

Written Statement to the UN Human Rights Council on Item 2 “Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Ukraine Stemming from the Russian Aggression”

Human Rights Council

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Agenda Item 2

Human rights situations that require the Council’s attention

Women’s Federation for World Peace International stands in solidarity with the widows affected by the situation in Ukraine. We recognise the situation is ongoing thus it is difficult to gather accurate data that fully addresses the issue of widowhood. However, as the plight of widows in conflict is often overlooked, it is of the utmost important that the UN places widows’ rights on its agenda, notably in the context of the Ukraine / Russia conflict. We call on the UN to recognise the unique situation of widows, as well as urging the UN to use their influence to work with the international community to offer protection for this group of women. We strongly insist a steadfast position is adopted on the protection of widows and their right to freedom from torture and inhumane treatment and ensure this security is extended long term. The outcomes of today shall influence the lives of widows and wives of the missing who have been affected by the conflict, each fault may have dire consequences for these women as the issue is incredibly time sensitive. Widows are often neglected in conflict, and their security must be of the utmost priority, for fear of escalation into other human rights abuses.

Widows affected by conflict are placed in extremely vulnerable positions which have life threatening consequences for both these women and their offspring. Children of widows are more likely to be forced into sex trafficking or into the child pornography industry, whilst widows in conflict are often left homeless and without protection or financial support. This is especially true for those whose husbands are missing, as inheritance funds are often inaccessible. It is important to note that the UN has an obligation to protect these women, given that both Ukraine and Russia are UN member states. The UN is responsible for ensuring UN conventions are followed, and given Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine, it is clear that Russia has committed multiple human rights abuses as a result of the conflict, as well as breaking a myriad of UN conventions. These include:

- The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- The Rights of the Child (CRC)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment (CAT)

We have seen the Russian capability for inhumane practices during conflict, notably towards women, thus the intersectional and unique position of widows raises serious concerns for their safety.

We applaud the UN in its recent passing of a resolution titled ‘Addressing the Situation of Widows’. However, further action must be taken to ensure protection specifically for widows affected by this conflict must be addressed today.

Whilst exact figures are difficult to obtain due to data collection issues, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has estimated around 27,000 soldiers have died since the conflict began. This war therefore has created a significant number of widows, on top of the widows who existed prior to the war. In active warzones, the rate of widowhood can be as high as 80 per cent.

The universal access to security is an essential foundation for the prosperity of widows, notably in conflict zones. Offering protection to these women is of the utmost importance to enable a promising future for both Ukraine and Russia. In the context of conflict-prone and post-conflict situations, women and notably widows are targeted in gender-based violence amongst other war crimes, and the intensity of this violence is exacerbated by the conflict.

With this in mind, we strongly ask the UN Human Rights Council to consider the following:

1. Facilitating accurate data collection: Warzones restrict the ability to achieve a true understanding of human rights abuses. We request that UN bodies work with NGOs, civil society and the international community to investigate and obtain accurate figures on widowhood and their unique situation.
2. Focus on humanitarian aid: The UN must work with organisations in both Ukraine and Russia to ensure that humanitarian aid is able to reach widows in the warzone. We insist that UN Bodies urge member states, notably those who border Ukraine and Russia to allow complete cooperation in delivering humanitarian aid. We also call on the international community to call on Russia to keep borders open so this aid can be delivered.
3. Hold Russia accountable for breaking international UN conventions and agreements: Russia must be persuaded by both the UN and the international community to recognise the illegitimacy of this war, and to cease referring to this invasion as a ‘special military operation’. We urge the international community to use diplomatic measures to hold Russia accountable for all human rights treaties that Russia is a part of.
4. Commission a special report on widows in conflict: This should be completed with the aim to appoint a special rapporteur of the secretary general on Widowhood to compliment the data collection effort.
5. The media: It is of the utmost importance that clear and fear-free reporting of the situation of widowhood on the ground can be achieved. We urge the international

community and the UN to insist that Russia allow for transparent coverage of the war atrocities. The media is essential to allow peace to ensue, for both Ukraine and civil society.