Vatican

Vatican News



Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, head of the CEI (Italian Conference of Bishops), welcomes parishioners after celebrating Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow, Thursday, June 29, 2023. Pope Francis' peace envoy was travelling to Washington on Monday, July 17 in hopes of promoting peace initiatives for Ukraine and supporting humanitarian operations, especially concerning children, the Vatican said. Cardinal Matteo Zuppi's visit, which lasts through Wednesday, follows his recent mission to Moscow and an earlier stop in Kyiv, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. (AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko, file)

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Rome — July 17, 2023
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Pope Francis’ peace envoy was traveling to Washington on July 17 as part of the Holy See's peace initiatives for Ukraine, hoping to support humanitarian operations especially concerning children, the Vatican said July 17.

Cardinal Matteo Zuppi’s visit, which lasts through July 19, follows his recent mission to Moscow and an earlier stop in Kyiv, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Zuppi is a veteran of the Catholic Church's peace initiatives and has been tasked by Francis to try to find "paths of peace" between the warring sides.

In Moscow, Zuppi met with Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia’s commissioner for children’s rights, as well as Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, who has strongly supported the war.

Francis has taken up Ukraine’s request to intervene where possible to return Ukrainian children transported to Russia following Moscow’s invasion. The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Lvova-Belova and Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing them of abducting children from Ukraine. Russian officials have denied any forced adoptions, saying some Ukrainian children are in foster care.

Francis has said he hopes the Holy See can facilitate family reunifications, in the same way the Vatican stepped in to facilitate prisoner swaps.

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In a statement on July 17, the Vatican spokesman said Zuppi would travel to Washington with an official from the Vatican secretariat of state. There were no

details on who he would see in the U.S. capital.

"The visit takes place in the context of the mission intended to promote peace in Ukraine and aims to exchange ideas and opinions on the tragic current situation and to support initiatives in the humanitarian sphere to alleviate the suffering of the most affected and fragile people, especially children," the statement said.

Francis has repeatedly called for an end to the war but has refrained from outwardly criticizing Moscow, part of the Vatican’s tradition of maintaining diplomatic neutrality in conflicts in hopes that it can play a behind-the-scenes role in forging peace.

He has irked the U.S. and its allies by repeating Moscow’s argument that NATO was "barking at its gates," and seemingly making a moral equivalence between Ukrainian and Russian losses.

He has asserted Ukraine’s right to self-defense but has sharply criticized the weapons industry, saying the provision of arms to Ukraine by the west could be immoral "if it’s done with the intention of provoking more war or selling weapons or getting rid of old ones."