

Justin Welby condemns Putin and Lavrov's lies about Russian atrocities

Archbishop of Canterbury visits Bucha in Ukraine, scene of brutal massacre

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The Archbishop of Canterbury visited makeshift wooden crosses for those killed during the Russian attack in Bucha

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Standing by a row of makeshift wooden crosses beneath the ruins of a bridge blown up during the bloody battle of Bucha on the outskirts of Kyiv, the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of his “great grief” at the death toll from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

He also called on Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, to “stop lying” about the atrocities committed by Russian troops in Ukraine.

The Most Rev Justin Welby walked past an upturned minibus that still lies in the Irpin River where it plunged nine months ago during Russian attempts to encircle Kyiv. He left a handwritten note on a memorial which read: “The darkness does not overcome the light.”



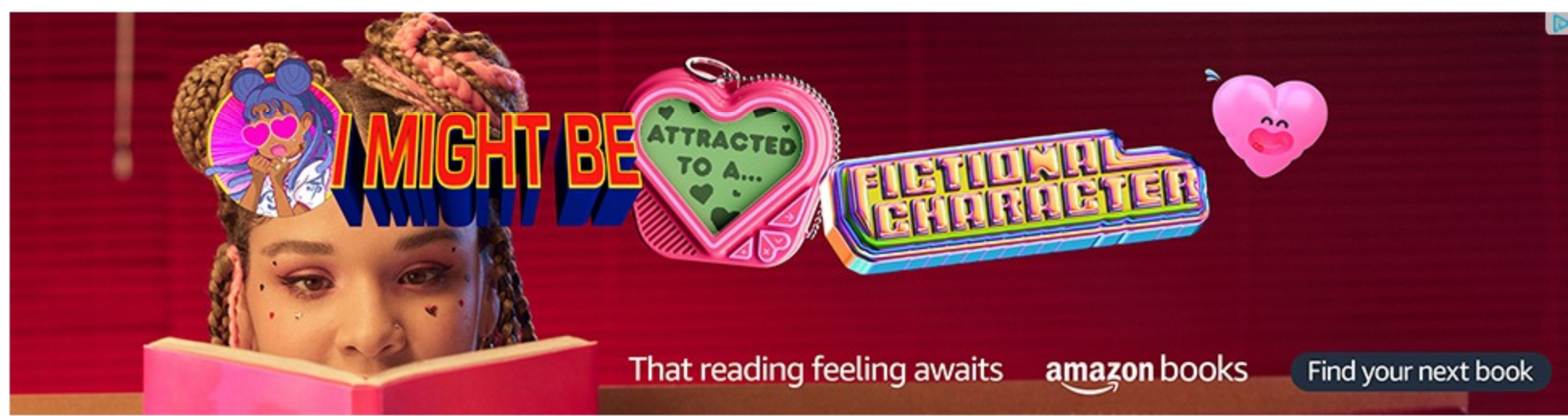
Welby wrote a message on memorial to those killed in Bucha

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“I’m surprised by how moved I am by this,” Welby said, beneath the bridge now dubbed the “Bridge of Hope” as it was the only route out of Bucha for residents to escape the Russian advance. “A lot of people died trying to come through here. They sheltered under the bridge there. Going to a place [in person] takes things from the head to the heart. [I feel] great grief, great compassion.

“It points to why we have to support those struggling for their freedom and be alongside them.”

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He also visited the nearby Orthodox church of St Andrew in whose churchyard mass graves were dug for the bodies found lying in the street after the battle. Russian forces captured the area on March 12. They withdrew on March 31. Welby was told by Father Andriy Halavin about the scene that greeted them.

“People brought the bodies here in supermarket trolleys,” Halavin said, choked with tears. “Without electricity, the morgues couldn’t operate so we buried them in the churchyard in mass graves.”



The archbishop walked past an upturned minibus that still lies in the Irpin River where it plunged during the fighting

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Welby was shown images of Ukrainian civilians lying dead in the street. One showed a civilian with their hands tied behind their back. In another, a dog waited patiently by the body of its owner.

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He also visited a chapel beneath the church whose altar screen is made of Crimean limestone. Andriy said: “It is a reminder that one day Crimea will come back to us.”

Leading a prayer, Welby said: “We pray and hope for justice for all those who live here and commit into your hands all those buried outside.”

Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, has claimed that the attack and dead bodies in Bucha were fake or staged.



Bodies were brought to be buried in a mass grave at an Orthodox church in Bucha

Speaking amid the dull thuds coming from Russian landmines being detonated in nearby woodland, Welby said: “There will be no peace until they stop lying. You’ve got to tell the truth, however painful. There can never be a way forward built on lies. I went over there [to see the mass grave site] just to imprint it on my mind. He’s got to stop lying, Lavrov. And Putin. There were atrocities committed here.”

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Asked why they have lied about events in places such as Bucha, he said: “It would be nice to think it was shame. But I don’t. I think it was for their own people. There won’t be a change.”

He added that the Russian invasion was “an evil act [that] started a train of destruction”, adding: “President Putin chose to start the war and release the evil that comes from that.”

Father Anatoliy Raychynets, from the Ukrainian Bible Society, recalled finding one woman standing outside the ruins of her house in Bucha, sweeping her front yard. Asked why she was doing it, she said: “I want to clear it up. Then maybe someone will help me rebuild my house.”

At the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary, which feeds a large number of mainly older Bucha residents who lack fuel to cook in their homes, the banner outside still bears the holes and tears from shrapnel from six missiles that fell nearby.

“We have replaced the windows,” said Father Ivan Rusyn. “People ask us why. They say, ‘How do you know the Russians won’t come back?’ I say: ‘They can’t because we have replaced all the windows now.’”

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