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Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, the new head of the Italian bishops' conference, talks during a press conference in Rome May 27. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)



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Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, Pope Francis' personal emissary tapped to lead the Vatican's peacemaking efforts between Ukraine and Russia, will be in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv from June 5-6.

The Vatican made the announcement on the morning of June 5, stating that Zuppi's main goal is "to listen to the Ukrainian authorities on the possible ways to achieve a just peace and support humanity's gestures to ease tensions." At the time of the announcement, there was no publicly available schedule of Zuppi's plans while in Ukraine.

Zuppi, who is the archbishop of Bologna and the president of the Italian bishops' conference, was appointed by Francis last month to lead a special "mission" to "initiate paths of peace" between the two warring countries.

The Italian cardinal's closely watched trip comes less than a month after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the pope at the Vatican on May 13. At the time, Zelenskyy thanked the pope for his humanitarian efforts, but also appealed to Francis to strongly denounce Russia's war crimes and to back a just peace that entails Russia abandoning all occupied Ukrainian territory.

Since the start of the war, neither Francis nor any of his Vatican foreign aides have been able to speak directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin. While no definitive plans have been announced, it is widely expected that Zuppi will also attempt to travel to Moscow on a future occasion as a part of the Vatican's diplomatic efforts.

Zuppi, 67, has long been involved with the Community of Sant'Egidio, a lay-led Catholic social service organization that has been involved in a number of successful high-level peace negotiations in recent decades. The organization has longstanding ties with the Russian Orthodox Church and its leader, Patriarch Kirill, which may help open doors for the Catholic cardinal in the overwhelmingly Orthodox country.

While Zuppi has not commented extensively on his special peace mission, during a gathering of Italian bishops last month, he backed the pope's approach to trying to maintain open lines of communication with both countries.

“We are grateful today for his prophecy, so rare today when talking about peace seems to avoid taking sides or fail to acknowledge responsibility,” he said of Francis.

“The church and Christians believe in peace, we are all called to be peacemakers, even more so in the terrible storm of conflicts,” said Zuppi.

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