

15th of April, 2022

Open letter from civil society and community networks on WHO health response to the war of Russia against Ukraine

Dear colleagues,

Since the 24th of February the whole world has been witnessing a flagrant tragedy that is taking place on Ukrainian lands - the war started by Russia is a terrifying example of blatant violence, inhumanity, and injustice. According to official estimates, the number of civilian casualties in Ukraine during the 50 days since Russia's invasion has reached over 2,613 civilians injuries, with 1,964 being killed, among them 161 children - while the actual number is much higher¹. Thousands of Ukrainian houses have been destroyed by Russian soldiers. Over 4,7 million Ukrainian people were forced to leave their homes to seek safety abroad², approximately 4,3 million children have been displaced, and 1.4 million people are lacking access to safe drinking water³.

The Ukrainian city of Mariupol, destroyed by 90%, civilian people in Bucha, Gostomel and Irpen raped and killed by Russian soldiers, shelled objects of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and kindergartens, maternity houses all constitute crimes against humanity⁴ and require public health highest level attention, likewise local civilian populations killed in other world conflicts. Special attention should be paid to the key populations living in the conflict areas that are most affected and most left behind.

WHO and other international agencies' statements should be carefully considered in the context of a war of misinformation that Russia is leading to discredit Ukraine, lying to the world that Ukrainians are Nazis. It is very important that appealing to principles of justice, equity and equality - should lead to catalyzing responses in Ukraine, and particularly regarding key populations, and lead to the acceptance of more refugees from Ukraine, and justify doing more to oppose Russian aggression against this peaceful nation.

Indeed, nowadays it is needed to actually do much more in Ukraine to guarantee the right to life and the right to health. The city of Mariupol still has not received the necessary "green corridors" and over 20 thousand civilians with children have been killed.

¹ According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Ukraine%20-%20civilian%20casualty%20update%20as%20of%2024.00%2013%20April%202022%20RUS.pdf>

² Data from UNHCR Operational Data Portal <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

³ UNICEF data

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/14-million-people-without-running-water-across-war-affected-eastern-ukraine-temp>

⁴ Please see the recent OSCE report, which highlights crimes against humanity committed by Russia <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/a/515868.pdf>

Regretfully, we are anticipating an escalation of the war in the Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine in the coming days. Ukraine still lacks medicines and basic medical equipment, such as tourniquets and blood-clotting remedies, whilst many doctors have fled the country. Ukraine alone is not ready to be able to support lives in the East of Ukraine on its own, without an accelerated increase of international assistance in all key areas. We respect the technical support provided by WHO regional and country offices who are working hard to support the health response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, but need further actions of the leading global public health opinion shapers to encourage more support and mitigate the anticipated casualties.

Our expectations are for WHO as per its mandate to do more to prepare the national health response to the military action on Donbas in the coming days! Responses need to be independent of the Russian Federation or other member state's contributions to WHO.

We, regional and global public health professionals and community and civil society activists, call on WHO to make a strong statement on Ukraine, with clear public health messaging and a bold plan to support people in need and mitigate human suffering that will come with the escalation of the Russian military activities in the Eastern part of Ukraine and Donbas region in particular!

We request that the WHO leadership calls out the Russian aggression which threatens public health, human rights, and democratic values in Ukraine and globally!

We appeal to Dr. Tedros to make a personal visit to Ukraine as soon as possible to show political support to a nation under attack, and to share and promote best public health practices in this fragile context.

Signatories:

Alliance for Public Health, Ukraine

Eurasian harm reduction association, Lithuania

International Network of People who Use Drugs, Global

East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH (ECUO)

Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS, Georgia

TB Europe Coalition, CEECA region, Ukraine/Netherlands

ECOM - Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity, Estonia

CF «INTERNATIONAL BUDGET ADVOCACY HUB»

Union for Equity and Health, Republic of Moldova

ALE «Kazakhstan Union of People Living with HIV»

“Network TBpeople” Georgia

Alliance Consultancy, Regional TS Hub for EECA

CO “TBPeopleUkraine”

TBpeople Global

Eurasian Movement for the Right to Health in Prisons

Center for Health Policies and Studies (PAS Center), Republic of Moldova

“Saglamliga Khidmat” Public Union, Azerbaijan

Public Association for Support of Social Protection and Integration of Persons with Disabilities, Azerbaijan