



MARIAN PALLISTER

WAR IS HELL ON EARTH

Marian Pallister, Chair of Pax Christi Scotland, says now more than ever we have to fight for peace.

The reports from Ukraine take me back to my years as a journalist in situations of conflict, trying to raise awareness of the plight of civilians caught up in the horrors of war. War is hell on earth and I firmly believe that those experiences in the Balkans, in Kosovo and elsewhere are what led me to be so involved in Pax Christi Scotland.

We are a member organisation of Pax Christi International, which was established after the Second World War with the intention of breaking vicious cycles of violence and injustice. We work to end discrimination in all its forms, to address the language of violence, to promote the need for a peace-filled welcome for refugees and migrants, to seek divestment from nuclear and conventional weapons, to remove Trident from Scotland, and to persuade the UK government to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In the past weeks, days, hours, all of these intentions have come into focus in different ways. Pax Christi Scotland had been lobbying to modify the Nationality and Borders Bill. Suddenly, it was refugees from Ukraine who most needed a voice raised to help them into the UK without the rolls of metaphorical barbed wire that the Home Office had already rolled out and was now bizarrely reinforcing.

How can you tell people who are fleeing tanks and bombs to apply for entry to a country under a seasonal worker visa system? How can you deny entry to those who don't happen to have a relative living in the country? Surely this is discrimination at its worst, its cruellest, its most unfeeling? The Westminster Government may have begun to unbend as the crisis worsened, but the world won't forget that reluctance to welcome Ukrainian refugees while others opened their borders without so much as asking for identification.

President Vladimir Putin is a master of violent language. It is cold and calculating and more frightening than former



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Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's brinkmanship during the Cuban crisis of 1962, when the world held its breath and school children like me discussed how we would spend our final four minutes when the threatened nuclear weapons were unleashed.

Putin told his military chiefs to put the nuclear deterrent forces in a 'special regime of combat duty.' Indirect threats delivered coldly are perhaps more alarming than overt intimidation.

The knock-on effect of Putin's initial attack and subsequent nuclear threats has, of course, escalated the use of weapons and the expected chorus from the nuclear nations that this is proof indeed that possession of nuclear weapons is a deterrent.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and it insults all those nations that brought the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons into international law in January of 2021.

It insults religious leaders who have sought the abolition of nuclear weapons

since their obscene consequences were first demonstrated. Pope John XXIII helped to de-escalate the Cuban missile crisis and then urged in *Pacem in terris* in 1963 that nuclear weapons must be banned.

Our own Scottish bishops condemned the possession and use of nuclear weapons in 1982 and Pax Christi Scotland will mark the anniversary of that statement in an online event on March 21 – Archbishop William Nolan is a key speaker. And of course, Pope Francis has continually condemned manufacture, possession and use of weapons of mass destruction. His personal visit to the Russian Ambassador to the Holy See to express his concerns about the invasion of Ukraine and the threats of Putin underscore for me that we've got it right – there is no place for nuclear weapons in this world. Their possession only allows for escalation of war rather than dialogue for peace.

It is fundamental to our Faith to believe that God is present in every human person, regardless of religion, culture, or nationality. Catholic social teaching asks us to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, to work for the common good and for peace. And of course, Jesus reminds us to pray for our enemies. That's hard - but let's try it.

I have felt the fear of those living under bombardment. To say it is tangible is a cliché straight from the war correspondents' handbook – but I assure you, you can taste it and smell it and feel it. When weapons of mass destruction are brought into the equation, the whole world must feel that fear. My prayers right now are that we are spared to turn this crisis into a wake-up call – that every world leader will realise that a nuclear free world is a safer world; and that every government will operate on the premise of Matthew 25:40. "In so far as you did this to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." ■

Marian Pallister is a writer and chair of Pax Christi Scotland.