



World Alliance of YMCAs Statement

9 March 2022

Protecting human dignity is the foundation of peace

„If we're to live up to our own time,
Then victory won't lie in the blade,
But all the bridges we've made.
That is the promise to glade.”

Amanda Gorman, National Youth Poet Laureate (USA)

In just a matter of days, our world has awoken to a new reality in Europe, with consequences that reverberate across the globe. The reality of war, suffering, displacement of families, and disregard for human life and dignity took hold over night. We look in disbelief at how millions are forced to flee their homes, how civilian buildings are reduced to rubble, and how discrimination takes root in its ugliest forms. And yet, in the face of all this suffering, we have also been profoundly inspired by the global solidarity shown to those affected by the war, including through the YMCA.

Despite a prolonged period of unprecedented peace around the world, several nations have suffered war in the past decades. We have witnessed horrible conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen, and countless other regions. Each of these conflicts produced horrendous suffering and destroyed the lives and livelihoods of millions. To this suffering, we now add Ukraine, a country of 44 million people, which is now fighting for its survival as an independent nation guided by the principle that a sovereign people can choose their own destiny.

Young people are disproportionate victims of war during and long after the conflict. Young people are the first to be drafted to fight, and are often forced into the direct line of fire, putting their lives in grave danger. Young people see their future blur into uncertainty, as they are forced to flee their homes and start over in a new country. They are often separated from their families as some go to fight and others become refugees. It is heart-breaking that young people see their education and careers disrupted and their lives changed in profound ways, with consequences that last a lifetime.

And yet even in the face of this heavy suffering, not all people are treated equally, not all benefit from the simple idea that each of us deserves to be treated with dignity. In the



midst of the violence we witness blatant discrimination and hostility towards refugees and citizens of African and Middle-Eastern descent, while fleeing to the border trying to protect themselves from bombs and bullets, and also in some cases, after they have crossed the border simply because of the colour of their skin colour or because of their religion.

Human dignity must be our guide. If peace is to prevail in the world, we must hold sacred the protection of human dignity and human rights, the regard for human life, and respect for one another. The long period of relative peace in the world that started in 1945 might have caused many to believe that human rights and dignity are values upheld by most and we do not have to fight fiercely for them.

But now – more than ever in recent history – we must remind ourselves and those around us that:

All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

War is never a solution to any problem.

Everyone should be treated with dignity and their voice should be heard.

The global response to the atrocities that are happening in Ukraine has been inspiring and astonishing, both at a governmental and individual level. At the governmental level, 141 countries voted for a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly to condemn war and request an immediate ceasefire, calling for guns to be silenced. And at an individual level, the depth of solidarity with the victims of war has been astounding. Volunteers rushed to the borders to support refugees, donations began flowing from all corners of the world, social media buzzes with continuous support, and so much more.

In its longstanding tradition of supporting communities wherever there is an essential need, the YMCA has stepped up since day 1 at all levels. On behalf of the global YMCA community, we wish to extend our deep gratitude and thanks to each YMCA staff member and volunteer who has committed to community service during this difficult time, as well as each individual and institutional donor who contributed to our fundraising efforts worldwide. They, together with the volunteers and teams from numerous civil society organisations, who are working day and night on the ground or remotely to meet the growing needs, are the everyday heroes that inspire us all. *Find out more about [the role of the YMCA in this crisis](#).*

In the YMCA *we believe in the power of young people and communities to promote and advance justice, peace, equity and human rights for all*". These words from our Vision 2030 Strategy now



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resonate more than ever, strengthening our resolve to advance these goals in the face of new challenges for our world.

Considering the profound effects on human life that the conflict in Ukraine has and the risks of escalation, the World YMCA calls leaders worldwide to:

1. Ensure humanitarian corridors that are free of violence to enable refugees to get away from harm's way;
2. Ensure the protection of civil society and humanitarian workers in all conflict areas so basic services can be provided to people as needed;
3. Ensure the protection of all refugees and the use of non-discriminatory practices and policies;
4. Prevent the discrimination of non-Ukrainian refugees and ensure the safety and protection of all individuals that are in harm's way;
5. Preserve, protect and defend human dignity in each decision that affects people on the ground;

At the same time, we salute and underline the urgency of all efforts taken worldwide to work for peace in Ukraine and to silence guns.

Our world and humanity are tested these days in ways unimaginable even mere days ago. But in the face of adversity, we find our strength in unity. We find our resolve in hope. We find our humanity in solidarity. We have only one Planet. Let's all work together to preserve harmony and peace.

“Finally, sisters and brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” – Corinthians 13:11