

A statement published on behalf of the countries listed below on the occasion of the 24th International Aids Conference

Statement on behalf of Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war has put the health of people living with, and affected by HIV, in and around Ukraine, at serious risk.

Ukraine is, after Russia, the country with the highest prevalence of HIV in Europe. An estimated 260,000 people lived with HIV before Russia's invasion; more than half (152,000) of them received antiretroviral therapy, thanks to intense efforts by the Ukraine Government in recent years.

As Russia's war rages on, many Ukrainians have been cut off from access to crucial HIV testing opportunities and life-saving medication. As of early May 2022, 39 antiretroviral therapy sites were closed, and HIV testing was disrupted in the non-government controlled areas of Ukraine and active fighting sites. Access to diagnostics has been fully disrupted in Kharkiv, Mariupol, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Slavyansk and partially disrupted in Kherson. Consequently, far fewer people can be diagnosed and receive the medication necessary to maintain their [state of] health.

This problem also affects the 30,000 Ukrainian refugees the World Health Organisation considers in need of HIV treatment. Most fled with extremely limited reserves of medication and now find themselves in a humanitarian and health emergency. An interruption of antiretroviral therapy can lead to increased viral load levels and disease progression. Alongside its other horrific consequences, Russia's aggressive invasion might thus trigger a resurgence of the epidemic in the region.

We welcome the work done bilaterally by several state parties, as well as by the Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which unites the work of UNESCO and ten sister UN agencies. UNAIDS and partners such as The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, have undertaken intense efforts to provide medical aid and HIV testing to Ukraine and its neighbouring countries.

Nonetheless, whilst sufficient stocks of medication could be delivered to Ukraine, Russia's war of choice makes it increasingly challenging to provide it to those in need.

The war and violence have affected everyone in Ukraine, including those living with, and affected by HIV, their families and close ones. We call upon the Russian Government to immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine, withdraw its forces and military equipment from the entirety of Ukraine and to recommit itself to the shared ideals embodied in the United Nations Charter.