



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Tuesday 22 March 2022

Jane Ann McKenna, CEO, Dóchas

Chairman Flanagan, Deputies and Senators, thank you for the invitation to meet with you again so soon. Little did we realize just 6 weeks ago, the devastation and horror that millions of Ukrainians would face today. Almost a month since the start of the conflict over 3.5 million people have fled the country, the majority of whom are women and children. Millions more have fled their homes and are displaced in Ukraine and as fighting continues they will likely be displaced multiple times. That figure will only continue to increase in the coming weeks and months.

Irish people have responded to this horrific conflict with immense generosity, solidarity and kindness. Dóchas members, including those here today from the Irish Red Cross, Concern Worldwide and Trocaire, have seen this support in action, with donations and offers of accommodation to those in need from thousands of supporters around the country.

Before I hand over to our speakers who are joining us virtually, let me share a snapshot of some of the key issues facing us currently.

Inside Ukraine

As the situation evolves inside Ukraine, humanitarian needs are becoming more and more critical, and reaching those in need is becoming more difficult. We have seen this play out in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan - ordinary people, civilians, some trapped in besieged cities and towns, living in constant fear of indiscriminate attacks. Food, water, fuel for heating, hygiene items and medical supplies are desperately needed.

Dóchas is demanding that all parties to the conflict fulfil their legal obligations and uphold international humanitarian law. Civilians must be spared from military operations and concrete agreements to allow safe passage for people fleeing the fighting need to be implemented and well communicated. All parties are obligated under international humanitarian law to ensure safe unimpeded access to all areas to deliver aid and reach vulnerable citizens trapped without services. Civilians, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure should never be a target.

Internally displaced

Over six and a half million people are displaced within Ukraine. Up until recently, people have been passing through collection centers located in central and western Ukraine, receiving support, before heading

towards border areas. However, we are seeing that this is now changing - cross border movements are slowing with numbers down to 45,000 per day, from 100,000. Centers inside Ukraine are becoming more permanent in nature requiring support and assistance. Very often it is the most vulnerable who do not have the means to move, and are fully dependent on available support, who are staying behind. This includes those who are elderly or people living with disabilities. Supporting local organisations and civil society movements inside Ukraine is essential. They are the first and closest responders.

Refugees

Many of those who left the country in recent weeks have had the resources or connections to do so.

As the conflict evolves, those who flee the country to neighboring countries will have less resources, and very different and enhanced humanitarian needs. Major resources will need to be mobilized to assist EU member countries who are taking in those seeking safety.

Food security

The repercussions of this conflict of this conflict are already being felt worldwide. The most immediate impact of this conflict, outside of Ukraine itself, is on the world's food security. We know that Russia and Ukraine are arguably the breadbasket of the world. Together the two countries supply a third of the world's wheat. Ukraine is the world's largest exporter of sunflower oil. The closure of ports and cessation of exports will have widespread humanitarian implications for Africa and other low- and middle-income countries. Twenty-three African countries are dependent on Russia and Ukraine for more than half the imports of one of their staple goods. The World Food Programme, which gets half of the wheat it distributes in humanitarian crises from Ukraine, will need to find other suppliers and the costs of responding to other crises such as Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen will increase

I will now hand over to Matthew Morris of the International Committee of the Red Cross and then to Ros O'Sullivan who is leading Concern's humanitarian response inside Ukraine.

But first, we ask that you as members of this committee support these vital asks:

- A peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine must be the top priority.
- All sides to the conflict must protect civilians and civilian infrastructure under international humanitarian law both for those who choose to leave and those who remain. Safe passage for those willing and able to escape should be urgently assured across war-affected areas inside Ukraine. This should not be dependent on the existence of humanitarian corridors or ceasefires that may temporarily be in place. It is vital that such opportunities for civilians to escape from areas of violent warfare are not one-off and time-limited offers.
- Ireland should use its seat on the UN Security Council to work with its international partners to ensure any and all violations of International Humanitarian Law are investigated and immediately condemned; and the dignity and rights of civilians are protected.
- Ireland must step up and meet its pledge to fully fund all current humanitarian appeals and ensure those in need of life saving assistance, including food, can receive it.