Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky makes a statement in Kyiv Feb. 25,a day after Russi

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky makes a statement in Kyiv Feb. 25,a day after Russia launched a massive military operation against Ukraine. (CNS photo/Reuters/Ukrainian Presidential Press Service)



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FLORENCE, Italy — February 26, 2022
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One day after Pope Francis took the unprecedented step of visiting Russia's

Vatican embassy to express his concern about he country's war against Ukraine, Pope

Francis on Feb. 26 called Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky to express his "sorrow" over

the worsening situation in the Eastern European country.

The call was announced by the Ukrainian's Vatican Embassy via Twitter, saying "The Holy

Father expressed his deepest sorrow for the tragic events that are taking place in our country."

Moments later, Zelensky — who has remained in the capital city of Kyiv vowing to fight for the

country — took to Twitter to confirm the call.

"Thanked Pope Francis for praying for peace in Ukraine and a ceasefire," he wrote. "The Ukrainian people feel the spiritual support of His Holiness."

The Vatican confirmed the pope's call to Zelensky.

Since the Russian invasion began, the Vatican has pleaded for "room for negotiation." On Feb. 25, the pope also called the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych. In a statement, the archbishop said the pope told him “I will do everything I can” to help the situation.

Pope Francis had originally planned to travel to the Italian city of Florence on Feb. 27 for the closing day of a meeting of some 60 bishops and mayors from 20 countries from around the

Mediterranean to discuss political and religious collaboration on the issue of migration. The pope, under doctor's orders, had to bow out of the meeting due to acute knee pain, but on

Feb. 26, those convened in Florence issued a declaration that included a plea for peace in Ukraine.

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"In these days, warfare is taking place against Ukraine," the Mediterranean leaders wrote. "A sense of pain has seized bishops and mayors, who jointly hope that violence and the use of weapons could come to a halt, great suffering to the Ukrainian people be avoided and that negotiations to rebuild peace could start immediately."

Pope Francis has called for Catholics and all believers to mark the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday, March 2, as a day of prayer and fasting for Ukraine.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.