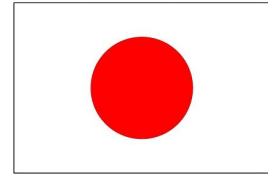




STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE



WE STAND TOGETHER with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in this time of unspeakable pain, suffering, and death, and **WE CALL for Peace**. We join our voices with the growing worldwide outcry against the unilateral and totally unprovoked invasion of the sovereign and independent nation of Ukraine. Here in Japan there have also been protests in the streets calling for an end to the war. Our hearts break at the suffering of the Ukrainian people. **You are not alone!**

The attempt by Russia to use military force to change the status quo and redraw established international borders violates the international rule of law, and is an egregious violation of the fundamental principles of the UN charter. The charter of the United Nations Article 2.4 reads as follows:

All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat and use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

We have watched in horror at the indiscriminate bombings of schools, hospitals, and residential complexes, and we condemn these attacks in the strongest possible way. The Geneva Convention specifically prohibits attacks on civilians, non-combatants, and civilian infrastructure, and any breach of this international legal standard would warrant an investigation into possible war crimes. In response to these attacks on innocent civilians, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently ruled on Wednesday, March 16, 2022 in the Hague that Russia must ‘immediately suspend’ military operations in Ukraine.

We call for an immediate halt to the invasion and the total withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, including Crimea, and the regions of Donbas and Luhansk, which were illegally occupied and annexed by Russia in 2014.

Russia has a long history of attempted conquest and invasion of Ukraine. It began in the 17th century under the czars, and in the following centuries, Russia continued its onslaught on Ukraine’s national identity by banning its language and literature, and persecuting its cultural leaders—an attempt to completely eradicate Ukraine as a separate and sovereign nation and people.

Hoping to crush the Ukrainian National Movement in the 1930s, the USSR under Stalin orchestrated the Famine of Ukraine, in which nearly 4 million Ukrainians died of starvation. Many Ukrainian cultural, political, and religious leaders were also exiled. During WWII, two out of three Ukrainian Jews—between 1.4 million to 1.5 million men, women and children—were murdered under Nazi Germany’s genocidal policies.

In 1991, Ukraine finally regained its independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The current president Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 in a democratic election by the Ukrainian people. His grandfather was the only one of four Jewish brothers to survive the Ukrainian Nazi Holocaust.

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As Russia grows increasingly politically and economically isolated from the rest of the world, it is in Russia's own self-interest to immediately end this war of aggression and withdraw from Ukraine. Putin's war will not only cause great destruction in Ukraine and Russia, but will also threaten the world's peace and stability. Ukraine's only 'sin' has been to choose its own identity, to live in a free and democratic country, and not under a dictatorial, repressive Soviet-style regime.

An attack on Ukraine is an attack on freedom and democracy—it is an attack on us all.

WE PRAY FOR UKRAINE. Along with our prayers, we will continue to provide financial assistance to the millions of Ukrainian refugees fleeing to the surrounding countries. We open our hearts and lift up our voices to support Ukraine and denounce the evil inflicted upon it.

WE PRAY FOR RUSSIA. The people of Russia are not the enemy. This is a war perpetrated by the autocratic, despotic leader of Russia. This is Putin's war. Many in Russia have courageously lifted up their voices in protest of the war and have been arrested as a result. Others have expressed deep shame and remorse for this war. It is the ordinary citizens of Russia who will suffer the brunt of severe, punishing economic sanctions. An increasing number of Russians are choosing to leave their country as economic repercussions intensify and political dissent is violently suppressed. They see no hope for the future of Russia.

WE PRAY FOR PEACE. We strive to be peacemakers, as Jesus taught us on the Mount of Beatitudes: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" (Matthew 5:9) As Christians who believe in the same God and pray in the same name of our Savior Jesus Christ, as our Russian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant brothers and sisters, we pledge to obey the Biblical command to love mercy; do justice; defend the poor, the widow and the orphan; and to be a light in a world increasingly filled with death, darkness, and despair.

In Christ,

Rev. Mark Magnusson

Bethany Chapel, Japan, Pastor
Bethany Christian Assemblies, Japan, Director
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(Bethany Christian Assemblies (BCA) is a growing group of Protestant churches in Japan with ministries in children's education, seminary training, and church planting. BCA also supports various international aid projects.)