

Immediate and effective ceasefire to fight COVID-19: civil society appeal to all parties to the conflict in eastern Ukraine

Statement of the international civil society platform CivilM+

06 April 2020

The coronavirus pandemic impacts every live. One of the most vulnerable in Ukraine are more than three million residents of the armed conflict zone in the east. For six years already, women, men and children live in dire economic conditions, under the threat of shelling or mine-related incidents.

In March, the situation deteriorated: monthly figures of civilian casualties were the highest since September 2019, according to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. In addition, reportedly, the so-called authorities of the self-proclaimed 'republics' use the measures on countering the pandemic as a pretext to deny access to the territory to the OSCE SMM patrols.

We, the undersigned members of the international civic platform CivilM+, echo the call of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to silence the guns and to protect the most vulnerable. Continuation of military action in times of the pandemic contradicts the basic principles of international humanitarian law (in particular, the balance between military necessity and humanity).

The ceasefire in Donbas will have a direct impact not only on the security, but also on the access to basic hygiene. Durable silence of the guns will eliminate the threat of shelling of Donetsk Filtration Station. It is located in the 'grey zone' and provides water to the settlements on both sides of the contact line. In addition, people from remote villages will be able to walk to a well with safe water without putting their life at risk.

To prevent the spread of the virus, all parties have introduced restrictions at the entry-exit crossing points; the border of the Russian Federation has been closed for everyone who does not have a Russian passport. Despite the restrictions, we are urging to provide all residents with timely access to medical assistance. Doctors must be protected and provided with everything that is necessary.

We are calling on Ukraine, on the Russian Federation and on 'DPR' and 'LPR' which are under Russian control:

- To announce and to uphold to immediate and effective ceasefire in Donbas
- To undertake all possible measures to prevent further civilian losses on both sides of the contact line
- To mobilize the resources to provide medical assistance, to protect the population and medical personnel in the conditions of the pandemic.

We also demand to ensure access for the OSCE SMM and humanitarian organizations to the territory controlled by the self-proclaimed 'republics' for monitoring and for providing assistance to the population. In particular, to provide access for the International Committee of the Red Cross to people detained both in the so-called 'official' penitentiary institutions and pre-trial detention centres, as well as in secret places of deprivation of liberty.

Signatories:

Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine

Centre of Public Initiatives “Ideas for Change”, Ukraine

‘Country of Free People’, Ukraine

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, Ukraine

Luhansk Oblast Human Rights Center “Alternatyva”, Ukraine

Truth Hounds, Ukraine

Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Ukraine

‘Don Women’, Russia

“Citizen and Army”, Russia

DRA, German-Russian Exchange, Germany

FIDH, France

Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (HCA), France

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

Human Rights Center “Memorial”, Russia

MEMORIAL Deutschland, Germany

Background:

The international CivilM+ platform was established in 2017. It unites 19 organizations and three independent experts from Ukraine, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and France. Within the CivilM+ network, they contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas. In particular, they inform their governments and communities about the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, implement projects in the spheres of peacebuilding, transitional justice, dialogue and human rights. <https://www.facebook.com/civilmplus/> <https://civilmplus.org/>

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