

May 19, 2025

Dear Members of Congress,

We write as organizations variously focused on U.S. national security and foreign policy, human rights, the protection of civilians, peacebuilding, and humanitarian response. As negotiations to end Russia's war against Ukraine continue, it is important that members of Congress engage robustly in supporting an inclusive peace process. We believe that the goal of a secure and prosperous Ukraine is achievable if the United States takes an inclusive, realistic, and sophisticated approach to these talks. To this end, we urge you to put forth your positive vision for a successful initial negotiation phase, with the goal of a just and lasting peace in which human rights are strengthened and harm to civilians is repaired.

In order to realistically achieve a ceasefire, this initial round of negotiations should focus on a framework for a continued peace process. While our organizations come from varying perspectives, we agree that, once negotiated, the framework for the peace process should result in:

- **A durable and verifiable end to the fighting, including an end to the targeting of critical infrastructure and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.** These are two of the most consistent causes of civilian harm in Ukraine, and negotiators should work towards an immediate end to attacks on all critical infrastructure, including water, electricity, heating, health care, and nuclear power generation, as well as an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The international community should mobilize resources to monitor any ceasefire and ongoing civilian protection risks and support civil society engagement in these efforts.
- **Meeting immediate humanitarian needs, including access to basic services and humanitarian demining.** Many civilians in Ukraine, especially older people, are unable to access basic services such as water and electricity due to the conflict. As the most heavily mined country in the world, landmines and other unexploded ordnance threaten Ukrainians' ability to safely travel, farm, attend school, or return home. Both before and after an end to the fighting is achieved, parties should address these and other humanitarian issues that impact people's lives every day. The leadership of local Ukrainian humanitarian organizations, which have been underfunded and marginalized, should be prioritized in all aspects of the response.
- **The release and return of captives in line with international law.** This includes the immediate release of all civilians held in captivity unlawfully and the repatriation or accommodation in a neutral country of all prisoners of war who are gravely wounded or gravely sick, or whose mental or physical well-being is endangered by captivity, as guaranteed by the Third Geneva Convention. For example, human rights organizations have [found](#) that the well-being of Ukrainian captives is endangered by the conditions of Russian captivity and therefore they should be released immediately. Prisoner exchanges should be carried out to the greatest possible extent.

While this initial round of negotiations will likely not address many important questions, achieving a framework for a broader peace process and a stable end to the fighting is essential for reducing civilian harm, beginning reconstruction in Ukraine, and establishing a process for justice. To increase the chances of the broader peace process leading to long-term, sustainable peace, negotiators should consider:

- **Inclusion of civilian voices in negotiations.** The parties should implement a framework that recognizes civilians not just as victims but as active stakeholders in the peace process. With the help of civil society, the negotiators or a contact group should establish a mechanism for civilians, including women and marginalized groups, to provide input on negotiation terms and facilitate community-driven initiatives. For an inclusive peace process and the full engagement of civil society to be possible, all parties should also ensure the safety and access of civil society that wishes to participate in the process.
- **Upholding the rights of civilians, especially in occupied territories.** Under international law, Russia's control over Ukrainian territory constitutes occupation. As required by international law, including the law of occupation, parties to the process should, among other obligations, ensure civilians in occupied territories receive all social and medical services and respect, protect, and fulfill property rights, freedom of movement, and the human rights of all people, regardless of their status or nationality. This also includes respect for the rights of those who have been unlawfully transferred or deported from Ukraine to Russia, and of minority groups on both sides of the contact line. Children's right to quality education, in their chosen language, free from indoctrination or coercion of any sort, should also be upheld.
- **Enabling family reunification.** Throughout the course of the war, families have been unable to communicate or see one another across the contact line. Any negotiation must ensure that families can safely reunite, visit, and communicate. This includes reuniting the children who have been abducted from Ukraine during the war with their families.
- **Obtaining concrete guarantees for Ukrainian reconstruction and establishing a process for reconciliation, accountability and repair.** Civilians, especially in Ukraine, have experienced great harm throughout the course of the war. All parties should account for and respond to harm to civilians, including by establishing concrete guarantees to fund Ukrainian reconstruction and by implementing a framework for civilian harm reporting, acknowledgement, accountability, and repair. The international community should support a process for accountability, justice, reparations, and reconciliation that can be accessed by all victims and survivors of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. This process to address the injustice and harm experienced by individuals and communities is critical as it can undermine long term peace and stability in the region if left unaddressed.

Russia's war in Ukraine has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, destroyed countless homes, and displaced ten million people. Diplomacy that centers the rights and needs of civilians may be long and complex, but it is critical to establishing long-term peace. The people impacted

by war need U.S. policymakers to be invested in this important process. We urge you to proactively offer a principled vision for diplomatic negotiations towards an inclusive, just peace for Ukraine and stability for the region.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Amnesty International USA
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Center for International Policy Advocacy
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Freedom House
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Hindus for Human Rights
Human Rights First
Legacies of War
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mines Advisory Group (MAG) U.S.
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Oxfam America
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Physicians for Human Rights
Presbyterian Church USA, Office of Public Witness
The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
RootsAction
Saferworld
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
United Church of Christ
West Virginia Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Munitions
World BEYOND War