

Taiwan Public Health Association, March 9, 2022

Statement on Ukraine invasion by Russian military forces.

Open letter to stop the war in Ukraine

Taiwan Public Health Association is a professional organization of experts and practitioners from different fields, including health policy, healthcare management, epidemiology, preventive medicine, environmental health, occupational health, behavioral sciences, sociology, and biostatistics. We aim to promote professionalism in public health and to improve health quality for all.

We resolutely condemn the ongoing invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces, which started on February 24, 2022. We view this unprovoked aggression and the breach of Ukraine's sovereignty as a humanitarian emergency with long-term consequences for public health in Ukraine and beyond its borders.

The deaths and casualties among civilians, including children, are rising every day. Civilian facilities, residential homes, and hospitals are being bombed and destroyed by the Russian army. The infrastructure essential for public health services has already been severely damaged, including roads, sanitary facilities, electricity, supply chains of drinkable water, and food, among others. The number of Ukrainian refugees forced to flee their homes has neared 2 million people within the two weeks of the invasion (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>).

As public health professionals, we are concerned not only with the immediate threats posed by this war but with the public health risks and grave long-term consequences for population health.

The damaged public health system cannot respond to the emerging infectious diseases in a timely manner. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine is currently uncontrolled. Understaffed hospitals and clinics are unable to provide adequate healthcare to the general population, including pregnant women and children. Neighboring countries that take in Ukrainian refugees are also experiencing an excessive burden to their own health care system, which might lead to worse health for their own people and the refugees.

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People, including children, are experiencing traumatizing events, such as the bombings that lead to deaths, demolition of homes, separation of family, food and water insecurity, and the absence of warm shelter in below zero temperatures.

People are scared and traumatized; many will suffer deteriorated mental health and well-being, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression for years to come. The more vulnerable populations are the most affected, especially children, as their development is being impeded by war trauma. Russian soldiers alike are also likely to sustain physical injuries and develop PTSD even if they survive. Many are fighting in a war they personally disapprove of, and their families are suffering as well.

Besides the physical and mental health burden, the recent Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the largest of its kind in Europe, could have very likely resulted in a radioactivity leakage manifold exceeding the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which could lead to a global ecological catastrophe (<https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-the-dangers-following-russias-attack-on-the-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant-178564>).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a blunt violation of international trust and basic human rights, including the right to life and the right to health. It brings unnecessary suffering and senseless cruelty to the people of Ukraine. The threat to a democratically-elected government of Ukraine from Russia is a threat to other democratic countries in the region and in the World.

We call for:

1. The immediate stop of Russian invasion and rapid withdrawal of Russian troops from the Ukraine territory supervised by international monitors from either the United Nations or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;

And

2. Wide international support aimed at a faster restoration of the damage already done to the healthcare system of Ukraine and the health of the Ukrainian population.

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We express our solidarity with the people living in Ukraine and Ukrainian who were forced to leave their country due to the Russian invasion. We also support Russian citizens who are speaking out against the war at great personal risk, as the Russian government brutally suppresses any public expression of the anti-war opinions (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_anti-war_protests_in_Russia).

Health is a human right, and Peace is the most important pre-condition for health.
Stop the war.

