**A call for a Christmas truce**

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Christmastime 1914, five months into the First World War, a remarkable event occurred. No one knows exactly how it began, but French, British, Belgian, and German soldiers on both sides of the trenches began singing Christmas carols, put down their weapons, played football, and exchanged Christmas greetings and gifts. This informal Christmas truce had not been sanctioned by any government. Appeals from civil society groups and Roman Catholic Pope Benedict XV, who urged “that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night that the angels sang” heralding the birth of Jesus, were rejected. In fact, some soldiers who participated in the spontaneous truce were deemed traitors and punished.

Despite the Christmas truce, the war lasted four more years, taking the lives of almost 15,000,000 combatants and civilians. But the spontaneous truce did live on in European lore and inspired filmmakers, storytellers, and religious leaders for its powerful example of the human spirit rising above hate and division in the promotion of peace. With this in mind, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) launched a campaign of religious leaders calling on the Russian and Ukrainian governments to accept a Christmas truce in Ukraine from December 25th to January 7th. The appeal is straightforward:

[Caretaker CM Mohsin Naqvi establishes committee for cardiac emergency services](https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2023/caretaker-cm-mohsin-naqvi-establishes-committee-for-cardiac-emergency-services)

“As people of faith and conscience, believing in the sanctity of all life on this planet, we call for a Christmas Truce in Ukraine. In the spirit of the truce that occurred in 1914 during the First World War, we urge our government to take a leadership role in bringing the war in Ukraine to an end through a ceasefire and negotiated settlement, before the conflict results in a nuclear war that could devastate the world’s ecosystems and annihilate all of God’s creation.”

The statement has been endorsed by over 1,000 US-based religious leaders and theologians representing most Christian denominations, and Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, and Buddhist faiths. With the war’s violence accelerating—intensified Russian attacks on Ukraine’s infrastructure and Ukraine’s use of drones to bomb installations within Russia—this appeal is unlikely to be embraced by Russian or Ukrainian leadership or by the White House.

The bad blood between the two peoples is even poisoning their religious faiths. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainians and Russians are Orthodox Christians, once united under the Patriarchy of Moscow. The Ukrainian church, long uncomfortable under Moscow’s thumb, declared its independence at the war’s outset after the Russian Patriarch endorsed Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion and his pronouncement that Russian soldiers killed in combat against Ukrainians would be forgiven their sins.

[Elahi holds Nawaz Sharif responsible for recent hike in POL prices](https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2023/elahi-holds-nawaz-sharif-responsible-for-recent-hike-in-pol-prices)

Initially, the Ukrainian Patriarchy simply urged Ukraine’s 7,000 Orthodox churches to sever ties with Moscow. But Prime Minister Volodymyr Zelensky has gone a step further, calling for a ban on Ukrainian Orthodox churches identifying with the Moscow Patriarchy.

This split has spilled over into Christmas celebrations. The Orthodox churches celebrate Christmas on January 7th, while the rest of Christendom celebrates on December 25th. Ukrainians have now moved their Christmas to the Western date—December 25. Thus, the FOR organizers have called for the truce to last at least between December 25th and January 7th, so that Jesus’ birth can be celebrated peacefully by both peoples.

Finding space for a truce—whether government or Orthodox Church endorsed or spontaneous—seems remote. But it doesn’t make the appeal less urgent. Not unlike the First World War, this war didn’t need to be fought and is taking a terrible toll in human life, while driving millions into exile as refugees. In the end, no one will win and not just Ukraine and Russia, but all of Europe will be worse off.

[Siraj sees dominance of Mir Jafar and Mir Sadiq](https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2023/siraj-sees-dominance-of-mir-jafar-and-mir-sadiq)

The FOR religious leaders’ appeal represents an important call to the Christian peoples of Ukraine and Russia to let the guns fall silent during the time when both celebrate Christmas. Officialdom may not listen, but religious leaders should not be silent.

While the call for a Christmas Truce may not succeed in creating a respite for this cruel war’s victims, it will challenge faith leaders and others in the US, Ukraine, and Russia to face our responsibilities to seek peace—at least while we celebrate the birth of he whom Christians call the “prince of peace.”