

JOINT I/NGO STATEMENT ON HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION AND ACCESS IN UKRAINE

The following is a joint statement by national and international humanitarian organizations on Ukraine.

March 4, 2022, Ukraine

We, the undersigned humanitarian organizations, urgently call on the international community to act on preventing a humanitarian tragedy if no windows of silence with relevant security guarantees are given to evacuate civilians and to reach people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Relief actors desperately call for the swift implementation of humanitarian corridors to allow the flow of humanitarian assistance, safe evacuation of civilians and relief workers to leave endangered locations.

While aid agencies have promptly secured humanitarian aid including life-saving medicines, food and non-food items, it is impossible for relief workers and volunteers to deliver them without windows of silence and security guarantees - none of which are in place at the moment in areas of active military action and surrounding areas.

UNHCR data shows that as of March 4, more than a million people have fled Ukraine since the beginning of the military escalation to Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia and other countries. At the same time, many civilians, among them aid workers and medics, remain unable to move and travel long distances to seek safety internally or in neighboring countries.

Unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction or discrimination, must be allowed and facilitated in line with International Humanitarian Law. The Fourth Geneva Convention requires States to 'allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores' intended for civilians and 'the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics intended for children under fifteen, expectant mothers and maternity cases'.

Welcoming the outcomes of the second round of negotiations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on March 3 where the parties to the conflict reached an understanding on the need to ensure joint humanitarian corridors, we urge:

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- An immediate cessation of hostilities and targeting of civilians, civilian objects and infrastructure, particularly in urban and densely populated areas;
- 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 of humanitarian agencies and the protection of humanitarian personnel and volunteers;
- The United Nations Security Council members to uphold their mandate to ensure the protection of civilians and maintain international peace and security away from political disputes;
- To abide by international humanitarian law and to unconditionally ensure systematic windows of silence and security guarantees in areas of combat operations to evacuate civilians and relief workers and to reach people in need of humanitarian assistance without any discrimination. Windows of silence shall never be used for forced displacement;
- The international community, notably the United Nations and the OSCE, to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of systematic humanitarian corridors enabling the swift passage of humanitarian cargos and convoys including the safe passage of all civilians and relief workers;
- Ukraine's neighboring countries to equally welcome all foreign nationals and stateless persons fleeing Ukraine regardless of their nationality, country of origin, religious background, race or ethnicity.

A humanitarian tragedy can be prevented.

Signatories:

