

Please take steps now for an end to the Ukraine war

Open Letter from Japanese and Korean Citizens and Scholars

To Antonio Guterres,
Secretary General,
The United Nations

We express our respect for the tireless actions for peace you have undertaken as United Nations Secretary General. We also have deep respect for your repeated expression of your views as Secretary-General on the Ukraine war and your efforts to mediate a ceasefire over the more than 100 days since the Russian invasion.

Concerned over the war in the Ukraine and the resulting humanitarian crisis, we Japanese and Korean citizens and scholars have been appealing to Russian and Ukrainian forces to cease fighting at their present positions and to engage in serious ceasefire talks.

Apart from the fierce fighting in the East of Ukraine, other districts have also been affected by the conflict and even now the loss of life day after day is staggering. We believe that, even at this juncture, the UN can take active steps towards a ceasefire so that the slaughter and destruction stops. First, since this is a cruel war of attrition in which soldiers are being slaughtered at the rate of more than 100 per day and civilians are being also killed, it seems to us that in the current situation both Russia and Ukraine can claim they have not been defeated and both sides could justify a ceasefire.

Following the efforts at mediation by the government of Turkey, the Italian government drew up a concrete ceasefire plan and the government of France has shown a readiness to play a mediating role. Also, the government of the United States, having from the start been calling for Russia to be weakened, has recently shown some restraint over calls for the overthrow of the Putin government, and President Biden in his 31 May letter to the New York Times wrote that “ultimately this war will only definitively end through diplomacy”.

Currently Russia is introducing more destructive weaponry and the Ukrainian side in response is being provided with more destructive weapons. If the war is not stopped now, slaughter and destruction will intensify and there will be no end to hatred and the desire for revenge. The possibility of Russia taking recourse to nuclear weapons or widening the conflict into a world war remains high. This war becomes the cause of global food shortages and serious hunger.

Needless to say, a ceasefire is not a peace settlement. For that, the countries concerned have to lay down their weapons, a demilitarized zone has to be agreed between them and the slaughter and destruction stopped. After the UN and global society first obtain such a ceasefire, consultation and negotiation can begin towards a formal settlement. At this point, it will be necessary for the UN and international society to stand between the two parties to work out fair conditions. An international observer force will presumably be necessary to maintain the ceasefire.

Mankind's bitter history has been to resolve, whenever going to war, never to do so again, only to have that resolve fail and new war break out. After World War I the League of Nations was formed and an anti-war pact agreed, and after World War II the UN was founded. Even during the Cold War when faced with nuclear weapons, states agreed to nuclear control and disarmament measures, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and engaged in mutual trust-building measures. We think that mankind has advanced towards prevention and renunciation of war. We maintain hope even when such hope is repeatedly dashed by the reality of cruel war (the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, Afghanistan War). The concept of "human security" has emerged. The United Nations has been at the forefront of the struggle to keep alight the beacon of hope.

We share the views of the Secretary-General and are encouraged by your efforts to mediate a ceasefire. We look forward to your next steps. Hopefully we will be able to shift public opinion in Japan and Korea towards increased support for a ceasefire.

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