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A white man wearing a suit and blue tie stands next to another white man wearing a suit

Yuri Ushakov, Kremlin foreign policy adviser, left, is pictured alongside Duško Perovi, head of the Republic of Srpska's representative office in Russia, right, during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow May 23, 2023. (CNS photo/Alexei Filippov, RIA Novosti/Kremlin)



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Vatican City — June 28, 2023
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Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi was scheduled to meet with a Kremlin foreign policy adviser during the peace mission he is making to Moscow on Pope Francis's behalf,

the Kremlin said.

Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin spokesperson, told journalists June 28 that the cardinal would meet with Yuri Ushakov, a foreign policy adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin and former Russian ambassador to the United States, "per instructions" from the president, according to TASS, the Russian state news agency.

Zuppi and Ushakov were expected to "discuss the situation around the Ukrainian conflict and, of course, the possible ways of a political and diplomatic settlement," Peskov said.

He also noted that Russia "appreciates the Vatican's efforts and initiatives to find a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis and welcomes the pope's desire to contribute to ending the armed conflict in Ukraine," TASS reported.

Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, arrived in Moscow June 27 accompanied by an official from the Vatican Secretariat of State and was scheduled to remain in the Russian capital until June 29.

He is on the second leg of a peace mission that also saw him travel to Kyiv, where he met with Ukrainian officials including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The principal aim of the cardinal's trip to Russia was "to encourage humanitarian gestures that may contribute to favoring a solution to the tragic current situation and finding ways of reaching a just peace," the Vatican said in a statement announcing the trip June 27.

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While the Vatican did not provide a list of the people Zuppi would meet in Russia, the Archdiocese of Moscow said on social media that a meeting between the cardinal and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow was possible. The patriarch has been a staunch supporter of the war since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The archdiocese also said Zuppi was scheduled to meet with Archbishop Paolo Pezzi of Moscow June 29 and participate in a Mass for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow.

At his general audience June 28, Francis prayed that "the example and protection of these two apostles may sustain each one of us in following Christ."

"We entrust the dear people of Ukraine to their intercession, that they may soon find peace," said the pope. "There is so much suffering in Ukraine, let us not forget it."

The Ukrainian embassy to the Holy See said on Twitter that Ukraine welcomed Zuppi's mission to Moscow if it helps bring about the release of Ukrainian prisoners held in Russian captivity and the return of illegally deported children to Ukraine.

But, the embassy added, "we don't need mediation with Russia."

After his meeting with Zuppi June 6, Zelenskyy wrote on his Telegram channel that only diplomatic isolation and pressure on Russia could bring a "just peace" to Ukraine.