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Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, on a peace mission to Moscow on Pope Francis' behalf, speaks with Ru

Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, on a peace mission to Moscow on Pope Francis' behalf, speaks with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, right, and Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, head of external church relations for the Moscow Patriarchate, left, during a meeting at the patriarch's residence at the Danilov monastery in Moscow June 29, 2023. (CNS photo/Courtesy of the Russian Orthodox Church, Department for External Church Relations)



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The Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches should join efforts to promote peace before threats of a "major global armed conflict," the head of the Russian Orthodox Church told Pope Francis' envoy on a peace mission to Moscow.

Meeting June 29 with Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, sent by the pope on a two-part peace mission to Ukraine and Russia, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow said the churches have a role in preventing "the negative development of political conditions" and working for peace and justice, according to a press release from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Kirill has repeatedly and publicly justified and supported Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"At the time when great problems have emerged in the relations between Russia and the West, when we encounter both a great tension in the sphere of political relations and real threats of the emergence of a major global armed conflict, it is very important that all the forces interested in preservation of peace and justice should unite to prevent such feasible pace of events," Kirill told the cardinal, according to the statement.

Expressing the need to strengthen relations between the Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, the patriarch said, "It is very important that in this very difficult time Christian communities in East and West should participate in the process of reconciliation," the statement said.

Zuppi reportedly stressed the need for increased dialogue between churches during times of conflict "to understand what the Lord asks us to do."

In a statement June 30 the Vatican said the two discussed "humanitarian initiatives that could facilitate a peaceful solution" to the war in Ukraine and that Zuppi conveyed the pope's greeting to the patriarch.

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Francis last met with Kirill via a video call in March 2022 shortly after the war in Ukraine broke out. The pope urged the patriarch not to use "the language of politics, but the language of Jesus." The two church leaders had been expected to meet in

person during an interreligious gathering in Kazakhstan in September 2022, but the patriarch canceled his trip weeks before the meeting.

During his trip to Moscow, Zuppi also met with Yury Ushakov, a Kremlin foreign policy adviser. Speaking to reporters the following day, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the "the meeting yielded no specific agreement, and the dialogue may continue if needed," according to TASS, the Russian state news agency.

Archbishop Paolo Pezzi of Moscow said the meeting "went positively" and that the cardinal and the adviser primarily discussed issues related to refugees, TASS reported.

The archbishop had said humanitarian issues also would be the subject of the cardinal's June 29 meeting with Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights, who has been accused by the International Criminal Court of aiding the abduction and deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

The Vatican said the humanitarian aspect of the cardinal's trip was "strongly underscored" during those meetings as was the need "to achieve the much-desired peace."

Zuppi arrived in Moscow June 27 and was scheduled to return to Italy June 30; the evening before his departure, he presided at Mass in Moscow's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and met with members of the Russian bishop's conference and the local Catholic community.

The Ukrainian Embassy to the Holy See said on Twitter that it supported the cardinal's mission to Moscow if it is able to help return illegally deported children to Ukraine, but, it added, "we don't need mediation with Russia."