

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 14, 2022

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development 1300
Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20523

Dear Administrator Power:

The eyes of the world are fixed upon the harrowing images of the devastation Russian military forces have inflicted on the people of Ukraine. As Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I am especially concerned by the toll this unjust war is taking on older adults and people with disabilities, including relatives of the more than 122,000 Ukrainian-Americans who live in my home state of Pennsylvania. I applaud the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to victims of Russia's aggression. As USAID administers the \$2.6 billion in humanitarian aid appropriated by Congress this Spring, I write to ensure your attention remains focused on the needs of older adults and people with disabilities during this crisis.

Last month, CNN reported Russian forces attacked a senior care home and killed more than 56 older adults, many of whom had disabilities and were powerless to defend themselves.¹ The victims of this attack are among the 7 million older adults and 2.7 million people with disabilities living in Ukraine affected by Russia's aggression. The United Nations stated in recent days that "outreach to older people in remote areas, [who are] among the most vulnerable groups, and [the] provision of basic commodities including water and food, and urgently needed medicines to continue treatment of chronic diseases, is hampered by security concerns and destruction of infrastructure."² There are concerns that older adults and people with disabilities "are increasingly facing barriers in accessing critical services such as transportation, food products, medicines, and emergency health care in impacted areas."³ Press reports have raised concerns that older adults and people with disabilities in Ukraine may be left behind in evacuation efforts due, in part, to accessibility barriers.⁴ Yet, even those who are older and who have disabilities who manage to leave with assistance from the Ukrainian government and NGOs face challenges accessing health care, emotional support and meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter.

Older adults and people with disabilities who are restricted to their homes or are unable to walk without assistance may be more likely to remain in their homes, even during evacuations. For example, an assessment of more than 1,500 Ukrainian older adults conducted by HelpAge International found virtually all intended to remain in their current homes despite more than nine

¹ Church, B., Upright, E., Chowdhury, M., & Hayes, M. (2022, March 21). "Russian attack killed 56 elderly residents of a care home in Eastern Ukraine, says regional official". CNN. Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-20-22/h_d4e310461013be01dd92f2da81c24314.

² "Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact Situation Report." Relief Web. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, March 13, 2022. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2022-03-13_Ukraine_Humanitarian_Impact_SitRep_final.pdf.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Demony, Catarina. "Fate of Ukrainians with Disabilities a 'Crisis within a Crisis'." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 11, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/fate-ukrainians-with-disabilities-crisis-within-crisis-2022-03-11/>.

out of 10 respondents reporting an increased need for food.⁵ These issues highlight the need for humanitarian aid strategies to account for older adults and people with disabilities who remain in Ukraine.

President Biden has made important commitments to work in partnership with European allies as the region strives to support the needs of more than 4.7 million Ukrainian refugees. While the number of older adults and people with disabilities who have been able to flee Ukraine remains unknowable, initial data suggest those who have escaped have urgent needs. These include access to medication for such conditions as diabetes, hypertension and chronic pain, as well as sufficient food and accessible housing.⁶

For decades, USAID has played an important role in addressing humanitarian crises around the world. Your steadfast commitment to working with our allies and implementing partners to support the needs of older adults and people with disabilities affected by this war is greatly appreciated. I encourage USAID to work with its partners to identify and support the specific needs of older adult refugees and refugees with disabilities as this crisis enters its second month. I look forward to working with the agency to advance the needs of all Ukrainians who have been so courageous in the face of an unwarranted and unjust invasion.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your agency's work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Casey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bob" and last name "Casey" clearly distinguishable.

Robert P. Casey, Jr
Chairman Special Committee on Aging

⁵ Wood, Sam, and Alex Goldsworthy. "Eastern Ukraine: The Needs of Older People – 4th March 2022." Help Age, March 4, 2022. <https://www.helpage.org/download/6226147bec08f>.

⁶ Sorocan, Tatiana, Renata Rusu, Alex Goldsworthy, and Dina Ciubotaru. "Moldova: Rapid Needs Assessment of Older Refugees – 10 March 2022." Help Age, March 10, 2022. <https://www.helpage.org/download/622a0c718e435>.