

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller, Statement to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine

UN Headquarters, New York, 30 October 2018

As delivered

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the challenging humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine.

Five months ago, I briefed the Council together with Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo. Today, I regrettably advise that millions of men, women and children continue to face dire humanitarian consequences in Europe's forgotten armed conflict. These impacts are deepening, as the situation becomes more protracted.

More than 3,000 civilians have been killed, and up to 9,000 injured since the conflict began in 2014. This crisis affects the highest proportion of elderly people in the world, more than 30 per cent.

A 400 plus kilometre 'contact line' divides the area of hostilities. The households close to this line live in fear of shelling, sniper-fire and pervasive mine contamination. People's access to basic services is constantly disrupted. There is extensive damage to homes, hospitals, schools and other critical civilian structures. In 2018, more than 70 serious incidents have disrupted vital water supply to millions of people. Risks from communicable diseases are rising due to the water shortages, extensive damage to health facilities, lack of access to health care and extremely low immunization rates.

It is an imperative that parties to the conflict respect civilians and civilian objects – consistent with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Civilians are Not A Target.

Mr. President,

The 'contact line' has dramatically altered the lives of millions of civilians. People are divided from their families, services and livelihoods. In October last year, I met people making the arduous journey at Maiorske Checkpoint. Since then, we have seen more than 1.1 million civilian crossings per month through the five official checkpoints.

Half of the people who cross are over 60 years old. Most are women. They are regularly exposed to harm as they wait in long lines with limited facilities in the midst of hostilities. So far in 2018, 50 civilians have died or been injured whilst crossing.

I welcome the efforts of the Government to improve crossing conditions, but I appeal for more to be done on both sides. Essential services at crossing points require urgent improvement, especially water and sanitation facilities. Heating points are an acute need as winter approaches. Addressing the specific needs of the elderly, especially the long-standing barriers for them to be able to easily access their pensions remains critical.

Mr. President,

So far this year, more than 100 civilians have been killed or injured due to extensive mine and unexploded ordnance contamination. On 30 September this year, an explosive device killed three children and seriously injured another close to the 'contact line'. Earlier this month, two workers were injured by a landmine when trying to restore vital water supplies to 45,000 people. For three years running, Ukraine has had the highest anti-vehicle mine casualties in the world.

I implore all parties to immediately cease using mines, including in populated areas and close to civilian structures. They must respect international humanitarian law. Ukraine also requires an appropriate national mine action framework and coordination mechanism.

Mr. President,

Over 3.5 million people will require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2019. Yet, funding for humanitarian action has steadily decreased over the years. The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan, which requires US\$187 million, is only 32 per cent funded. This is simply not enough. Without adequate funds, food, healthcare, water and sanitation, and other life-saving assistance cannot be provided.

Humanitarians can and do deliver. So far in 2018, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs have assisted more than 1 million people, on both sides of the 'contact line'. Whilst humanitarian access is often unpredictable, particularly in the non-government-controlled areas, today we have slightly more access than before.

Since July 2018, humanitarians have rapidly scaled up their efforts to deliver essential humanitarian assistance and protection services to the people in the non-government-controlled areas. An allocation of US\$ 6 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund was an important catalyst.

I appeal to the donors to increase their support for consolidating these humanitarian gains, especially with Ukraine's harsh winter fast approaching.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude by commending the Government of Ukraine's efforts to implement a national strategy and action plan in support of its 1.5 million internally displaced persons. I also welcome the recent adoption of the legal status of missing persons law and look forward to its implementation to facilitate the search and identification of missing persons and support to family members.

I reaffirm the United Nations' and its partners' commitment to support Ukraine's displaced and conflict-affected people across the spectrum of emergency and early recovery assistance.

Mr. President,

I thank you again for the opportunity to brief the Council on the critical humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine.

Thank you.