

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

New York, 12 February 2019

As delivered

Mr. President,

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

Civilians continue to pay the highest price. More than 3,300 civilians have been killed, and up to 9,000 injured since the conflict began in 2014. 1.5 million people have been internally displaced.

The humanitarian consequences are severe. In 2019, 3.5 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection services—many of whom are elderly, women and children. For most of them, the impact of the conflict has deepened. They have lost their livelihoods, and their limited resources have been exhausted by now. They rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs.

Critical civilian infrastructure continues to be damaged or disrupted, compounding people's struggle. In 2018 alone, 89 incidents affected water and sanitation facilities and in the last 12 months, 12 water workers were injured due to hostilities and landmine explosions. They were simply trying to do their work, ensuring that water continues to flow to millions of people on both sides of the "contact line".

The parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, civilian harm. International humanitarian law must be upheld to protect civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, at all times, everywhere and by all parties.

In the Security Council last October, I welcomed the efforts of the Government of Ukraine to improve crossing conditions at the checkpoints. While there has been progress, I appeal, once again, for more to be done on both sides. In the entire Luhansk Oblast, civilians can cross the "contact line" through only one checkpoint, the pedestrian bridge of Stanytsia Luhanska. This is simply not enough. With freezing temperatures

during Ukraine's winter, it is critical that essential services at crossing points are improved as people continue to wait several hours to cross the "contact line". Already this year, 10 people have died at the checkpoints, most of them elderly. Elderly people account for more than half of the crossings and face long-standing barriers to access their pensions.

I also called on the Government of Ukraine to adopt a national mine-action framework. Today, I am pleased to report that a mine-action law was recently adopted. Now, this needs to pave the way to urgently scale up mine-action efforts. In 2018, landmine and explosive hazard explosions caused some 43 per cent of all civilian casualties. I implore all parties to immediately cease using landmines.

Mr. President,

While humanitarians today have slightly more access to civilians in need than a year ago, particularly in areas beyond government control, humanitarian access is often unpredictable. As you recall, on 6 June 2018, this Council (S/PRST/2018/12) welcomed the work of UN agencies in order to address the tragic humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine and emphasized the need to scale up efforts to alleviate suffering of civilians affected by the conflict. Unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian organizations is key to achieving that.

But despite access challenges, a complex operating environment and limited funding, humanitarians are making a real difference by providing aid on both sides of the "contact line". They continue to be guided by the universally recognized principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In 2018 alone, humanitarians reached some 1.3 million of the most vulnerable civilians with critical assistance.

We are establishing an innovative funding mechanism to support the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) efforts—the Ukraine Humanitarian Pooled Fund—to address acute needs that are least funded. I welcome the contributions made by donors to this Fund. I urge others to join. Last month, the Emergency Relief Coordinator approved a \$6 million USD allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund, as part of an envelope for underfunded crises.

Over 60 per cent of last year's Humanitarian Response Plan was not funded. As a consequence, some civilians who desperately needed assistance were unable to receive food, water and sanitation, healthcare and medicines, as well as protection services.

This year, we require US\$162 million USD to provide aid to 2.3 million people, through the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan. The Plan focuses on protection of affected people, and on restoring their access to livelihoods, essential services and critical structures. While humanitarian assistance continues to be critical as a result of conflict, we aim to

meet people's needs through more sustainable efforts, linking with recovery and development action, where possible.

Mr. President,

Civilians along the “contact line” have suffered the physical and emotional consequences of repeated, often intense, hostilities. Shelling, sniper-fire and landmines have become a daily reality for millions. Let's remember that behind the figures mentioned are families—men, women and children—who have suffered every day for over five years. Many are struggling to access schools, hospitals and other essential services. Many have lost their jobs, homes, family members and friends.

We can, and we must do better for these people.

To the resilient people of Ukraine, I wish to say that we have not forgotten you. We will continue to do everything we can to alleviate your suffering, and to call for lasting peace.

Thank you.