



A Message to all UN Member States and Leaders of the United Nations
from Members of the Leadership Council of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network
and Members of the SDSN Community¹

April 14, 2022

The war in Ukraine threatens not only sustainable development, but the survival of humanity. We call on all nations, operating in accordance with the UN Charter, to put diplomacy to the service of humanity by ending the war through negotiations before the war ends all of us.

The world must urgently return to the path of peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, teaches Jesus in the Gospels. The Qur'an invites the righteous to the *Dar as-Salam*, the abode of peace. Buddha teaches *Ahimsa*, nonviolence to all living beings. Isaiah prophesizes the day when nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.

International peace and security are the first purposes of the United Nations. The world's nations dare not fail to bring peace to Ukraine in the momentous hours ahead.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is repugnant, cruel, and sacrilegious, in the words of Pope Francis, making the search for peace our most urgent need. This is especially true as an even more devastating military confrontation builds in Eastern Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin has recently declared the peace talks at a "dead end." The world cannot accept this. All nations and the United Nations must do all in their power to revive the peace talks and bring the parties to a successful and rapid agreement.

Peace requires dialogue and diplomacy, not more heavy weaponry that will ultimately lay Ukraine to utter ruin. The path of military escalation in Ukraine is one of guaranteed suffering and despair. Still worse, military escalation risks a conflict that spirals to Armageddon.

History shows that the Cuban Missile Crisis nearly led to nuclear war even *after* the leaders of the US and Soviet Union had reached a diplomatic solution. Because of misunderstandings, a disabled Soviet submarine nearly launched a nuclear-tipped torpedo that could have triggered a full nuclear response by the United States. Only the brave actions of a single Soviet party officer on the submarine halted the firing of the torpedo, thereby saving the world.

Russia and Ukraine can certainly reach an agreement that fulfills the two fundamental aims of the UN Charter: territorial integrity and security for both Ukraine and Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has already identified a diplomatic solution: Ukraine's neutrality – no NATO membership – and its territorial integrity secured by international law. Russia's

¹The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is a worldwide network of universities, scholars, politicians, business leaders, and faith leaders operating under the auspices of UN Secretary General António Guterres. Our mission is to help identify pathways to sustainable development.

troops must leave Ukraine, but not to be replaced by NATO's troops or heavy weaponry. We note that the UN Charter uses the words "peace" and "peaceful" 49 times, but never once uses the word "alliance" or the phrase "military alliance."

Escalation of conflicts comes all too easily, while negotiation requires wisdom and willpower. UN members are deeply divided in their understandings of the conflict, but they should be completely united by their shared interest in an immediate ceasefire, halt to attacks on civilians, and return to peace. The war is causing horrific deaths and staggering destruction – hundreds of billions of dollars of damage to Ukraine's cities, which have been reduced to rubble in mere weeks – and growing economic chaos worldwide: soaring food prices and shortages, millions of refugees, the breakdown of global trade and supply chains, and rising political instability around the world, hitting the poorest nations and households with devastating burdens.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has the world's sacred responsibility to keep the peace. Some say that the UNSC cannot play this role with Russia on the Security Council. Yet this view is completely mistaken. The UNSC can secure the peace precisely because Russia, China, the US, France, and the United Kingdom are all permanent members. These five permanent members, together with the other ten members of the UNSC, must negotiate with each other to find a way forward that preserves the territorial integrity of Ukraine while meeting the security needs of Ukraine, Russia, and indeed the other 191 UN member states.

We applaud the bold and creative efforts of President Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey to help the two parties to find an agreement, yet we bemoan the lack of direct talks within the UN Security Council. We are not calling for more soundbites in which diplomats hurl invectives at each other. We are calling for true negotiations guided by the UN Charter. We are talking about peace through the UN rule of law, not through power, threats, and divisive military alliances.

We should not have to remind the world's nations of the harrowing fragility of these days. The war threatens to escalate by the hour. And this occurs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which claims around 5,000 lives each day. Even now, in the third year of the pandemic, the world has failed to provide vaccine doses for the world's poor and vulnerable and has failed in no small part because of the geopolitical tensions among the vaccine-producing nations.

The massive displacement of refugees and rising hunger worldwide due to the war in Ukraine now threaten an even greater surge of disease, death, and instability and deeper financial hardship for poor nations. And lurking behind the war and pandemic is the slow-moving beast of human-induced climate change, another woe pulling humanity towards the cliff. The most recent IPCC report reminds us that we have exhausted the margin of climate safety. We need immediate climate action. Yet the war drains the attention, multilateral cooperation, and the financing needed to rescue us from our manmade climate emergency.

As educators and university leaders, we also recognize our own heightened responsibilities to our students. We must teach not only scientific and technical know-how to achieve sustainable development, as important as those topics are today, but also the pathways to peace, problem solving,

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and conflict resolution. We must educate young people so that today's youth gain the wisdom to respect global diversity and to settle disputes peacefully, through thoughtful negotiation and compromise.

In the spirit of the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we call on all nations of the UN General Assembly, unanimously and without exception, to adopt a resolution calling for an urgent negotiated peace that meets the needs and security of Ukraine, Russia, and all other nations.

We call on the UN Security Council to meet in an emergency session, for as long as necessary, to ensure that the full weight of the UN Charter is brought to bear to end the war in Ukraine through diplomatic means.

We call on permanent members of the UNSC to negotiate with diplomacy rather than rancor and to recognize that true peace must meet the security needs of all countries. There is no need or room for a veto; a just agreement will be supported by all nations and can be backed by UN peacekeepers.

Ukraine, to its profound credit, has signaled its readiness to meet Russia on reasonable terms; Russia now must also do the same. And the world must help these two nations to accomplish this difficult task.

Finally, we call on all governments and politicians to emphasize the cause of diplomacy and to tamp down the vitriol, calls for escalation, and even open contemplation of a global war. Global war today must remain unthinkable, as it would be nothing other than a suicide pact for humanity, or a murderous pact of politicians.

Peace is not appeasement, and peacemakers are not cowards. Peacemakers are the bravest defenders of humanity.

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