 Appeal for peace and demilitarisation  

For almost two weeks now, the war in Ukraine has escalated with the invasion and air strikes by Russian troops. Over a million people have already fled, many others are seeking refuge in bomb shelters, metro stations, places outside the cities that perhaps are safer. This latest war in Europe is a stark and brutal reminder that armed conflict causes untold suffering and senseless destruction. War always has a gendered impact, and affects marginalised groups in particular. As feminist peace organisations, we call for the immediate withdrawal of the Russian military and an immediate end to violence.

Even if the media attention currently is almost exclusively on the war in Ukraine, there have also been heavy airstrikes and violence against civilian facilities in Gaza, Syria, Somalia and Yemen in recent weeks.

Swiss civil society has long called for increased civilian peacebuilding and against the export of war materiel. In 2020, however, Switzerland exported weapons worth at least 900 million Swiss francs, an absolute record. Parallel to the globally increasing business with weapons and war material, we observe an increase in bellicose rhetoric that promotes a militaristic and patriarchal attitude at international and national level. It serves to legitimise violence and further increase military spending. Peace and peace efforts are undermined and sabotaged by investments in and trade in arms and war material and by a militaristic discourse.

Currently, the war in Ukraine is being misused to increase arms spending. Germany has announced that it will invest an additional 100 billion euros in armament. Calls for rearmament are also growing louder in the Swiss parliament. But: weapons create war instead of peace.

(Small) Arms now coming into circulation will soon become a problem – they are a risk factor and lead to an increase in gender-based and sexualised violence during but especially also in post-conflict times. Already now we have to deal with the coming consequences of the proliferation of small arms!

We welcome the great solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine and the willingness for unbureaucratic reception and protection. We demand that this solidarity applies to all refugees! Black people and People of Colour (BPoC) seeking to flee Ukraine have been and continue to be confronted with racism at the border. BPoC were prevented from crossing the borders, not allowed on buses, pushed back into Ukraine. The public, political and media discourse in recent days has also been strongly racist. A picture was painted of Ukrainian refugees who need protection, as opposed to racialised refugees who are not worthy of protection. We strongly condemn racism at the border, in institutions and in public discourse in the media.
We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and condemn the attack by the Russian government. We stand in solidarity with Ukrainian and Russian civil society working for peace.

We demand:

- An immediate ceasefire and the rapid withdrawal of the Russian military from Ukraine.
- That all actors directly and indirectly involved in the war in Ukraine take clear positions against militarisation and for peace.
- That the perspectives of those directly affected are put at the centre.
- That the Federal Council organise a mediation conference in Geneva with experienced peace experts.
- Respect for human rights and international law.
- That the voices of civil society be heard and that international commitments such as UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security be respected. The Resolution calls for the protection of women in conflict situations and their participation in conflict prevention, peace processes and in post-conflict situations.
- An immediate end to threats to use nuclear weapons. Disarmament is needed, and the banning of nuclear weapons.
- That no men be forcibly recruited.
- The unbureaucratic admission of refugees from Ukraine and all people fleeing armed conflicts.

Bern, 8. March 2022