

JOINT I/NGO STATEMENT ON RECENT EVENTS IN UKRAINE

The following is a joint statement by I/NGOs operating in eastern Ukraine on the current security developments.

February 18, 2022, Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Eastern Ukraine

We are deeply disturbed by reports of the recent series of shelling along the line of contact in Donetsk and Luhansk regions that reached civilians and critical civilian infrastructure in multiple locations. Children and teachers in a kindergarten and a school, workers, humanitarians, and residents of Stanytsia Luhanska, Vrubivka and other areas were present at close proximity to targeted locations and exposed to grave and immediate risk with some of the residential buildings and private houses sustaining collateral damage.

This does not come as an isolated event as it has been the reality for the people of Luhansk and Donetsk regions for nearly 9 years. While hostilities are ongoing, all parties must adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring that civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially schools, hospitals, and water systems are protected from armed violence and enabling the swift and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected populations. The right to life is a fundamental human right and every human life is priceless.

We also call on all parties to the conflict to agree to a lasting ceasefire, as this is the only way to protect civilians from violence and other violations of their rights. In particular, we are calling on all parties to prevent threats of attacks against schools, children, and teachers in line with the Safe School Declaration and humanitarian law.

We are also concerned about the effects of the current tensions on people's physical and mental well-being. People everywhere in areas both controlled and not controlled by the Government of Ukraine are anxious and exhausted by statements of officials and information of the mass media. In his most recent public address on Ukraine, the UN Secretary-General emphasized that diplomacy should prevail and "there is no place for incendiary rhetoric. Public statements should aim to reduce tensions, not inflame them".

The humanitarian community in Ukraine warns that the ongoing tensions could result in a drastic increase in humanitarian needs. With the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine entering its 9th year, 2.9 million people living on both sides of the line of contact remain in urgent need of humanitarian assistance whereas the Humanitarian Response Plan continues to be significantly underfunded with only 4% out of 190 million USD in funding requirements allocated as of February 18, 2022.

The current events and risks require even more engagement and solidarity of the international community with the affected civilians. Diplomatic efforts should prevail over any intensification of the already existing armed violence in eastern Ukraine to avoid further human suffering.

Signatories:

