



SHEM APPEALS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE IN UKRAINE AND FOR PEACE TO BE RESTORED IN UKRAINE AND EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD

The dire health consequences of the war in Ukraine are being felt most by the people of Ukraine, subject to Russian attacks upon their homes and hospitals, sieges of their cities, and denial of safe evacuation routes, and with a quarter of the population displaced or having been forced to become refugees. Health services are also suffering from lack of maintenance of medical equipment, scarcity of medicines and medical supplies, insufficient staff, and forced absence of personnel. Critical hospital services are also being hampered by the lack of electricity, while ambulances transporting patients are at risk of getting hit in the crossfire. The threat from Russia of using nuclear war and of chemical and biological weapons is real, and its government has not taken the use of nuclear weapons off the table.

The already alarming scenario is compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic; the war has halted vaccination efforts in Ukraine. Meanwhile, mass human mobility is usually disorganized and potentially generates many different epidemic infirmities, such as outbreaks of infectious diarrheas, respiratory diseases, and severe mental conditions, along with not to mention the loss of control of chronic diseases, such as hypertension, and diabetes.

COVID-19 threats and mass mobility are hardly contained to the war in Ukraine and its consequences. Globally, COVID-19 has taken the lives of more than 6 million people and infected more than 450 million people (1), to use WHO official numbers. Yet this is based on severe underreporting, with experts estimating as many as 18 million deaths. Approximately 10.5 billion doses of vaccines have been applied, but with an unjust inequality of access to vaccines among populations, with higher-income countries receiving preferential access, leading to lower uptake in lower-income countries. And at last count, the world had 84 million refugees (2), the most ever – even more than following World War II (3). And that was before the war in Ukraine, forcing millions more to flee.

Meanwhile, the health threats resulting from Russia's invasion are being felt worldwide. racism in the treatment given to Black people at borders. The global economy is unstable, with global downturns inevitably harming those who are already most vulnerable. Higher prices of essential products, such as energy and food, all over the world is leading to increased hunger.

The war in Ukraine is not the only active war. Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Yemen, Ethiopia, Palestine, Somalia, and several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria) are also at war.

These are all realities in which conflict and diseases walk hand in hand. They are much less visible than the conflict in Europe, but they are by no means less important.

Armed conflicts affect biodiversity and ecosystems, and pollute and contaminate the air, the soil, and the water, along with causing the collapse of essential infrastructures, such as water, sewage and power systems. Wars also paralyze environmental management systems. The increased pressure for resources and the absence of controls make the environment a silent victim of wars.

SHEM stands in solidarity with those suffering from aggression in Ukraine and anywhere in the world due to violent actions and appeals for immediate ceasefires so that peace can be restored in all countries and regions involved in armed conflicts. In this sense, SHEM welcomes the recent news of a near future peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine and looks forward to hearing similar news from all regions in armed conflict.

(1) Official figures of the WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard on 13-03-2022.

(2) <http://refugeecouncilusa.org/modern-refugee-crisis/>

(3) <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>