

The UN must provide secure medical and humanitarian assistance in Ukraine

We are calling for more involvement by the UN in the current conflict in Ukraine.¹ Continuation of the health and humanitarian crisis will result in many deaths and much suffering unless there is safe delivery and implementation of humanitarian and medical aid, including secure humanitarian corridors and safe medical evacuation. Substantial international protection forces, able to ensure safe humanitarian work in Ukraine, are essential and urgently needed.

We understand why NATO, as a military alliance, is unwilling to put defensive troops on the ground or to introduce a no-fly zone, because of a real risk of worsened confrontation and possible nuclear war.

The current veto system in place within the UN Security Council has already resulted in one of the permanent members (Russia) stopping national and international humanitarian interventions. However, our understanding is that there are no legal reasons why the UN General Assembly cannot support non-NATO countries providing protective personnel, if such countries are willing to do so and if requested by elected representatives of the sovereign state of Ukraine. A proposed resolution would make it clear that any incoming protective and humanitarian forces could only be supported by the UN General Assembly rather than being official UN forces using blue helmets and the UN insignia. Forces coming into Ukraine that are supported by such a UN General Assembly Resolution (rather than fully labelled official UN security forces), are more likely to be accepted by Russian leaders and therefore may be a relatively safe and effective option.

To avoid dangerous opposition on the ground from Russia, it will be essential for humanitarian support

through the UN General Assembly to come from non-NATO countries in Europe (such as Austria, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden) and from non-EU countries, such as China, India, and Israel. Such an approach might have less danger in terms of nuclear consequences and the potential spread of conflict to neighbouring countries.

If, therefore, the UN General Assembly states that it is willing to support a resolution that provides for humanitarian forces entering Ukraine, and if President Zelenskyy's Ukrainian Government states that it would invite such support into Ukraine, secure humanitarian relief especially for pregnant women, babies, severely ill children, and older people might be achieved. Such support could include humanitarian corridors, protection of hospitals and health facilities, and safe medical evacuation when needed.

DS and RM are directors of Maternal & Childhealth Advocacy International (MCAI). OK, VS, and AD declare no competing interests. MCAI is running a petition calling for the UN General Assembly to support non-NATO countries in providing secure medical care and other humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

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- 1 Southall D, Kostiuk O, Shcherbakov V, et al. Letters: vulnerable Ukrainians need non-Nato support. March 13, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2022/mar/13/vulnerable-ukrainians-need-non-nato-support> (accessed March 13, 2022).



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