

July 1, 2019

**Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church
His Holiness Pope Francis**

Your Holiness,

We write to you on behalf of the worldwide Ukrainian diaspora, the highest legitimate representative of whose interests and aspirations is the Ukrainian World Congress.

The immediate cause of our address to you as the head of the Roman Catholic Church is the official visit to the Vatican of the President of the Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir Putin.

We are moved to express our deep concerns about the war that has been inflicted upon Ukraine and its territories, the Donbas and Crimea, by Russian military aggression since 2014. This war has brought upon Ukraine a great humanitarian tragedy. Your Holiness's appeal to the world community for aid and assistance in the reconstruction of the affected regions has helped ameliorate this humanitarian calamity, and for this Ukrainians are most grateful.

Russia has not hesitated to exploit religion in pursuing its murky political goals. This was recently attested, for example, at an event in the Georgian parliament, where the presence of a delegation of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, headed by a Communist from Russia, ignited discontent and justified protest on the part of the Georgian people. A representative of the Ukrainian delegation in the Georgian parliament, Viktor Yelensky, said that "it is impossible to speak of Orthodox solidarity when one of the countries concerned has committed an act of aggression against other Orthodox countries – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova." "Lessons learnt by our countries," the Ukrainian parliamentarian continued, "tell us that it is impossible to appease aggressors. They must be stopped."

The war and the great privations that it wreaks on millions of people in countries bordering Russia compels us to call upon you to communicate to the leadership of the Russian Federation the profound suffering of our people and our insistence that the Russian Federation discontinue its aggression. This we articulate in the form of proposals whose implementation, we are confident, would reanimate the so-called Minsk Process – the process initiated in order to establish a lasting peace in the Donbas and Crimea, and to renew Ukraine's territorial integrity.

We appeal to you, Your Holiness, in the first instance to support our demand that the Russian side unconditionally release the Ukrainian sailors that it has under arrest, return the Ukrainian ships that it has seized and guarantee safe passage for all vessels through the Kerch Strait in accord with international law. Leaders of the European Union are also calling upon Moscow to undertake these steps.

Further, we appeal to you, Your Holiness, in your dialogue with the President of the Russian Federation to reiterate the demand of the international community that, after a full bilateral ceasefire, an international peacekeeping mission be granted free access to the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. Only on this basis will it be possible to establish a lasting peace, to conduct democratic elections to organs of government on those territories according to Ukrainian law, and fully to restore and effectively defend the state border of Ukraine where it abuts the Russian Federation, thus renewing relations between our countries on the basis of international law.

We should be sincerely grateful to Your Holiness if our words should touch your heart and if you should transmit them to the President of Russia, Mr Vladimir Putin. Even greater would be our gratitude and thanks to God, should your eminent guest from Moscow agree to use his best efforts to ensure that our requests be acceded to, the war stopped, and peace established for the welfare of the people and to the glory of our Creator.

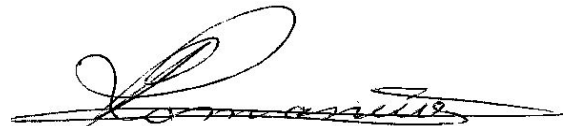
Please accept in the name of the worldwide Ukrainian diaspora our expression of sincere thanks and profound esteem. May God bless you as you continue to undertake your tireless service to people of all the nations of the Earth.

Kyiv and Toronto, July 2019.

On behalf of the Presidium of the Ukrainian World Congress



Paul Grod
President



Stefan Romaniw OAM
First Vice-President
Chair, UWC Religious Commission