



SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA

Via Marsala, 42 – 00185 Roma

Il Rettor Maggiore

Prot. 22/0091
Rome, 12 March 2022

**To my dear SDB confreres throughout the world
To our dear Salesian Family throughout the world**

REGARDING THE WAR and the REFUGEE DRAMA

My dear brothers and sisters throughout the world. I am writing this letter to you once more before leaving tomorrow night for Cameroon, Africa, where I will lead the Retreat for all the Provincials of the Africa and Madagascar Region, together with all the members of their Provincial Councils. I did this previously in the Mediterranean, Inter-America and South America Regions. 98 SDB confreres are awaiting me in Cameroon, with the blessing of the Lord.

However, I would not like to set out on my journey without being in touch with you all again, my dear brothers and sisters of our entire Salesian Family around the world. Over these days, we have undoubtedly suffered at the pain of thousands and thousands of people. So many images of suffering and death have swept the world. Once again I would like to state that I am convinced that there is no doubt that there are many people in Russia who do not want this massacre that is taking place, but either they cannot say so, or they cannot speak out (for we know that prison awaits them if they do), or they live deceived by the false news that their leaders transmit. I say this because our Christian and Salesian heart does not allow us to condemn people just because they come from one place or another. We do condemn and reject wrongdoing and those responsible for it.

My dear brothers and sisters, much is being done on behalf of the victims in this 'unjust, aggressive and overpowering war'; many countries are helping, as well as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, in our own lowly way. Further on I will briefly share with you some of all that is being done. I ask you to keep on doing so, and in unison with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and the whole Church, I ask that we continue to pray with deep Faith and the hope that even in the midst of evil, sin and pain, God will undoubtedly have the last word. So it was, even in the unjust death of his own Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have also been in written contact with Mother Chiara Cazzuola, Superior General of the FMA, and with Mr Antonio Boccia, the World Coordinator of the Salesian Cooperators. And I know we are all doing our bit. It's beautiful to feel that way.

The first thing I would like to express through this letter is a very sincere and heartfelt 'Thank you' to all our SDB and FMA brothers and sisters in Salesian presences in Ukraine, and in Poland, Slovakia, Moldavia and Romania who are assisting in the massive hosting of this *sad human exodus*. The information I have is that many of our houses are taking in so many people and in a dignified way. I know that this will continue, as well as acceptance by other countries. Thank you for all this, my dear brothers and sisters. It fills us with quiet pride, and I can assure you that you are not alone, that we are with you in this. We say this especially to our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who continue to stand '*by the people's side, their people's*'. We will continue to be with you in whatever you need and with what we can offer.



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The Salesian Family of Don Bosco wishes to be a response, today, to so much pain. I also know that this war in Ukraine is not the only one. A few minutes ago the Zenit international news agency said that right at the moment there are 25 armed conflicts of one or other kind going on in the world. And always with the same effects: devastation, displacement, refugees and deaths. There are more than two million people in the war in Ukraine who have had to leave their homeland and head to other countries as refugees. It is a human tragedy, no doubt about that. We want to help as much as possible as SDBs and as a family of Don Bosco.

Let us continue to ask every day for an end to this disaster as soon as possible.

However, at the same time I would like to provide you with news of the solidarity and fraternity carried out up to now in the Salesian world. No doubt I will not be accurate because there is much more that has been going on that I do not know about. I apologise for that. And what I have gathered here I have to express in a very brief and summary way. Let me try to put together a brief list:

→ The Salesian 'Province' (actually Vice-province) in Ukraine has continued to accompany the displacements within its country, mobilising many people and bringing food and medicine to the east, not without danger. We find the most dramatic situations in Ukraine, given the many elderly and sick people who cannot move anywhere unassisted. Our confreres, together with many lay people and friends, are doing everything possible to help with the most essential needs: food, protection from the cold, emotional support.

→ The Salesian Provinces throughout Poland have opened their houses to take in many hundreds of people, often mothers with their sons and daughters. I very much appreciate how they have worked together and proposed Fr Krzysztof, the current Provincial Economist in Warsaw, along with other collaborators, to organise all the help that arrives so that it can be effectively distributed. We have been informed by our confreres that so far Poland (as a nation) has taken in 1,370,000 people (and the number will, unfortunately, continue to increase). Of these, 93% are Ukrainian citizens; 6% are citizens of 100 other different nations who were in Ukraine, and 1% are Polish citizens who have returned to their homeland because of all this.

→ From the Mission Office in Turin the Procurator, Fr Daniel Antúnez, has been in Poland and Ukraine this week with the Provincials of each place, and continues to be in personal contact with me, in order to guarantee immediate help and, in particular for a longer-term future. An important campaign to seek help is underway from 'Missioni Don Bosco' in Turin.

→ Similarly, in addition to initial financial support, 'Misiones Salesianas' en Madrid, Spain, has done a lot of work to raise awareness among the Spanish population through radio stations and publications and press releases, as well as a fundraising campaign for this Ukrainian refugee emergency.



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→ The Economer General, Bro. Jean Paul Muller, and Fr George Menampampil have also been in Poland for a few days to support and gain the necessary perspective for immediate but also more far-reaching help.

→ Our *Salesian Cooperator* brothers and sisters have also passed on the information that the ASC is providing financial aid, but in addition to this they wanted to make their position clear by condemning the war in a statement to various media, as well as in a personal letter to the Russian ambassador in Rome. The ASC World Council has also asked all the Cooperators around the world to pray for an end to this war. Mr Stanislav Veselsky, ASC councillor for the East Europe Region has enabled them to be present to these countries. For their part, the *Damas Salesianas* are carrying out various initiatives in different parts of the world where they can be found, to join this call made by me last week. We are deeply grateful for your communion as a family.

→ The Salesian Venice-Mestre Province, with a border closer to these countries, has sent multiple items of aid: Bacau (Romania) has begun taking people in; in Chisinau (Moldavia) 220 people are being received at the Don Bosco Centre there. In our parish at Cretoaia another 18 people have been welcomed. Two families with their children have been taken in at Bardolino (Italy) and in the Mogliano Veneto (Italy) aspirantate community (*comunità proposta*). In Costanza (Romania) there are 15 people (7 adults and 8 children). Two mothers and their children are also in Mestre. Two vans with medicines have already left Bearzi, Udine, a few days ago in collaboration with the Food Bank, and from Mogliano Astoria four trucks have left with material for people who have been welcomed to Poland.

→ Most of the Salesian Provinces around the world are mobilising to send as much financial aid as possible. The transfer of monies received and sent is by now more than €400,000, most of it sent to the Ukraine Vice-province itself (UKR). Much more will undoubtedly be forthcoming. We are awaiting further evaluation of needs and concrete proposals for action. We intend to avoid improvised or ineffective action. On the contrary, it is undoubtedly being effective (even in the emergency), and also far-sighted in terms of the near future.

→ The Salesian presence in Beromünster, '*Don Bosco Jugendhilfe Weltweit*' Switzerland, has approved €250,000 as emergency aid for Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia and €30,000 have been transferred to the PLS Province to assist in the reception of refugees.

→ Many other donations come from the most diverse Salesian places in the world with Provinces such as Hong Kong and Thailand, or Ireland, Germany (Salesian Province, as well as *Don Bosco Mondo* and *Don Bosco Mission*), Great Britain, Portugal, Naples and Milan in Italy, Madrid in Spain, Campo Grande in Brazil, as well as the young recently erected Provinces in Africa: ANN (Africa Nigeria Niger) and AON (West Africa-North Africa). There are more privately registered contributions from Provinces in countries with political difficulties. I must admit that I am touched by the generosity and efforts of these and other provinces and I bless the Lord for it – He who will never be outdone in generosity by those who are generous.



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→ The KOR Mission Office in Korea has sent help to Poland South Province and to Ukraine. Our FMA Sisters in Korea have sent an amount of funds to FMA headquarters in Rome; and the Salesian Family in Korea is collecting financial aid during the Lenten season for war victims and refugees.

→ But among the many things I would like to emphasise, I would like to once more stress the fact that when a welcome, a home and a shared life are offered, this has extraordinary value. In Germany, the Salesian Province has offered to provide housing and accommodation in our house in Beromünster for about 20 refugees and is already in contact with the official refugee administration in Switzerland. Other houses in this Province are offering housing and accommodation for refugees: the Salesianum in Munich, Don Bosco Aschau-Waldwinkel, Kloster Benediktbeuern, Kloster Ensdorf, Bonn, Pfaffendorf, as well as unaccompanied minor refugees from the Ukraine in Helenenberg. This is just a sample of our humble but important and significant contribution. This is in addition to what was mentioned above in some houses of the Venice-Mestre Province in Moldavia and Romania. All this, and much more that is going on that I cannot include in these few pages, makes me think, somehow, of the situation to which I referred in the letter about Fr Paul Albera, when, faced with the orphans resulting from the First World War, he asked Salesian houses to be generous in welcoming so many youngsters who had been left at least without a father.

The generosity of these moments also touches the very depths of our Salesian charism. Without a doubt, I can affirm that Don Bosco would have done the same. Thank you for this my dear SDB confreres and my dear Salesian Family.

→ I should end this story with a list of some other initiatives of various kinds, full of creativity, energy, or the capacity to dialogue with society. Here are some of them:

- The *Opera don Bosco onlus* (ONLUS = not for profit) in Lugano (ILE Province) has sent significant assistance to prepare a bunker that had been requested in Ukraine.
- Also the German Province has helped with the delivery of medicines with 'Action Medeor Germany' to Lviv, as well as collaboration with the Mission Office in Warsaw for the purchase of beds and equipment for refugees in Poland.
- In Great Britain, a meeting was arranged between Fr Eugene Nebesniak, sdb, and a member of parliament, a member of the UK Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine, at the GBR provincial house to enable Fr Eugene to do all he could by 'lobbying' the civil authorities to give priority to preparations allowing migrants to be received from Ukraine.
- At the same time, also in Great Britain, the *Ukrainian and Russian families* from the Salesian School in London were invited to take part in a liturgy for peace. A beautiful and meaningful initiative, no doubt.



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Let me conclude this letter, my dear brothers and sisters, by saying thank you once again, first of all to the Lord who allows our hearts, even with the personal fragility that each of us knows in ourselves, not to be hearts of stone but of flesh (as Scripture says). I am grateful for so much generosity. I invite us not to grow weary, for this reality will demand help, empathy and communion of us for a long time to come. But I also ask you for the most important thing: *That we do not cease to beg the Lord, day and night, for the gift of peace* to touch hearts that need to be transformed, and to guide these events along the best possible path, in harmony between our freedom and His Providence.

May the prayer to our Mother Help of Christians, our Mother in the most difficult moments, give us the strength we need, and especially that which the people of Ukraine need.

A fraternal embrace with true affection in the Lord and in Don Bosco.


Fr. Angel Fernandez Artime, SDB
Rector Major

