

Dear Colleagues,

It has been two weeks since Russia launched a fully-fledged war which by far transcends the Ukrainian-Russian issue. By showing complete disregard for international law and unleashing unprovoked and unjustified aggression against some 60 millions of Ukrainian people around the world Russia purports not only to deprive us of our culture and challenge our identity. Its poses a threat to global peace and security and puts the very future of the world at stake.

From day one, under false pretences of protecting the rights and freedoms of Russian-speaking population and motivated by unfounded national security concerns Russia's armed forces have been relentlessly shelling cities throughout Ukraine. Indiscriminately, or rather willfully, the aggressor army targets residential areas and subjects of critical infrastructure, museums and cultural heritage sites, schools and kindergartens, hospitals, orphanages, and maternity homes. Thus, on March 9, at least 3 people were killed and 17 injured, including staff and patients, as a result of a Russian air strike on a maternity and children's hospital in the city of Mariupol. Based on the confirmed data of the World Health Organization, Russia's military attacked ambulance crews near Sumy, Kyiv, Poltava, Kherson, Kharkiv and Zaporizhia regions, killing 6 and injuring 3 members of personnel.

According to the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, more than 350,000 school children have no access to education. Russian military has so far completely or partially destroyed more than 200 schools and shows no intention to cease atrocities. Through its criminal actions Russia has blatantly violated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child thereby denying millions of Ukrainian children the right to education, adequate health care, nutrition. More than 2 million people, 500,000 of them children, have been forced to flee Ukraine, millions are hiding from shelling in bomb shelters. At least 71 child has been denied the right to life, more than 100 children are reported to have been injured. As of March 10, the total number of confirmed deaths among civilians were 516 with 900 injured. Russia's intentional killings bear genocidal intent and the worst is yet to come as the toll is growing every minute.

Russian military aggression kills not only Ukrainians but threatens thousands of foreigners who are staying in Ukraine. Large numbers of international students have been likewise affected by Russia's aggression; more than 10, 000 of them are still struggling to flee the war-torn country which has become their second home.

Russia's armed forces are shattering not only the lives of ordinary people, they target not only our cultural and spiritual heritage – through intermittent shelling of our cities the aggressor also threatens UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which have universal value and are masterpiece of human creative genius. Thus, Russia's bombs have been falling on Kyiv, which houses the Saint-Sophia Cathedral and the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra – unique monuments of religious architecture and art and centers of Christianity in Kyivan Rus. Some sites from the UNESCO tentative have either sustained major damage or are located in the area where heavy fighting continues. As an illustration, Chernihiv has been particularly affected, severe explosions left gaping holes in Derzhprom in Kharkiv, the world's largest building in constructivist style. Kharkiv has recently become UNESCO's Creative City of Music yet has not had a chance to put on concerts, shows, host festivals. Instead came the wail of sirens, the ringing screams of bombs, groans of the dying and cries of children.

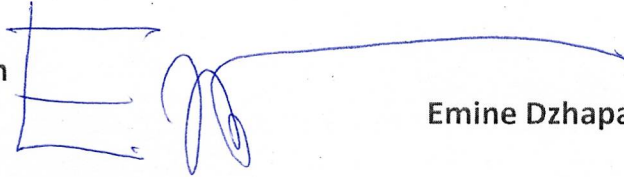
I therefore strongly appeal to all of you to work together to devise common comprehensive approaches not only to halt Russia's aggression but also to hold it accountable for the unlawful acts it keeps on perpetrating. In a blatant attempt to flout international legitimacy Russia violated Article 2(4) of the UN Charter which prohibits the use of military force against another state, it acts against the Constitution of UNESCO and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. By now, there is ample evidence of Russia's violating the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999). It is for these reasons that I remain firm in my conviction, that 45th session of the World Heritage Committee should not take place in Kazan as previously planned.

Through its criminal actions Russia has proved to be an unreliable international partner and a threat to global security. Therefore, putting an end to Kremlin's impunity and ensuring accountability for its human rights violations in Ukraine are of the utmost importance. Our country values universal condemnation of the atrocities Russia commits; a condemnation which has yet to be translated into firm pressure and sanctions on the aggressor. What is now required is a tough position and a concerted effort by the international community which should include a termination of academic exchanges and research cooperation, boycott of any cultural and scientific events within Russia, etc.

I believe that it is in those dire circumstances when a security crisis has turned into a humanitarian crisis unseen since World War II it is a historic responsibility of the network of National Commissions to contribute to the termination of atrocities and subsequent stabilization efforts. Ukraine, being a responsible member of the UN and UNESCO, needs your pulling together as never before to help us to deter aggression against the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of our country. We should start presenting a more united front in this war against humanity and all the values UNESCO represents as the aggressor is determined to stop at nothing to further advance its ulterior agenda and achieve its criminal goals. This present state of affairs is certainly untenable and should not remain unchecked. It is in your power to further mobilize civil society, opinion leaders, engage thinkers and figures of influence in your countries, who will make all the people of the world see through the lies of the Kremlin propaganda and thereby may eventually force the aggressor to back down from its evil plan.

It is thus with great hope and expectations that I am looking forward to the extraordinary session of the Executive Board to achieve real progress in peacebuilding effort in Ukraine. I call upon all Heads of the National Commissions of UNESCO to address the fact of Russia's aggression in all earnestness and consider excluding it from the Executive Board of UNESCO and other bodies of the Organization, including the World Heritage Committee for Physical Education and Sport, Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee, etc.

**Head of the National Commission
of Ukraine for UNESCO**



Emine Dzhaparova