Statement of UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine Osnat Lubrani marking the International Day of Peace

(Kyiv, 21 September 2020). Today, 21 September, marks the International Day of Peace.

People living in situations of prolonged violent conflict know better than any of us the intrinsic value of peace. In eastern Ukraine, millions of people have been yearning for peace year after year, since 2014. Today, 3.4 million of them still rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their daily needs. The COVID-19 pandemic and the needed measures taken to contain it, have further exacerbated their vulnerabilities in 2020.

The number of monthly crossings along the ‘contact line’ has fallen by more than 93 per cent from August 2019 to this past August. On this day, I make visible the plight of the invisible 1.2 million vulnerable people in Donbas, who – for a sixth month – are unable to receive their pensions, travel to care for sick family members, or reunite with loved ones. With severely depleted resources, how will they survive a seventh winter if severe restrictions on movement through the ‘contact line’ persist?

As many of us struggle to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most vulnerable people in eastern Ukraine continue to bear the heaviest brunt of the health crisis, compounded by the armed conflict, with few opportunities to adjust to the new reality.

In my recent mission to the East, compared to the daily flow of thousands last February, I was alarmed by the sight of empty crossing points with just a trickle of people allowed to cross the ‘contact line’. As I applaud some visible improvements to infrastructure for improved delivery of services on the ‘crossing points’ on both sides, I call on all relevant actors to facilitate safe crossing of more people with critical needs. This is critical for their survival, as well as for survival of connectivity between people and preservation of hope for peace. COVID-19-safe crossing is possible by implementing coordinated, realistic, clearly communicated procedures. The UN and the humanitarian community are ready to help.

On this international peace day, I call on all relevant actors to seize every opening to uphold this ceasefire and move towards establishing lasting peace for the benefit of the civilian population.

Life-saving urgent emergency assistance is an essential requirement to ensure that they can survive through the winter and live a life of dignity.

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