

# OPEN LETTER FROM THE ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING COMMUNITY TO CONDEMN AND END THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE



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We, a community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and anti-trafficking leaders who work to end human trafficking and modern slavery, declare in solidarity that we condemn the invasion of Ukraine launched by Russia on February 24, 2022.

In addition to being an act of aggression, a crime under international law and a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter,<sup>1</sup> the invasion will exacerbate the human trafficking of civilians in Ukraine and those fleeing from the country. We stand in solidarity to call on the Russian authorities to end the invasion.

### **The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Significant Increased Risks of Human Trafficking**

- As of 10 March, 2022, over 2 million people have fled Ukraine<sup>2</sup>. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has said that the forced displacement in Ukraine “*looks set to become Europe’s largest refugee crisis this century.*”<sup>3</sup> The majority of these refugees are women and children. Many more have been internally displaced, placing them at significantly increased vulnerability to human trafficking.
- As long as the military invasion of Ukraine continues, the vulnerability of displaced people in the country to human trafficking will increase due to deteriorating rule of law and impunity; further forced displacement; humanitarian need and socio-economic stress and social fragmentation.
- Human trafficking will also escalate in the countries to where people from Ukraine are fleeing. There have also been deeply concerning reports of attempts to traffic women and girls fleeing Ukraine in neighboring countries, including Poland and Romania.

### **Our Call to End the Invasion and Protect Civilians from Human Trafficking**

1. We condemn the military invasion of Ukraine by Russia and call the Russian authorities to withdraw their troops immediately from Ukraine;
2. We call on the International Criminal Court and relevant judicial instances to investigate all potential war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights violations associated with human trafficking in the context of the invasion, be investigated and brought to court;
3. We call on neighboring states and countries of asylum to prevent trafficking and protect refugees by ensuring that all responses to this crisis include a Counter Trafficking Strategy. This should include but not be limited to:
  - (a) the training of all frontline agencies and citizens in spotting the signs of human trafficking to help prevent human trafficking and support victims and survivors;
  - (b) wider prevention measures including safe and legal routes for those fleeing the conflict;
  - (c) identification and restorative measures to enable the active identification of potential victims and ensure that survivors receive holistic trauma informed care;
  - (d) measures to enable perpetrator accountability including through criminal and civil proceedings.
4. We call on the international community to assist receiving asylum countries in their financial, coordination and technical support of refugees and their protection from human trafficking, including the safe repatriation and return of citizens to their communities when safe to do so.

*Further information can be located in the background information page.*

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, Russia/Ukraine: Invasion of Ukraine is an act of aggression and human rights catastrophe, 1 March, 2022. Available at: [Invasion of Ukraine is an act of aggression and human rights catastrophe \(amnesty.org\)](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/russia-ukraine-invasion-is-an-act-of-aggression-and-human-rights-catastrophe/).

<sup>2</sup> BBC, How many refugees have fled Ukraine and where are they going? 10 March, 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-60555472>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR mobilizing to aid forcibly displaced in Ukraine and neighboring countries, 1 March 2022. Available at: [UNHCR - UNHCR mobilizing to aid forcibly displaced in Ukraine and neighbouring countries](https://www.unhcr.org/en/news/stories/2022/3/1610000000/unhcr-mobilizing-to-aid-forcibly-displaced-in-ukraine-and-neighbouring-countries)

## Signatories

1. Tim Nelson, CEO, Hope for Justice and Slave-Free Alliance
2. Nick Grono, CEO, The Freedom Fund
3. Red Godfrey-Sagoo, CEO, Sophie Hayes Foundation
4. Joy M Gillespie, CEO, Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland (SOHTIS)
5. Linda Smith, Founder and President, Shared Hope International
6. Andrew Wallis, CEO and Founder, Unseen
7. Dawn Hawkins, CEO, National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE)
8. Christian Guy, CEO, Justice and Care
9. Helen Sworn, Executive Director and Founder, Chab Dai
10. Deb Sigmund, Founder, Innocents at Risk
11. Elizabeth Fisher Good, Founder & CEO, The Foundation United
12. Leanne Rhodes, Executive Director, European Freedom Network
13. Harriett Baldwin MP, Chair, British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
14. Karen Bradley MP, UK Former Minister for Modern Slavery and Organised Crime
15. Patricia Durr, CEO, ECPAT UK
16. Ann-Kristin Vervik, Generalsekretær/Executive Director, ECPAT Norway
17. Lori L Cohen, CEO, ECPAT USA
18. Richard Beard, CEO, Jericho Foundation
19. Mick Clarke, CEO, The Passage
20. Kim Westfall, Founder, Uncaged
21. David Gadd, Professor of Criminology
22. Bronagh Andrew, Operations Manager, The TARA Service
23. Kirsty Thomson, Managing Director, JustRight Scotland
24. Martin Hancock, CEO, BCHA
25. Emily Chalke, Co Director, Ella's House
26. Lara Bundock, CEO and Founder, Snowdrop Project
27. Kush Chottera, CEO, Europa
28. Fred Sherling, General Manager, Fair Play Bygg Rogland Norway
29. Yvonne Hall, Founder and Co-Chief Executive, Palm Cove Society
30. Ragnhild Lindahl Torstensen, CEO, Lightup Norway
31. Victoria Marks, Director and Solicitor, Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit
32. Liz Griffith, Head of Policy and Research, Migration Justice Project at Law Centre Northern Ireland  
Law Centre
33. Jon Lord, CEO, Bolton at Home

34. Dr Carole Murphy, Director, Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse.
35. Dr Ruth Van Dyke, Acting Director, Training Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse
36. Rev Ian Howarth (Adavu Chair) and Liisa Wiseman (Adavu Project Manager) Adavu Project
37. Leanne Rhodes, CEO and Founder, Abolishion
38. Erhard Hermansen, General Secretary, Christian Council of Norway
39. Rita Gava, Director, Kalayaan
40. Karen Anstiss, Service Manager, Caritas Bakhita House
41. Wanjiku Ngotho-Mbugua, Acting Chief Executive, Bawso
42. Ed Newton, CEO, City Hearts
43. Gayle Bunting, Director, Invisible Traffick
44. Amber Cagney, Development Manager, West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network
45. Ross Hendry, CEO, Christian Care Research and Education (CARE)
46. Matthew Evans, Director, The AIRE Centre
47. Jillian McBride, Children's Policy Officer, Scottish Refugee Council
48. Moya Woolven, CEO, Basis Yorkshire
49. Modupe Debbie Ariyo OBE, CEO, AFRUCA
50. Ashleigh Chapman, President, AFRJ (Alliance for Freedom, Restoration and Justice)
51. Rushan Abbas, Executive Director, Campaign for Uyghurs
52. Coreen Lategan, Executive Director, Kainos e.V. Germany
53. Bettina Kneisler, First Chairperson, Projekt Schattentöchter e.V.
54. Rachel Witkin, Head of Counter-Trafficking and Publications, Helen Bamber Foundation
55. Anja Slabbekoorn, President, Spring2Freedom
56. Andrew Hoskins, Vice President of International Programs, The Exodus Road
57. Courtney Skiera-Vaughn, Director of International Programs, Free The Girls
58. Jerry Gowen, CXO, Operation Underground Railroad
59. Korrin Moon, Co-Founder, Lantern Rescue
60. Alison Ussery, Director, Haven of Light CIC
61. Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, Deputy Director; and Grace Forrest, Founding Director, Walk Free
62. Vidar Sagmyr, Project Leader, Byggebransjens uropatrulje
63. Tom Stancliffe, Co-Founder, TRIBE Freedom Foundation
64. Caroline Downey, Executive Director, Women Working Worldwide

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Human Trafficking and Other Forms of Modern Slavery<sup>4</sup>

- An estimated 40.3 million people are currently trapped in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labor.<sup>5</sup>
- Human trafficking is also the second largest criminal enterprise in the world, generating the equivalent of US \$150 billion annually.<sup>6</sup>
- Human trafficking is a transnational crime and a human rights violation codified in international human rights and refugee law, and international criminal law.<sup>7</sup>

### Human Trafficking during Military Invasions and Armed Conflict

- In 2020, a record 80 million people were forcibly displaced in their own countries or abroad due to war, military invasion or armed conflict.<sup>8</sup>
- Human trafficking and conflict feed each other. Traffickers are typically aware of the lack of options displaced individuals have and can offer to fill this void. By promising stability, security and employment, traffickers often appear to offer a greater prospect of hope for individuals who might have left everything behind.
- Survivors of trafficking who are displaced, often fear returning to their locations or countries of origin due to threats by traffickers and criminal gangs made against them and their families.
- Large numbers of people may be displaced either within their country or across borders, living with considerable physical insecurity and limited access to protection and assistance. In these contexts, the risks of human trafficking are exacerbated, especially for women and unaccompanied or separated children living in desperate circumstances.
- Enslavement, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, is considered a crime against humanity and a war crime in times of war.<sup>9</sup>
- In the context of a military invasion, human trafficking should be viewed as not only as a human rights violation and a potential war crime, but also an international security concern. The illicit funding behind human trafficking is fueling global instability and insecurity.

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<sup>4</sup> Human trafficking is the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation and other forms of modern slavery, UNODC, Human Trafficking Factsheet, accessed 6 March 2022. Available at: [Human-Trafficking \(unodc.org\)](https://www.unodc.org/human-trafficking/)

<sup>5</sup> ILO, Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, 2017. Available at: [wcms\\_575479.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>6</sup> ILO, Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labor, 2014, [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_243391/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two related protocols: the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, (2003-2004). Slavery Convention (1926) and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (1966), The United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). Available at:

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/12/5fcf94a04/forced-displacement-passes-80-million-mid-2020-covid-19-tests-refugee-protection.html>

<sup>9</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court art. 7(1), July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90