A Message to all UN Member States and Leaders of the United Nations
from Members of the Leadership Council of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network
and Members of the SDSN Community

April 14, 2022

The war in Ukraine threatens not only sustainable development, but the survival of humanity. We call on all nations, operating in accordance with the UN Charter, to put diplomacy to the service of humanity by ending the war through negotiations before the war ends all of us.

The world must urgently return to the path of peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, teaches Jesus in the Gospels. The Qur’an invites the righteous to the Dar as-Salam, the abode of peace. Buddha teaches Ahimsa, nonviolence to all living beings. Isaiah prophesizes the day when nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.

International peace and security are the first purposes of the United Nations. The world’s nations dare not fail to bring peace to Ukraine in the momentous hours ahead.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is repugnant, cruel, and sacrilegious, in the words of Pope Francis, making the search for peace our most urgent need. This is especially true as an even more devastating military confrontation builds in Eastern Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin has recently declared the peace talks at a “dead end.” The world cannot accept this. All nations and the United Nations must do all in their power to revive the peace talks and bring the parties to a successful and rapid agreement.

Peace requires dialogue and diplomacy, not more heavy weaponry that will ultimately lay Ukraine to utter ruin. The path of military escalation in Ukraine is one of guaranteed suffering and despair. Still worse, military escalation risks a conflict that spirals to Armageddon.

History shows that the Cuban Missile Crisis nearly led to nuclear war even after the leaders of the US and Soviet Union had reached a diplomatic solution. Because of misunderstandings, a disabled Soviet submarine nearly launched a nuclear-tipped torpedo that could have triggered a full nuclear response by the United States. Only the brave actions of a single Soviet party officer on the submarine halted the firing of the torpedo, thereby saving the world.

Russia and Ukraine can certainly reach an agreement that fulfills the two fundamental aims of the UN Charter: territorial integrity and security for both Ukraine and Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has already identified a diplomatic solution: Ukraine’s neutrality – no NATO membership – and its territorial integrity secured by international law. Russia’s

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1 The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is a worldwide network of universities, scholars, politicians, business leaders, and faith leaders operating under the auspices of UN Secretary General António Guterres. Our mission is to help identify pathways to sustainable development.
troops must leave Ukraine, but not to be replaced by NATO’s troops or heavy weaponry. We note that the UN Charter uses the words “peace” and “peaceful” 49 times, but never once uses the word “alliance” or the phrase “military alliance.”

Escalation of conflicts comes all too easily, while negotiation requires wisdom and willpower. UN members are deeply divided in their understandings of the conflict, but they should be completely united by their shared interest in an immediate ceasefire, halt to attacks on civilians, and return to peace. The war is causing horrific deaths and staggering destruction—hundreds of billions of dollars of damage to Ukraine’s cities, which have been reduced to rubble in mere weeks—and growing economic chaos worldwide: soaring food prices and shortages, millions of refugees, the breakdown of global trade and supply chains, and rising political instability around the world, hitting the poorest nations and households with devastating burdens.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has the world’s sacred responsibility to keep the peace. Some say that the UNSC cannot play this role with Russia on the Security Council. Yet this view is completely mistaken. The UNSC can secure the peace precisely because Russia, China, the US, France, and the United Kingdom are all permanent members. These five permanent members, together with the other ten members of the UNSC, must negotiate with each other to find a way forward that preserves the territorial integrity of Ukraine while meeting the security needs of Ukraine, Russia, and indeed the other 191 UN member states.

We applaud the bold and creative efforts of President Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey to help the two parties to find an agreement, yet we bemoan the lack of direct talks within the UN Security Council. We are not calling for more soundbites in which diplomats hurl invectives at each other. We are calling for true negotiations guided by the UN Charter. We are talking about peace through the UN rule of law, not through power, threats, and divisive military alliances.

We should not have to remind the world’s nations of the harrowing fragility of these days. The war threatens to escalate by the hour. And this occurs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which claims around 5,000 lives each day. Even now, in the third year of the pandemic, the world has failed to provide vaccine doses for the world’s poor and vulnerable and has failed in no small part because of the geopolitical tensions among the vaccine-producing nations.

The massive displacement of refugees and rising hunger worldwide due to the war in Ukraine now threaten an even greater surge of disease, death, and instability and deeper financial hardship for poor nations. And lurking behind the war and pandemic is the slow-moving beast of human-induced climate change, another woe pulling humanity towards the cliff. The most recent IPCC report reminds us that we have exhausted the margin of climate safety. We need immediate climate action. Yet the war drains the attention, multilateral cooperation, and the financing needed to rescue us from our manmade climate emergency.

As educators and university leaders, we also recognize our own heightened responsibilities to our students. We must teach not only scientific and technical know-how to achieve sustainable development, as important as those topics are today, but also the pathways to peace, problem solving,
and conflict resolution. We must educate young people so that today’s youth gain the wisdom to respect global diversity and to settle disputes peacefully, through thoughtful negotiation and compromise.

In the spirit of the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we call on all nations of the UN General Assembly, unanimously and without exception, to adopt a resolution calling for an urgent negotiated peace that meets the needs and security of Ukraine, Russia, and all other nations.

We call on the UN Security Council to meet in an emergency session, for as long as necessary, to ensure that the full weight of the UN Charter is brought to bear to end the war in Ukraine through diplomatic means.

We call on permanent members of the UNSC to negotiate with diplomacy rather than rancor and to recognize that true peace must meet the security needs of all countries. There is no need or room for a veto; a just agreement will be supported by all nations and can be backed by UN peacekeepers.

Ukraine, to its profound credit, has signaled its readiness to meet Russia on reasonable terms; Russia now must also do the same. And the world must help these two nations to accomplish this difficult task.

Finally, we call on all governments and politicians to emphasize the cause of diplomacy and to tamp down the vitriol, calls for escalation, and even open contemplation of a global war. Global war today must remain unthinkable, as it would be nothing other than a suicide pact for humanity, or a murderous pact of politicians.

Peace is not appeasement, and peacemakers are not cowards. Peacemakers are the bravest defenders of humanity.

Jeffrey Sachs, President, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN); University Professor, Columbia University
Anthony Annett, Gabelli Fellow, Fordham University
Tamer Atabarut, Director, Bogazici University Lifelong Learning Centre (BULLC); Board Member, Sustainability Academy (SA); High Council Member & Readers’ Representative, Press Council of Turkey; Steering Committee Member & Past President, Council of Turkish Universities Continuing Education Centres (TUSEM)
Ambassador Richard L. Bernal, Professor of Practice, SALISES, University of the West Indies
Irina Bokova, Former Director-General of UNESCO
Helen Bond, University Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, Howard University; Co-Chair of SDSN USA
Jeffrey Cheah, Chancellor, Sunway University | Chairman, SDSN Malaysia
Jacqueline Corbelli, Founder and CEO, US Coalition on Sustainability
Mouhamadou Diakhaté, Professor, Université Gaston Berger
Hendrik du Toit, Founder & CEO, Ninety One
Jennifer Stengaard Gross, Co-Founder Blue Chip Foundation
Pavel Kabat, Secretary-General, Human Frontier Science Program; Former Chief Scientist, WMO-UN; Former Director General, IIASA
Brighton Kaoma, Global Director, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network – Youth
Israel Klabin, Presidente, FBDS – Fundação Brasileira
Phoebe Koundouri, Professor, School of Economics, Athens University of Economics & Business; President, European Association of Environmental and Natural Resource Economists (EAERE)
Zlatko Lagumdzija, Professor, Former Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina; co-chair Western Balkan SDSN
Upmanu Lall, Director, Columbia Water Center; Senior Research Scientist, International Research Institute for Climate & Society; Alan & Carol Silberstein Professor of Engineering, Columbia University
Felipe Larrain Bascuñan, Professor of Economics, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
Klaus M. Leisinger, President, Foundation Global Values Alliance; Former Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the UN Global Compact
Justin Yifu Lin, Dean, Institute of New Structural Economics & Institute for South-South Cooperation and Development, National School of Development, Peking University
Gordon G. Liu, Peking University BOYA Distinguished Professor of Economics at National School of Development; and Dean of PKU Institute for Global Health and Development
Siamak Loni, Director, Global Schools Program, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)
Gordon McCord, Associate Teaching Professor & Associate Dean, School of Global Policy and Strategy, The University of California, San Diego
Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain
Joanna Newman, Senior Research Fellow, King’s College London
Amadou Ibra Niang, CEO, Afrik Innovations
Ngozi Ifeoma Odiaka, Professor, Crop Production Department, College of Agronomy, Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria (Now Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University)
Roza Otunbayeva, Former President of Kyrgyzstan, Head of Foundation “Initiatives of Roza Otunbayeva”
Antoni Plasència, Director General, Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)
Labode Popoola, Professor of Forest Economics & Sustainable Development, Department of Social and Environmental Forestry, Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources, University of Ibadan
Stefano Quintarelli, Internet Entrepreneur
Sabina Ratti, Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development, Laudato Si Action Platform and Fuori Quota executive board member
Irwin Redlener, Senior Research Scholar, Columbia University; Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Angelo Riccaboni, Professor, School of Economics and Management, University of Siena; Chair, PRIMA Foundation
Katherine Richardson, Professor and Leader of Sustainability Science Centre, University of Copenhagen
S.E. Mons. Marcelo Sánchez, Chancellor, The Pontifical Academy of Sciences
His Highness, Khalifa Muhammad Sanusi II, UN SDG Advocate and 14th Emir of Kano
Marco F. Simoes Coelho, Professor and Researcher, COPPEAD Center for International Business Studies, Rio de Janeiro
David Smith, Coordinator, Institute for Sustainable Development, The University of the West Indies
Nicolaos Theodossiou, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
John Thwaites, Chair, Monash Sustainable Development Institute
Rocky S. Tuan, Vice-Chancellor and President, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Albert van Jaarsveld, Director-General, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)
Virgilio Viana, Director General, Amazonas Sustainability Foundation (FAS)
Patrick Paul Walsh, Full Professor of International Development Studies, University College Dublin
Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Courtney Sale Ross Professor of Globalization and Education and University Professor, New York University
Soogil Young, Honorary Chairman, SDSN South Korea

Andrea Vitaliano Maria Bedin, Founder and CEO of Esercizio s.r.l. Italy
June Barbour, Manager, SDSN Caribbean
Daniel Bena, Board, UN Association USA Westchester Chapter; Senior Consultant, Antea Group; Hon Professor, Glasgow Caledonian University
Michele Chesnek
Alkhaly Mohamed T. Conde, Expert in Strategy and Sustainable Development, OSAA - Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, United Nations Under Secretary – General; Lecturer, Université Général Lansana Conté of Lambagny and Sonfonia, Conakry, Guinea; Researcher, Trainer, Consultant, Author and International Speaker
Siri Corsepius, Assistant Professor; High school teacher, Norway
Gordon Dumoulin, Associate Transnational Foundation of Peace and Future Research
Owen Gatehi, CPA, Kenya
Kul Chandra Gautam, Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations & Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF
Gocha Goguadaze, Chairman at Circular Initiatives Roadmap (CIR), Head of SDSN at Tbilisi State University (TSU)
Juan Gomez, Chilean coordinator Mundo sin guerras y sin violencia
Sanjay Gorkhali, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Agnes Imgart, Parent Climate Activist, Parents for Future Global
Tony Jenkins, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education; Coordinator, Global Campaign for Peace Education; Lecturer, Justice & Peace Studies, Georgetown University
Exnora Kannan, President, Nilgris Exnora
Mario La Torre, Full Professor, Sustainable Finance and Impact Banking, Sapienza University of Rome
George Lueddeke, Global Lead, International One Health for One Planet Education Initiative (1 HOPE), Southampton, United Kingdom
Shirin Malik, Member Board of Directors UNA-Houston, UNA-USA
Geeta Mehta, Adjunct Professor of Architecture and Urban Design; SDSN Affiliation: Columbia University
Carolyne Nyarangi, President ICARE Sustainably International
Emmanuel Olowoyo, Student Coordinator, Development Practice Programme, Center for Sustainable Development; University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Ottavia Ortolani, Head of Communications and Advocacy Projects, ASviS (Italian Alliance for Sustainable
Rino Rappuoli, Extraordinary Professor in Molecular Biology, University of Siena, Italy
Osvaldo Raimondo, University of Minnesota, USA
Betty Reardon, Founding Director Emeritus, International Institute on Peace Education
Dirk Schweitzer
Peter Webley
Anastasia Zabaniotou, Prof Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; President of the Network of Mediterranean Engineering Schools