

# HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND WAR IN UKRAINE

A letter from the Associated Country Women of the World  
World President Magdie de Kock, 30 March 2022

Dear ACWW Members,

Having received contact from several Members and Societies around the world, I thought it would be helpful to clarify ACWW's position regarding the current crisis in Ukraine.

Firstly, ACWW is clear in its conviction that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is an illegal war of aggression, in line with Article 1; Article 2, paragraph 4; Article 33; and Article 39 of the UN Charter, as well as UN General Assembly Resolution 3314, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It is illegal to wage wars of territorial aggression, and to invade another country without sanction of the UN Security Council in specifically defined circumstances (such as some Peace Enforcement operations under Chapter 7, Article 45 of the UN Charter). We are horrified by the impacts of this aggression on the people of Ukraine, and particularly the many millions of women and children who have had to flee their homes, lost their lives, suffered premature births, or whose health has been affected by the conflict.

On 5 March 2022, ACWW published a statement along with Soroptimist International, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Graduate Women International, International Alliance of Women, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, Zonta International, and the NGO Committee on Aging-Vienna which called for the *"immediate halt to hostilities, for all troops to be withdrawn, and for good-faith, peaceful, diplomatic negotiations to begin in a neutral territory. The actions of states must place the good of citizens and humanity at their heart, accordingly, all civilians must be protected"*. It further stated that *"War is never gender-neutral. Women and girls in all their diversity are always disproportionately affected by war, and it is no different in this conflict. The projections that millions will be displaced and will become refugees, are being realised with thousands fleeing daily. Many of those on the move are women and girls; specific, targeted, gender-transformative programmes must be immediately developed and implemented to ensure that their lives, hopes and dreams are not irreparably damaged by this war."*

If you would like to read the full statement, it was published by the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations, and can be found [here](#).

No one at ACWW is under the illusion that public statements will end this conflict. However, it has been ACWW's policy for decades that we are not equipped to act in conflict zones, or provide relief aid. This type of work requires very specific provisions, include specially trained staff, security, and resources such as power generators and clean water which ACWW is simply not equipped to provide – and in doing so without these, a team from ACWW would become more of a burden on the local population and those agencies seeking to make an impact as we relied on them to help us.

We were founded in 1929 to be an organisation that advocated for our members, and to amplify their voices at the international level. This remains critical today and is exactly what we have been doing. I would like to bring you an update on this below:

At the United Nations, there are moves under way to challenge the Russian Federation's right to sit on the Security Council, and thus hold a veto vote in their deliberations. Whilst it has always been widely understood that the Russian Federation inherited the seat on the Security Council from the USSR, this was never formally codified and so there is nothing in the UN Charter that provides the Russian Federation with a seat on the Security Council. This move, if successful, would have significant impact on the situation;



1. Russia would no longer be able to veto decisions at the Security Council, including decisions around the deployment of peacekeepers or other initiatives
2. To remove Russia from other mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Council, there needs to be a motion from the Security Council to the General Assembly – if Russia cannot veto this at the Security Council, then there is much more chance of such a motion making it to the General Assembly.
3. It would be a massive loss of status, and have long-lasting implications for Putin's regime

We have seen the immediate impact of Russia's weakened stance at the UN in the last 3 weeks. On 3 March, a Resolution was presented to the UN General Assembly which demanded that Russia *"immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."* This unprecedented condemnation and call for action passed with 141 Member States voting for it, with only 5 voting against. In the wake of this, Russia's negotiating position at the recent Commission on the Status of Women was significantly less high-profile than usual, and significantly weakened – ACWW took part in negotiations on the text of the Agreed Conclusions via the UK Government's civil society text group (6 representatives from UK-based NGOs). During these negotiations, text that was drastically stronger on women's rights was secured than has been achieved in the past 10 years.

Next week, ACWW's Advocacy Director Nick Newland will attend an emergency session of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Council. This session has been called by 49 Member States to address the impacts on food security in Ukraine, and across Europe, resulting from the invasion of Ukraine. ACWW is one of a small number of NGOs invited to attend this session, and will use this opportunity to lobby Member States to prioritise women from rural communities in both their immediate responses to the crisis, and in the reconstruction efforts that will need to follow.

I know this may sound like a lot of talk and not much action, but it can and will have an impact on both the Russian government and hopefully a positive one on the peoples of both Russia and Ukraine. In October 2021, I had a meeting with the Russian minister for rural affairs (along with our Executive Director Tish Collins, and Advocacy Director Nick Newland). The Minister was asked whether he participated in the production of reports for CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women), as Article 14 is centred on the rights of rural women. His response was a simple "no"... but having challenged him on the implications of this, we were also then able to inform our members in Russia who are able to pursue this through their own legal channels. It is not a fast process, and it is not comprehensive, but we do whatever we are able to do to help our members, and to hold governments to account.

ACWW has maintained contact with our friends and colleagues in Ukraine throughout the crisis, and where possible signposted assistance. ACWW staff have personally made donations of warm clothes for children and babies to a Polish community centre which was able to deliver resources directly to those most in need as they crossed the Border. We have, whenever contacted at Central Office, encouraged members who wanted to take immediate action to donate to UNICEF or relevant aid organisations who are working on the ground. We have also encouraged members to support ACWW's advocacy efforts.

I believe it is also important to remember two additional points;

1. ACWW has a large member organisation in the Russian Federation, the Women's Union of Russia. With more than one million women in rural communities all across the country, the WUR do their best to provide support women in very difficult circumstances, and in an environment which is, at best, hostile to women. Legalisation of domestic violence, refusal to sign or ratify the Istanbul Convention, and repeated breaches of international human rights laws all put Russian women at risk. We continue to stand in solidarity with our members in Russia, who have no part in this war, no desire for it to have happened, and no ability to stop it. We have received reports in the last weeks that nappies (diapers) and baby products have gone up in price more than 800% in Russian cities – you can thus imagine the impact of this in isolated and remote rural communities. At no point does this detract from the suffering of Ukrainian women and their families, but we must always remember that wars of aggression waged by men will cause suffering for women.



2. On 21 March, ACWW issued a Statement for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In it, we said: *“The current crisis in Ukraine has created a near-global movement of political and emotional solidarity with the people of that nation who are suffering the impacts of an illegal invasion. Though we recognise that this is an appropriate and reasonable reaction, we also recognise that the attitudes of Western and Global-North States have not been as sympathetic when those affected by conflicts in other regions have looked different. Refugees and IDPs fleeing conflicts in Africa and the Middle East continue to receive a frosty reception in many Western nations. ACWW urges all governments to stand with all those affected by conflict, regardless of their country of origin, their ethnic background, or colour.”* Again, this is not to diminish the severity of the situation in Ukraine, but sadly this is by no means the only conflict impacting women today.

ACWW remains committed to peace, to peace-building, and to the needs of rural women. I do hope that this letter has clarified ACWW’s position and the actions we are taking within our remit. Every query or contact we have received on this matter has been replied to, and we have offered to attend digital meetings or indeed organise them to discuss Members’ concerns – and will continue to do this for as long as is necessary.

Please do not hesitate to contact ACWW Central Office at [office@acww.org.uk](mailto:office@acww.org.uk) or our Advocacy Director Nick Newland directly at [nick@acww.org.uk](mailto:nick@acww.org.uk) if you have specific questions.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Magdie".

Magdie de Kock  
ACWW World President