



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy awards Argentine Dominican Sr. María Lucía Caram Padilla the Order of Princess Olga, III class, in Madrid Nov. 18, 2025. Caram was honored for her efforts to provide humanitarian aid and support since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (OSV News/Courtesy of Office of the President of Ukraine)

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Dominican Sr. María Lucía Caram Padilla was awarded the Order of Princess Olga, III class, by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for her efforts in providing humanitarian aid and support since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

During his official visit to Madrid Nov. 18, Zelenskyy met with Caram, director of the Santa Clara Convent Foundation, along with [Juan Carlos Cruz](#), a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and a supporter of Caram's humanitarian work.

Presenting her with the civil decoration, Zelenskyy thanked the Argentine nun and expressed his gratitude for her service in aiding those in need.

"You have visited my home country more than 40 times since the very beginning of the Russian aggression," the Ukrainian president said. "And each time, I know you leave a piece of your heart, you pray, you help our warriors undergoing treatment, and you provide substantial humanitarian assistance. We are truly grateful."

In a telephone interview Nov. 19, Caram told OSV News, "The recognition, more than for me, is for all the people who have helped me to be able to do what we have done."

During his meeting with Caram and Cruz, she recalled, Zelenskyy spoke about the current situation and "how Russia is taking region by region and destroying the infrastructure, mainly so people will be cold and without electricity."

Caram said the meeting with Zelenskyy "was a very heartwarming moment" and that he was "very receptive, very grateful, and at the same time very communicative about the reality his country is experiencing."

"I saw him as a strong leader, but it is clear that he is very concerned about the direction the war is taking and that there is no end in sight. I think this is what

worries us all the most," she added.

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Zelenskyy's one-day visit to Spain was part of his efforts to rally support from allies as Russia continued its relentless assault on Ukraine.

According to the Associated Press, Russia launched a barrage of missiles and drones Nov. 18 on two nine-story apartment blocks in Ternopil, located in western Ukraine, just 120 miles from the country's border with Poland.

An estimated 25 people, including three children, were killed when Russian drones and missiles decimated the area, and dozens of people, among them children, were injured, AP reported.

Caram told OSV News she receives news and updates on the situation in Ukraine "that the media doesn't report." She urged European leaders to recognize the looming threat of war in their countries.

"We want Europe to know that we have a war in Europe, that Ukraine is defending the borders of Europe and democratic values, and that we cannot look the other way," she said. "It is the responsibility of all to stop this madness."

Regarding the attack on Ternopil, Caram lamented that while Russia's attack was "a brutality," such attacks are a daily occurrence across Ukraine.

"Every day, there are wounded, every day there are dead, every day, they destroy civilian areas. But the carnage on the front is also tremendous. War is madness, and the only thing we want is for this to end," she said.

Caram told OSV News that Zelenskyy expressed his concern to her and Cruz about "the more than 20,000 children who are missing, who are in captivity, or who have been given up for adoption, and whose whereabouts are unknown."

Cruz, who has accompanied Caram on several of her humanitarian visits to Ukraine, told OSV News Nov. 19 he spoke to Zelenskyy about his efforts in helping protect children who were kidnapped by Russian forces.



From left: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Juan Carlos Cruz and Dominican Sr. María Lucía Caram Padilla in Madrid Nov. 18, 2025 (OSV News/Courtesy of Office of the President of Ukraine)

The president, he said, invited him to connect with his wife, first lady Olena Zelenska, who runs a foundation that supports Ukrainian children impacted by the war.

"I'm really looking forward to starting something with helping children, on top of all the things we do," Cruz said.

In a video of the meeting Zelenskyy posted on X, Cruz can be seen presenting the Ukrainian president with an image of Mary, Undoer of Knots.

Cruz told OSV News that the image was given to him by the [late Pope Francis](#), who had a particular [devotion to the Marian image](#). Cruz gave it to Zelenskyy because "obviously, his knots are quite bigger than mine."

"I told him that I know that Pope Francis loved him, and he said that he loved him, too," Cruz said. "I told him that I felt Pope Leo was going to be as supportive as Pope Francis, and I wanted to give him this — that meant so much to me — to him, because I admire what he's doing for his country. I see it every time I go there. It's just heartbreaking."

Cruz noted that Leo XIV's papacy began with the words, "Peace be with you," and highlighted the Catholic Church's need to continue defending life in all its aspects, particularly in war, the death penalty and the defense of migrants.

Caram's humanitarian efforts in Ukraine began shortly after the invasion began. However, the Argentine nun, who lives in Spain, began assisting Ukrainian families arriving in the country following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

After Russia launched its war in 2022, Caram said, she and several others drove a van to Ukraine and "brought six people, mothers and children, and from there we opened 40 humanitarian corridors."

Since then, she told OSV News, they have helped 4,000 people who fled the war, and in April 2022, "we began to bring wounded people to Spain."

The Santa Clara Convent Foundation, which she runs, has also delivered ambulances and pickup trucks and set up field hospitals near the front lines of the conflict.

"We go practically every month and a half, and we continue to bring the wounded. And when they have recovered, we return them to the country," Caram said. "This is a little bit of what we are doing and what we will continue to do as long as we have resources and until the much-desired peace that we all ardently wish for arrives."

Caram told OSV News that in June, she received a call from Leo and met with him Aug. 28.

"He wanted to know the situation in Ukraine. He knew that Pope Francis supported me. He listened a lot, and I saw he was very concerned about the situation," she said.

Leo, she added, "continued Pope Francis' tradition of giving me rosaries to take to the wounded and those on the front line. He is very concerned and eager to collaborate."

"I am sure that [Leo] will continue along the same line as Francis in denouncing this invasion and working for peace," Caram said.