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Firefighters work amid smoke from drone attack.

Firefighters work at the site of the Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack in Kharkiv, Ukraine, June 4. (OSV News/Reuters/Vitalii Hnidyi)

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Vatican City — June 4, 2025
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In the first telephone conversation between Pope Leo XIV and Russian leader Vladimir Putin, the pope encouraged Putin to make a gesture to show he is serious about peace with Ukraine, the Vatican press office said June 4.

"I confirm that this afternoon there was a telephone conversation between Pope Leo XIV and President Putin," said Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office.

While they spoke of several "matters of mutual interest," Bruni said that "special attention was paid to the situation in Ukraine and peace."

"The pope made an appeal for Russia to make a gesture that would promote peace, stressed the importance of dialogue for the realization of positive contacts between the parties and seeking solutions to the conflict," Bruni said.

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The pope and president also discussed the humanitarian situation, the need to facilitate the delivery of aid and ongoing negotiations over the exchange of prisoners of war, an effort Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna is involved with, he said.

Bruni also said Pope Leo spoke about Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, an ally of Putin.

The pope thanked the patriarch for sending his best wishes at the start of the pope's pontificate, Bruni said, and the pope "emphasized how common Christian values can be a light to help seek peace, defend life and seek genuine religious freedom."

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In a post on Telegram, the Russian news agency Tass, citing the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, said that "Putin drew the pope's attention to the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict by the Kiev (Kyiv) regime," apparently referred to Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian war planes June 1.

Tass also reported that "Putin expressed his hope that the Holy See would step up its efforts to promote religious freedom in Ukraine," a reference to the Ukrainian parliament's decision in 2024 to ban the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and to outlaw ties with Russian-based religious organizations.

Putin "thanked the Pope for his readiness to assist in resolving the conflict in Ukraine," Tass reported. Pope Leo had offered the Vatican as a neutral site for peace talks, but Russia declined the invitation.

"The Russian leader reiterated his interest in achieving peace in Ukraine through political and diplomatic means," Tass said.

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