

## **Solidarity with Ukraine: Sanctuary for Refugees**

I am deeply troubled and angry at the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is an injustice, not least in terms of:

- The use of force by Russia to invade a nation to build its own security. The end result will do little to leave either Russia or Europe in a more secure place
- The use of violence to resolve a conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is also driving civilians to resort to guns
- The large number of casualties and deaths including civilians
- Thousands of civilians forced to flee from danger and threat of violence to protect their lives. According to the UN up to 7 million will leave Ukraine and cross a border for safety and sanctuary. This will be the largest refugee situation since 2015. Many remain trapped in the long queues in Ukraine at borders, without shelter, food or drink, and some face hostility here too
- Young and old, children and babies among the refugees. This is the reality of conflict. It is conflict which makes refugees
- The possibilities of the escalation of the conflict and violence and refugee numbers

What is clearly visible in the situation are two realities: violence and refugees. Where there is war, violence and persecution, there are always refugees.

And as always, refugees try to escape and find sanctuary in the nearest next country, in this case Poland, and are grateful for welcome, hospitality and safety.

Poland has welcomed refugees with open arms and given them sanctuary. Britain can follow this lead.

It is deeply disturbing to see images emerging of refugees of African and Asian ethnicities and colours being blocked, and facing racism and hostility, while trying to flee violence. This is a further violation of human rights and unacceptable.

Every person seeking safety must be valued and welcomed equally and with compassion.

We can all respond to refugees with humanity, hospitality and hope.

The way forward in the conflict must be a ceasefire in the violence, a ceaseless diplomatic dialogue and non-violent resolution.

As Christians we are called to speak out for peace and support sanctuary. It is good to hear of churches around Britain, Ukraine and other countries offering space for prayer, and opening their doors to offer sanctuary. Every Church can be a Church of Sanctuary.

We will work and pray for a world without war and violence, and always sanctuary for those whose lives are vulnerable to danger and harm.

**Inderjit Bhogal**

