News



Rescuers work at the site of a building destroyed during a Russian airstrike in Chernihiv, Ukraine, April 17, 2024. (OSV News/Valentyn Ogirenko, Reuters)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Kyiv, Ukraine — April 18, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has responded to a "devastating" strike by Russia on civilians in a northern Ukrainian city.

At least 17 were killed and 61 wounded when three Russian missiles slammed into the center of Chernihiv, located some 95 miles from Kyiv, during the morning of April 17.

The buildings struck in the attack included an eight-floor apartment building, a hospital and an education facility — targets banned by international humanitarian law, which specifies that attacks may not be directed against civilian objects.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the casualties point to his nation's dire need for Western military aid, a major portion of which has been stalled in the U.S. Congress due to political gridlock, partisan infighting and openly anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

In a brief April 17 statement posted to Facebook, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk said the losses at Chernihiv were "tragic."

"In this challenging time, we pray for the souls of those killed and extend our heartfelt condolences to their families," he wrote. "We also ask the all-merciful Lord for the healing of the injured!"

Later the same day, Shevchuk addressed participants at the International Ecumenical Conference in Lviv, the theme of which was "Overcoming together the horrors of war: The experience of post-Yugoslav states and Ukraine." The gathering was organized by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's Commission for Interfaith and Interreligious Relations and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at Ukrainian Catholic University.

Speaking by video link from Kyiv, the archbishop said that "war is always a tragedy and a crime, especially when someone conducts it under the guise of God. Then this war turns into blasphemy."

Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has openly blessed and encouraged Russia's aggression against Ukraine, saying in a September 2022 sermon that those who die fighting with the Russian military will see their sins washed away.

The invasion, which continues attacks initiated in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the backing of military separatists in Ukraine's Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, has been declared a genocide in two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights. Ukraine has reported more than 129,842 war crimes committed by Russia to date in Ukraine since February 2022.

Advertisement

The International Criminal Court has to date issued four arrest warrants against Russian officials, including two for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for the unlawful deportation and transfer of at least 19,546 children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

"We believe in victory not only over the Russian aggressor, but over the war itself, over the reasons that led to this war in the post-Soviet space," said Shevchuk in his conference address.

The churches of Ukraine, along with those of the Balkan countries, have been tasked with a special mission to heal the wounds of war, which is "impossible" to do "without Christian understanding," he told conference participants.

"We understand that we need to heal not ideas, but hearts. And this is a process that we Christians consider impossible without the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit is the divine power of love, which eliminates hatred,"

said Shevchuk. "May the Lord God bless us, may this conference bear worthy fruits, may the suffering stop, may peace and grace have the last and most important word between us today."