

Human Rights Council 49th session

Urgent debate on the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian Aggression

3rd March

Joint NGO statement

We stand in solidarity with all the children, families, and organisations that have been working in Ukraine and neighbouring countries in these difficult times. The ongoing escalation of the conflict increases children's risk of death, injury, trauma, disruption of access to education and basic services, forced displacement, and separation. We are profoundly concerned by the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation facing children and the short- and long-term consequences on their rights, particularly those in the most vulnerable situations, such as the 100,000 children growing up in institutions without parental care and undocumented and stateless children. We condemn the recent attacks on schools and kindergartens in Ukraine. At least six educational facilities have faced shelling in recent days, which will have a profound impact on children's right to education.

Our lives are interconnected. The suffering of Ukraine's children is our suffering too. We know this war will also have knock-on effects throughout Europe, at a time when the pandemic has already deepened inequalities and damaged social cohesion.

The Russian Federation and Ukraine have both ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC). The latter emphasises in its preamble the "harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long-term consequences it has for durable peace, security and development". We join the call by UN experts and the international community to ensure that all parties to the conflict abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law, and that affected communities can safely access the humanitarian assistance they need. The protection of civilians and their infrastructures must be a priority, including those impacting children's lives such as hospitals and schools, in line with OPAC and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Respect for children's rights is the foundation of peace and prosperity. Our collective future depends on children growing up in an environment free of fear, violence, and human rights violations. We call for the protection of children, particularly girls and young women, who are at disproportionate risk of sexual violence and gender-based violence during conflicts.

We also echo the UN experts' call to protect the rights of all human rights defenders, including child human rights defenders, who are exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression in all countries involved.

As a network of organisations and individuals committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of children, we stand united against war. We reiterate the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and a return to dialogue and negotiations to stop the escalation of war in Ukraine and we call on the international community to support all measures that protect children's lives and wellbeing, including support for all children and families to find safety within Ukraine and across borders without discrimination. We also support the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry by the Council and any other accountability mechanisms to deal with violations and abuses of children's rights.

List of signatories:

1. Arigatou International (ECOSOC Status)
2. Child Rights Connect (ECOSOC status)
3. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
4. Defence for Children International (ECOSOC status)
5. Defence for Children Costa Rica
6. ECPAT International
7. Eurochild (ECOSOC status)
8. Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion
9. Plan International
10. SOS Children's Villages (ECOSOC Status)
11. Women's World Summit Foundation
12. World Organisation Against Torture/SOS Torture (ECOSOC status)
13. World Vision International
14. Association AMANE