

Explanation of Vote on the humanitarian resolution in Ukraine on the occasion of the Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly on 24 March 2022

South Africa is deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries. It is vital that the United Nations General Assembly adopts a resolution responding to this humanitarian crisis and affirm the international humanitarian principles that the parties must abide by. Addressing the human situation should be our immediate priority.

Unfortunately, instead of placing the humanitarian crisis and our response at the centre of our deliberations, the political divisions in this Assembly suggests that perhaps in the minds of some delegations the humanitarian response is secondary to geo-political objectives.

While we should not ignore the context that gave rise to this crisis and nor should we ignore any violations of the UN Charter and international law, that should not divert our focus from what we ought to be immediately doing.

What we should be doing as a matter of urgency is working as a global community to end the war by calling for a cessation of hostilities as this is the first step in a comprehensive humanitarian response. This would create the necessary environment required for a political process that would lead to sustainable peace.

Let us be clear, war has no winners. The real heroes are those that work towards peace. Through the last few decades, the world has continued to experience debilitating conflicts. Many of these wars have contravened the provisions of the Charter and international law. **In one of these conflicts, the devastating war in Iraq for example, over two point four million people are reported to have died since 2003. Many more civilians across the world have died and been displaced.**

Making this point today in our discussion on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine is not a form of 'whataboutery'. It is underscoring the point that many countries and their peoples suffer the consequences of wars that are not of their own doing. They have had no role to play in starting or ending those wars. In fact, we must make the point that in most cases, the vast majority of countries in this Assembly have never invaded or colonised other countries yet has suffered their consequences. There are few powerful countries that have been party to most of these conflicts often in the form of proxy wars in other countries or regions. Africa has experienced its fair share of these proxy wars and their destructive outcomes. We therefore empathise with the people of Ukraine who find themselves caught up in a conflict not of their making. War and the use of force is never a solution to international disputes, irrespective of which countries are involved. Once war has begun, it is imperative that all of us work towards peace.

It is for this reason that South Africa is of the view that right now we should be more concerned with ending the war and addressing the humanitarian plight of the people that are impacted by it.

South Africa remains steadfast that an atmosphere of dialogue, mediation and diplomacy is the only path to de-escalate the current conflict. In this regard, we reiterate our call for the Good Offices of the United Nations to mediate in pursuit of finding a sustainable solution and for us as member states to facilitate an enabling environment for dialogue.

In the backdrop of the deepening humanitarian crisis and the pursuit of peace not in sight, we ought to ask ourselves what matters most? Our objective at this Assembly must be to find a constructive outcome conducive to the creation of sustainable peace in Ukraine and addressing the humanitarian plight of those affected by the conflict. Resolution L.2 of the cross-regional group unfortunately does not address this.

South Africa supports several aspects of the resolution. We support the immediate cessation of hostilities, reaffirming the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine as well as the establishment of humanitarian corridors. We support that civilians, humanitarian personnel, vulnerable persons, including women and children, are fully protected. We support the call on all states and parties to the conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We support the voluntary, safe, and unhindered passage of civilians, including foreign nationals without discrimination.

There are however elements of the resolution that may make the attainment of a General Assembly consensus difficult. At this stage, it remains imperative that all parties to the conflict are committed to humanitarian principles and a UN humanitarian response and be part of an outcome that we adopt.

It is for this reason that South Africa saw the need to put forward a text which focus specifically on the humanitarian plight of those affected. Political issues that may lead to Member States not agreeing to a text should be addressed elsewhere. We believe that an impartial humanitarian resolution should focus purely on addressing the humanitarian needs of those affected.

It is in this context that we proposed a text that will first and foremost focus on calling for the cessation of hostilities as the first step towards ameliorating the humanitarian situation. A crucial aspect of our resolution also calls on all parties to abide by international humanitarian law as well as all protocols of the Geneva Conventions. It remains pivotal that aside from addressing the humanitarian needs of the people it must also lay the foundation for the parties to engage in constructive and meaningful dialogue.

South Africa's approach has been that in the current context of the conflict in Ukraine, it is necessary for the United Nations to adopt a resolution on the humanitarian situation affecting the people of Ukraine that is based on the principles that govern humanitarian assistance, namely, humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. These principles provide the foundations for humanitarian action and are central to establishing and maintaining access to those affected. An important aspect of this resolution must be to express concern at the humanitarian situation and call on all parties to abide by international humanitarian law.

South Africa will abstain on the resolution L.2. We have tabled a resolution, L.3, which we believe is more conducive for a comprehensive humanitarian response. **Regarding action we will take this morning it is crucial that all voices be heard and given an equal chance. There should be no attempt to muzzle those we see as different from ours. That would be cutting at the core of what this United Nations is about and undermining its basic tenants and setting precedents we will regret for years to come.**

Therefore, following the action by the Assembly on L.2 this morning, South Africa formally requests that the Assembly should vote on L.3.

Statement delivered by **Ambassador Mathu Joyini, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations.**

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<http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2022/unga0324.htm#:~:text=Making%20this%20point%20today%20in,starting%20or%20ending%20those%20wars.>