

**Re: Meeting of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June  
@3.15pm**

**Ghita El Khyari – Head of Secretariat, Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund**

**- Opening statement**

**Open:**

Thank you chair, it is a great honour for me to speak here today as part of Ireland’s Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, and have the opportunity to share with you the response of the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund alongside its civil society partners, to the on-going and devastating war in Ukraine.

The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund is a United Nations multi-partner trust fund which supports women led and women’s rights civil society organizations in conflict and crisis affected countries, with a focus on local and grassroots organizations.

I want to start firstly by acknowledging Ireland’s continual commitment not only to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, but to the women’s organizations in crises that we serve. Ireland as a founding member of WPHF has been a consistent supporter since our launch in 2016, stepping forward once again in solidarity with women’s civil society organisations responding to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and Moldova.

Today, I am joined by our partner Ms Olena Stryzhak, from the Ukrainian Civil Society Organization “Positive Women”, whom I will pass the floor to soon to speak more about their work in Ukraine.

**Context:**

As you know, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the world watched on as Russia launched its unjustifiable war on Ukraine. More than 100 days on, we continue to witness the devastating effects on the lives of so many. As we sit here today, more than 6.5 million people have fled the Ukraine, and a further 8 million are internally displaced. This war, like many others, is forcing people to flee their homes seeking safety, protection, and humanitarian assistance.

However, the conflict in Ukraine is also revealing the disproportionate discrimination faced by women and girls.

Women and girls constitute approximately 90 per cent of all those displaced from Ukraine, through which they are exposed to gender-specific risks such as trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and denial of access to essential services. This also includes increasing numbers of reported cases of conflict related sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian armed forces as part of the war tactics.

A recent report by UN Women and CARE International also reveals that with schools closed, high demand for volunteer work, and the absence of men, women's unpaid care burden has increased significantly.

Women and girls have poor access to health care services, especially for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and pregnant, expecting, and new mothers. Rising fears of GBV and lack of food, especially for those in heavy conflict areas have also been reported.

Many respondents spoke of the challenges and barriers they face in accessing humanitarian aid and services, and around 50 per cent of both women and men indicated that mental health was a main area of life impacted by the war.

The impact of the war is particularly disproportionate for internally displaced people and marginalized groups such as female-headed households, Roma people, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities, who face severe discrimination, both in their daily struggle and in access to humanitarian aid.

Unfortunately, it is not a surprise. As we know and have learned from other conflicts, backtracking on gender equality is already evident in the ongoing crisis. The war is increasing unemployment among the entire population and will likely push women into the unprotected informal sectors of the economy and increase poverty.

With gender roles changing in crisis and conflict settings, many men have become unemployed and are primarily engaging in the armed forces, while women report taking on new roles and multiple jobs to make up for the lost family income. Women are also performing vital roles in the humanitarian response in local communities. However, despite taking on increasing leadership roles in their families and communities, they are largely excluded from formal political and administrative decision-making processes.

It's critical that the humanitarian response in Ukraine takes into account and addresses the different needs of women and girls, men and boys, including those that are furthest left behind. Women have been playing vital roles in their communities' humanitarian response. They must also be meaningfully involved in the planning and decision-making processes to make sure that their specific needs are met and that they participate as experts and key actors across the peace-security-development nexus.

As we will hear today from Olena, women's organizations play a critical role both during and after conflict. Women's civil society organizations like Positive Women, who despite their challenges in funding and recognition, remain operational, risking their lives daily for the fundamental rights of their communities.

Women's organizations lie at the heart of the response in Ukraine. Supporting these organizations must be a priority.

**WPHF:**

That is why, WPHF is investing in the work of women civil-society leaders, like Olena, who are yielding remarkable dividends towards a more peaceful, inclusive and gender-equal world.

As part of its emergency regional response efforts to the war in Ukraine, WPHF is ensuring vital financing and coordination support to local women's organizations in Ukraine and Moldova by providing both core institutional and programmatic financing.

Through the support of donors such as Ireland and the Irish Stability Fund, WPHF launched a series of emergency targeted Calls for Proposals in March and April respectively, focusing on core areas of work of the Fund aimed at addressing the needs through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

A total of 14 civil society organisations, 8 from Ukraine and 6 from Moldova have been supported thus far. Through this support, women's organizations in Ukraine and in Moldova are providing essential humanitarian and protection assistance to displaced women and girls, including shelter, medication, food, as well as vital psychosocial support, including to marginalized groups such as women and girls with disabilities and HIV/AIDs, which Olena will elaborate more on.

WPHF partners are also training smaller women groups and organizations in gender responsive humanitarian planning, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) and Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) response and prevention. Examples of activities include the launching of an on-line platform through which CSOs will provide psychological and legal services on CRSV among other types of violence, while also awareness raising and information sharing on CRSV.

I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Ireland for their thought leadership in this response and for providing funding for WPHF's response to Ukraine.

Thank you.