

Ukraine: Legacy of Trauma, Generations of War, Future of Hope

Statement of the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations

Regarding the Current Situation in Ukraine

February 12, 2022

With each hour, Vladimir Putin's threat of Russian aggression against Ukraine intensifies. Whether he chooses a military invasion of Ukraine, a crippling cyberattack, an economic chokehold, or any combination of destructive actions, his intent to break Ukraine, the nation, and her people, is unequivocally clear. Along with the rest of the civilized world, the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations cannot presume to understand Russia's unilateral obsession with destroying Ukraine. Along with the rest of the civilized world, we fully condemn Putin's actions.

All of Putin's "reasons" for wanting to break Ukraine are factually baseless, historically inaccurate, and immoral. Ukraine does not pose a threat to Russia unless Putin chooses to fabricate a threat, Ukraine is not Russian land just because Putin wants it to be, and ultimately, Putin rejects the century-long international effort to stop the strong from subjugating those less strong simply because they can and want to do so.

Ukrainians have no illusions. Russia started a war with Ukraine eight years ago and will escalate in some manner. War is not coming. War is already here. Ukrainians are preparing for more, but not panicking since panic leads to weakness and Putin would like nothing more.

For the past 100 years, war is a leading reason why "historically, Ukraine has one of the largest diasporas in the world" (*United Nations International Organization for Migration Report, 2010*). Ukraine's diaspora maintains ties to its homeland for generations. At present, approximately 10 million self-identified Ukrainians live beyond the borders of Ukraine, almost 25% of Ukraine's in-country population of 45 million. Vast stretches of World War I, the "Russian" Civil War, World War II, were fought by foreign armies on Ukrainian land. Moscow sent Ukraine's soldiers to die in the various international wars instigated by the USSR. Even after the inevitable and fortunate end of that dictatorial empire, Moscow could not leave Ukraine alone. Since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, 14,000 have died and 1.5 million civilians have fled their homes.

More than language, more than religion, or place of birth, the one characteristic common to every Ukrainian woman, whether in the diaspora or in Ukraine, is that each is either a direct or intergenerational victim of war. Every woman has her personal war-story legacy — as a survivor, as the mother of a soldier, as the daughter or granddaughter of a war refugee, as a woman whose great grandmother lived through two world wars. The very real and very immediate consequences of war — physical destruction, loss of life, a humanitarian crisis, then the long-term burden of alleviating the intergenerational trauma of war — raising healthy children, keeping families together, healing emotional and physical damage — primarily has been the responsibility of

women, a burden needlessly imposed by foreign aggression. Once again, this fate awaits tens of millions.

We commend and are grateful to the nations who support Ukraine, understand that Ukraine is the current fault line between the past and the future – a victory for the old world order of aggressive and authoritative powers, or a victory for the future of a rules-based international order with a goal of peace.

Regardless of Russia's immediate actions, the unwinding of this war will take decades. In the end, Putin's vision will fail. For every Ukrainian he kills today, there is a mother raising a child in a foreign land to understand that might does not make right and that the dignity of each individual and each nation lies in the ability to freely choose a destiny.

In the title of her iconic 1890 poem *Contra Spem Spero!* poet Lesya Ukrainka offers the essence of a message that every Ukrainian understands – with no reason to hope, I still hope. In three words, she summarized Ukraine's reality. With no objective reasons to hope, we still hope.

Signed,
WFUWO Executive Board