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## UKRAINE: I/NGO STATEMENT ON THE TARGETING OF CIVILIANS AND CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Apr 8, 2022

**We, the undersigned humanitarian organizations, are shocked and disturbed by the level of humanitarian needs and mass civilian deaths, casualties, and sexual violence against women and girls witnessed in different regions across Ukraine.**

Targeting densely populated areas and collectively depriving civilians of their right to access basic needs, essential services, humanitarian assistance, protection, and safe evacuation - as well as targeting civilian objects such as hospitals, learning institutions and residential buildings are blatant violations of International Humanitarian Law.

As humanitarian organizations following the principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality, we are seriously concerned about the ongoing hostilities and the international community's unsuccessful efforts at negotiating and securing a ceasefire. The cessation of hostilities is urgently needed to stop the killing of civilians and the suffering of people in Ukraine. We are closely monitoring the ongoing UN-led high-level negotiations and demand that they have a positive outcome on the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Nothing can justify the ongoing suffering of civilians, particularly children and women, older women and men, and people with disability in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Borodianka, Mariupol, and in other Ukrainian regions. All parties to the conflict must uphold their international obligations, including not targeting civilians and vital public infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water and electricity supplies. All parties to the conflict must not tolerate in their ranks sexual violence. Such serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts could amount to war crimes.

*"I will never forget the day I tried to get out of Irpin. I was outside when my neighbor's car was shelled. The father died, and the mother and her child were wounded. It is difficult to accept this and impossible to understand. I desperately want this war to come to an end,"*  
- Olha, a senior from Irpin, currently displaced in western Ukraine.

We call for a serious political agreement for the protection of civilians, including safe and voluntary passage to people who want to leave high-risk areas across Ukraine. At the same time their right to determine their destination of choice for evacuation must be respected in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Parties to the conflict must urgently facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access allowing relief workers and volunteers to urgently deliver life-saving assistance and medical support to people in need. Under the IV Geneva Convention and the UN Security Council Resolution 2286, health personnel and health facilities, such as hospitals and other facilities that have been set up for

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medical purposes, must be respected and protected in all circumstances. Medical units may not be attacked and access to them may not be limited.

The international community, including the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, must take sterner measures to bring hostilities to an end, and reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and conditions under which respect for the obligations from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.

We add to and reiterate our demands from [March 4, 2022](#):

- An immediate cessation of hostilities and targeting of civilians, civilian objects and infrastructure;
- All parties to the conflict must abide by **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**. Attacks targeting civilians and public infrastructure, including facilities that are indispensable for the survival of the civilians are prohibited under IHL. At no time should hostilities jeopardize the rights, **well-being and safety of civilians or civilian objects** such as schools, health centers, markets or farmlands, among others;
- Safe and unhindered humanitarian access, including across conflict lines for humanitarian assistance to reach all those in need, particularly those in vulnerable situations, with respect to the independence and neutrality of humanitarian agencies and the protection of humanitarian personnel and volunteers;
- All children have the right to enjoy provisions under the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which urges all persons to consider the best interests of the child. During armed conflict, **IHL** provides general protection for children as persons not taking part in hostilities and special protection as particularly vulnerable persons. **Protocol I, Article 77**: "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against all forms of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with such care and assistance as they may require, whether on account of their age or for any other reason";
- All parties must abide by their obligations under **Security Council resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict**, and prevent the killing and maiming, recruitment, use, sexual exploitation and sexual violence against girls, boys and adolescents who are at risk of suffering the six grave violations against children in conflict;
- All parties to the conflict must recall the fundamental **Principle of Distinction and the Safe Schools Declaration** to ensure the protection of all children and facilities including schools, kindergartens and hospitals where children are present. The full range of duty bearers and armed actors must ensure that children and their caregivers remain safe, regardless of the prevailing circumstances;

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- The United Nations Security Council to uphold their mandate, ensure the protection of civilians and maintain international peace and security away from political disputes;
- A serious political agreement for the protection of every civilian trapped in high-risk areas anywhere in Ukraine, including safe and voluntary passage to people who want to leave, humanitarian access, and protection. At the same time their right to determine their destination of choice for evacuation must be respected in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention;
- Ensure full cooperation with the United Nations and the ICRC to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of safe and systematic passages enabling the swift passage of humanitarian cargos and convoys including the safe passage of all civilians and relief workers;
- All countries to equally welcome all foreign nationals and stateless persons fleeing Ukraine regardless of their nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, country of origin, religious background, race or ethnicity;
- All funds to alleviate the suffering, and for people affected by the conflict in Ukraine must be additional and flexible, or new funding streams adapted to local actors. They must not be diverted from other under-funded humanitarian crises taking place globally.



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