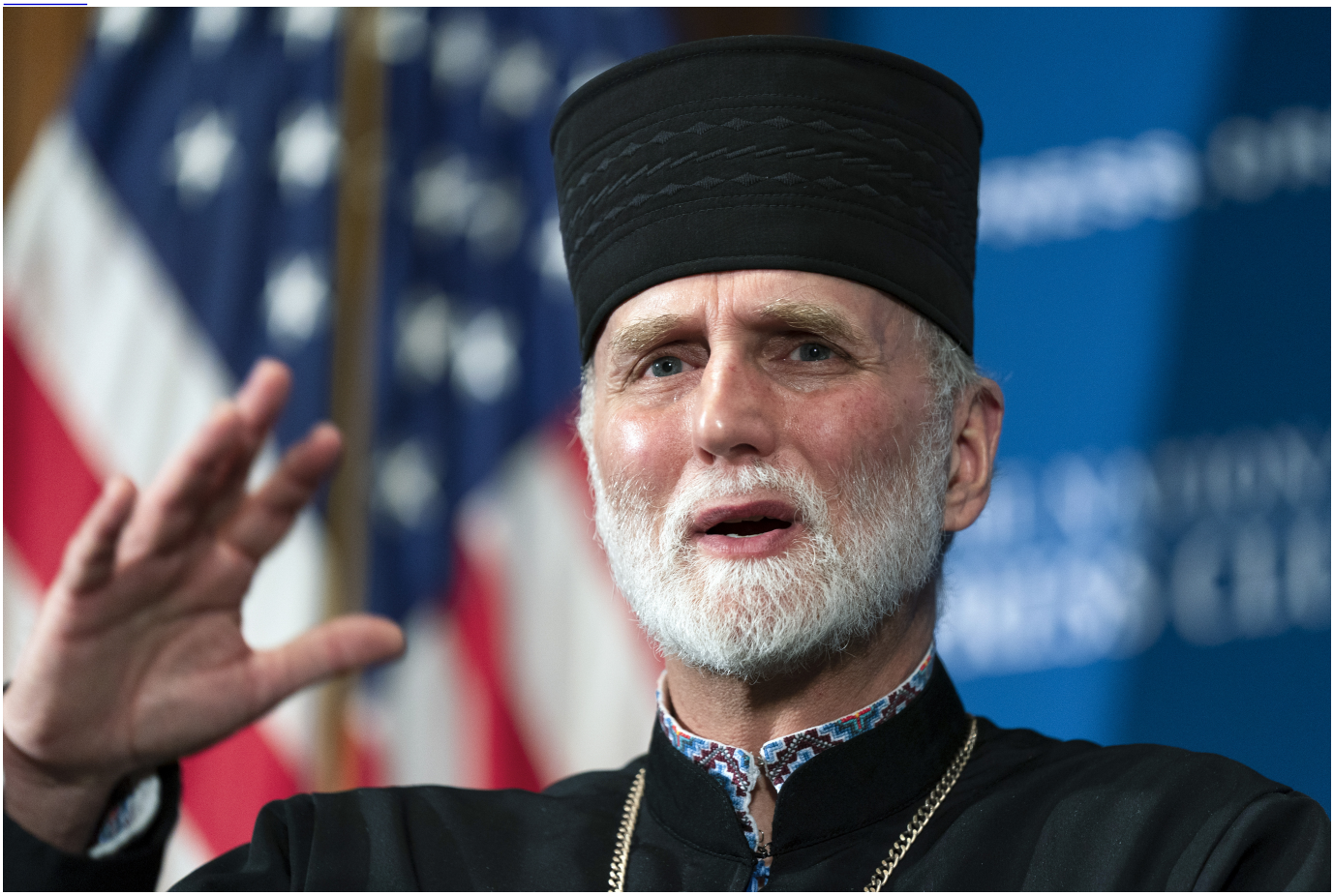
News



The Most Rev. Borys Gudziak, metropolitan archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Philadelphia for the United States, speaks at the National Press Club in Washington, Tuesday, March 15, 2022. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

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The top leader of Ukrainian Catholics in the United States and Ukraine's ambassador to the nation made an urgent appeal to the world Tuesday for more weapons to fight against Russia's invasion and aid to address the worsening humanitarian crisis.

The Most Rev. Borys Gudziak, metropolitan archbishop of Philadelphia for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States, said at a news conference in Washington that there is a dire need for armored ambulances, medical supplies and food — but also arms.

"What good is it if you feed the stomachs of these children, these women, these people in cities, if their brains are going to be blown out, if their apartment buildings are going to be rendered into rubble?" Gudziak said. "There needs to be massive defensive and massive humanitarian aid."

Ambassador Oksana Markarova also called for more sanctions against Moscow and increased aid and diplomatic efforts to keep humanitarian corridors open. She accused Russian forces of committing genocide.

"They're targeting civilians. They're killing children, pregnant women. They're killing the elderly," Markarova said.

More than 3 million people have fled Ukraine since the start of the war, now in its third week, and thousands of soldiers and civilians have died.

On Tuesday, Russia stepped up its bombardment of Kyiv, the capital, and civilians fled Mariupol along a humanitarian corridor in what was believed to be the biggest evacuation yet from the besieged port city.

Gudziak said it was "sad" to see the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church supporting President Vladimir Putin and the war, and he criticized Patriarch Kirill for giving a large icon of the Virgin Mary to a leader of the Russian national guard.

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"This is happening in the biggest church in the capital of Russia. The patriarch is giving the mother of God to these war criminals," the archbishop said.

Gudziak, who also heads the department of external church relations for the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, added that he met with Pope Francis five weeks ago, before the war, and asked the pontiff to call Putin.

The Vatican has called for peace, humanitarian corridors, a cease-fire and a return to negotiations, and has also offered to mediate between the sides. Francis went to the Russian Embassy in Rome last month to personally "express his concern about the war," in an extraordinary papal gesture without recent precedent. But Francis has not publicly condemned Russia by name or publicly appealed to Kirill.

"I think he's been doing everything he can behind the scenes," Gudziak said.

"I'm convinced that he has made every effort to speak to Putin, and I have some information that he has not gotten responses to his gestures toward Patriarch Kirill. But I think that will change," Gudziak said. "I'm hoping the Russian church leadership will open up."

Gudziak said one heartening response to the invasion has been a coming together of people from across a range of faith traditions.

"Orthodox, Catholics, east and west, Protestants, Muslims, Jews are united in a stance against this war and are working each and together for humanitarian aid to help people stand strong," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called on Putin to meet with him directly, a request that has not been met by the Kremlin. Markarova said any good-faith negotiations toward ending the war will require a cease-fire.

"We have a saying in Ukraine: 'If Russia stops shooting, the war will stop. If Ukraine stops shooting today, our country will disappear,'" Markarova said. "So it's totally up to Russia."