28 January 2022
Open Letter to the UN Security Council
War “Over” Ukraine: Militarism is Killing Us All

It appears that the United States has decided to refer the deteriorating situation over Ukraine to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and this will be discussed on Monday, 31 January. We urge in the strongest possible terms that the debate is used to address the serious and underlying causes and not be abused by members of the UNSC to grandstand their militaristic rhetoric.

It is now obvious that the situation represents a massive and immediate threat to international peace and security. The Charter of the United Nations gives primary responsibility for the maintenance of that peace and security to the UNSC. Until now, the silence of the UN Secretary-General and from the UNSC has been incomprehensible. Ceding responsibility to resolve the situation to those who have proven themselves time and again to be absolutely irresponsible actors—governments that have invested billions into weapons and wage wars, directly or indirectly, around the globe—is an abnegation of the principles and purpose of the Charter. This “crisis” has been created by the militarism of these countries; their militarism cannot solve it. Leaving them to their devices enables a drift to armed conflict, potentially of nuclear war.

This is not security. This is the madness of patriarchy and militarism. A failure to act for peace in Ukraine, after the appalling failures to act on Afghanistan, will confirm that after decades of abuse by the P5, the UN system, as it is now structured, is almost irredeemable.

Since 2014, there have been thousands of civilians killed and wounded. The plundering of Ukraine through neoliberal intervention and policies has left a population in dire economic straits, with a massive impact on women, particularly in rural communities. The COVID-19 pandemic made it abundantly clear that significant investments in health care and social infrastructure are needed; and yet money has been spent on weapons instead. The militarisation and co-option of the language of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda by the UN, NATO, and the Ukrainian authorities means that women have to compulsorily register for military service. Yet where is the participation of women in the current discussions? Where is the participation of the non-violent people who will suffer most from an outbreak of war?

Instead of moving for peaceful resolution and de-escalation, the members of the UNSC have flooded the region with weapons and sought to build on existing military alliances and tensions, as if 1914 taught us nothing.

This is not security. Look up. Your conflicts and war profiteering make the death of our species inevitable; militarism is literally killing everything.
All states, regardless of geographic location, have obligations. No country benefits from this war; no people ever can. Only the kleptocrats and the weak need such distractions. The UNSC must act now. Representatives of the UNSC should be sent to Ukraine and to the border to assess first-hand the conditions, the threats, and the needs of those directly affected and bring together the parties for mediation and peaceful resolution.

“I can’t understand why it’s impossible to put an end to this. Why do our children have to die there?” (Mother of a soldier shot and killed on the Ukrainian border)

Act on that. It is possible and vital that this conflict be prevented, that the root causes be identified, that the continuing dispute over Donbass be addressed with fulsome participation of those most affected, and all necessary support be given to resolving economic insecurity and undertaking confidence building measures for a path to reconciliation of interests. That overriding interest has to be peace.

If the UNSC fails to reach sensible, diplomatic means to secure peace, then we call on the UN General Assembly to take leadership. The failure of the few, with vested interests in the pursuit of war, cannot prejudice the lives of the many who seek peace.

Madeleine Rees
Secretary General
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom