

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Deputy High Commissioner's Statement to the Security Council On the situation in Ukraine and Neighboring Countries

19 April 2022

Madam President,

Thank you for inviting UNHCR to the Security Council to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

I am joining you tonight from Hungary, a country to which almost a half million Ukrainians have fled, a fraction of the almost 5 million who have been forced to leave their country, in addition to over 7 million who remain displaced inside Ukraine. The UN also estimates that 13 million more are in the hardest hit areas, many unable to move and difficult to reach with aid...safely.

Earlier today I was in the Czech Republic, and before that in Austria, and the compassion and solidarity in these countries along with others continues to be unprecedented. Our fervent wish is this will also extend to other refugees uprooted from their homes, and who find themselves on this continent, unable to return and in need of the same international protection and solidarity. My own visit, which will continue to the Slovak Republic, complements those of High Commissioner Grandi, including to Ukraine, and Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, who was in Moldova and Romania since he addressed this Council.

And while the sheer scale and speed of displacement is immense, we must not lose sight of what these figures mean. Our teams on the ground continue to be confronted by the same scenes and shared stories. Women, children, and the aged, have left their homes, their lives, their sons, fathers and husbands. Just this morning in Prague, I met Lupa, a 25-year-old from Odessa. Like so many others, she was forced to leave behind her family in Ukraine. Her father, a military reservist, remains there with her mother. Her grandmother who lives in Melitopol, just a few hours west of Mariupol, has been completely unreachable since the war began 2 months ago. Each one of the millions displaced are forced to make impossible, heartbreaking decisions and have left behind almost everything they hold dear.

But we have also seen consistently remarkable acts of humanity. Apartment and office buildings, windows and balconies, street lamps on every corner, covered with messages of support. Local authorities, communities, and individuals, rallying to provide what they can -- food and medicine, transportation, and a place to sleep. I saw this in Prague today — tremendous solidarity and support. Thanks to the commitment of concerned states, borders have been kept open, those seeking safety are given access to protection and aid, and we call on that to continue in a non-discriminatory manner for all people in need.

This inspiring response is surpassed only by the strength and composure of refugees themselves, who continue to exude both courage and resilience as they describe their flight to safety, bravely talking about being separated from their families, fearful the war will pursue them. And most of all, they emphasize their hope for peace so they can return home as soon as possible. Many are therefore staying close to Ukraine. Some are even returning now, anxious to connect with family and check on property.

Madam President,

Some in this Council may have joined the briefing last week by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, when he described the chilling scene in Bucha and throughout Ukraine. Heartbreaking stories of those killed, those lucky to escape, and those left behind or with loved ones whose whereabouts remain unknown. Dire humanitarian conditions for civilians forced to withstand unrelenting fighting, but also tireless efforts from many to save lives and help people in besieged areas like Mariupol.

When the High Commissioner visited Ukraine two weeks ago, he spoke with the Government about scaling up cash assistance to reach 360,000 vulnerable people inside the country. He also conveyed our commitment to extend our expertise in shelter to help those with damaged homes, and repair of reception centres. UNHCR is now signing agreements with three key ministries in Ukraine to take this work forward, in support of the Government, which is determinedly leading this effort.

Let me reiterate what the High Commissioner conveyed at the time, that we will continue to expand our lifesaving aid to the internally displaced throughout Ukraine, especially in the centre and the east, where a brutal humanitarian nightmare is unfolding. This requires not just resources, but also safe and unhindered access to people in need, wherever they are in the country, so that they too can receive desperately needed help... safely.

Madam President,

I want to stress that even as news coverage has shifted to other aspects of the conflict, people are still fleeing in desperation and fear. And not just from Ukraine but from other countries in turmoil around the world – Yemen, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Syria, Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo – and the list goes on.

We ask this Council to continue, even as we focus today on Ukraine, to consider the needs of all refugees from all corners of the globe. All those uprooted from their homes need the same solidarity. The same compassion. The same protection.

In Ukraine, the vast majority of those on the move are women and children, and the risks of gender-based violence, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse are high. Anecdotal information is already coming in about persons approaching the displaced with too-good-to-be-true promises of work, accommodation, and transport. The first identified cases of trafficking confirm that these risks are coming true.

As UNHCR, we are working – including with Antonio's organization IOM - to prevent, mitigate, and respond to these trafficking risks. In addition to strengthened gender-based violence programs, we have deployed expert coordinators in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse to support governments' response.

We also partner with UNICEF on safe spaces called "Blue Dots" at main border crossing points, transit and reception centers to provide information and specialized aid for mothers, adolescents, children and other vulnerable refugees. This is the first time we have done this so early in an emergency response and we expect it will serve as a best practice going forward.

States, however, have the strongest role to play, especially on trafficking. We call upon them to end the impunity of traffickers, help identify international protection needs of survivors and persons at

risk, and most of all, redouble efforts to address the root causes of the conflict which allows predators to exploit the opportunities that war presents.

Madam President,

We will continue our work to provide lifesaving aid in Ukraine. At the same time, neighbouring countries are increasingly – and in line with the Global Compact on Refugees – including refugees in national education, health and social programmes. This inclusive approach is – bar none - the best way for refugees to sustain their lives in exile, and it requires more international support.

But no pile of blankets, no sum of cash, no amount of medicine, is going to halt the death and destruction. Aid alone will not stop people forced by war to flee, nor will it give them what they really want and need – peace and safety at home, a chance to return voluntarily, sustainably....and safely.

So while we will continue our job to deliver aid, we need this Council to do its job too. When the High Commissioner last addressed this body, he warned that without an immediate end to the shelling, we were planning for up to four million refugees. Now eight weeks into the conflict, we are at five million and counting, with five million unique stories of loss and trauma.

We therefore call on all of you in this Council again – and yes, we are aware of the deep divisions – to put aside your differences and find a way to end this horrific and senseless war.

Thank you.