

Papal envoy arrives in Ukraine, meets with archbishops in Lviv

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Archbishop Mieczysław Mokrzycki of Lviv, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, and Major Archbishop Swiatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv are seen in Lviv, Ukraine, March 9, 2022. (Credit: Archdiocese of Lviv.)

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, Pope Francis’s envoy to Ukraine is in Lviv, in western Ukraine.

Krajewski told *Crux* and Polish television on Wednesday that he sent pictures from the border crossing with Poland to Pope Francis: “People are standing in freezing weather, women with little children are standing in long lines. It is a hair-raising scene.”

Krajewski — who serves as the papal almoner in charge of charity for the pope — was joined in Lviv by Major Archbishop Swiatoslav Shevchuk, who drove from Kyiv.

“The city is under siege, the only way out has five hours of traffic,” he said. “From Kyiv you can only drive to Vinnytsia and Khmelnytskyi.”

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“Kyiv is the main target to Russia,” Shevchuk added.

The archbishop claimed the only way to protect the country is to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine: “Every night the bombs are dropped and people are dying. We pray for survival every day. We pray for ending the war. The skies over Ukraine must be closed.”

Hosting both Krajewski and Shevchuk is Archbishop Mieczysław Mokrzycki, the Latin rite metropolitan of Lviv. He is Polish, like Krajewski, and a former personal secretary of Pope John Paul II.

“We are truly grateful to Pope Francis, not only for prayer, but for sending his representative to us, for the arrival of Cardinal Krajewski; through him we feel that the Holy Father wants to be close to us,” the Lviv archbishop said.

Mokrzycki told *Crux* and Polish television that Ukrainians are most grateful to Poles for helping Ukrainians fleeing the war and for the ongoing support in their fight against Russian aggression.

“My neighbor knows I’m Polish, and even though he is not religious and usually we greeted each other from the distance, he recently not only shook my hand, but embraced me and told me – ‘Please pass to your fellow Poles that this is the embrace for them, for everything you do for Ukrainians, we are so grateful.’”

The prelates all said the situation in Ukraine is tragic.

“In Irpin, Butcha, and Hostomel in the outskirts of Kyiv, people are completely blocked, with no food supplies, no food for three days. We are unable to evacuate them,” Shevchuk said.

“There is a lot of disinformation spread,” Mokrzycki added. “People are concerned that Poland won’t take any more refugees – it is not true, we need to spread the right information: Poland was always ready to take 3-4 million people. It’s important to assure people of Ukraine they don’t have to be afraid of going there.”

Krajewski noted that “the help of the Vatican is not just spiritual.”

“The Holy Father just bought gasoline for the trucks that drive to Kyiv, Odessa, Zhytomyr,” the cardinal explained.

It is, Krajewski said, an urgent need since Polish companies are donating trucks and drivers for humanitarian help but gasoline is the major expense.

“Pope Francis reacted immediately and filled up those tanks,” he said.

The prelates are due to attend an interreligious prayer service on Thursday in Lviv, with other Christian leaders, as well as representatives of the Jewish community.

Krajewski said that he is happy he can sit at the table with the archbishops of Lviv and Kyiv: “The table always unites and heals.”

He added that the gospel urges people to always forgive: “But I must say that today, being in Ukraine, I am simply mad. I am so mad at the man who causes such a pain, my heart is bleeding.”

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