



## Solidarity for Ukraine – issue 25– Women’s Day

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The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (iriv) is associated to the international solidarity for Ukraine attacked by Russia on 24th February 2022. After a pandemic that has weakened democratic countries with the disturbing rise of conspiracy theories and hate speech on social networks, we do hope this war in Europe will be an opportunity to reflect on a new solidarity, among European and international allies. This issue is the 3rd one for 2024 and the 25th since the beginning of the war in Ukraine..... *We dedicate this 3rd issue of our Newsletter and the 25th since the Russian aggression against Ukraine to the memory of Alexander Navalny, who died on February 16th, 2024 after a murderous relentlessness of Russian President Vladimir Putin to whom he has opposed since 2011. In an interview*

*with the New York Times, he assessed his chances of survival at 50%; he had mental strength and courage, only his body let go.* March the 8th is International Women’s Day; November 25th is dedicated to the Day of Violence Against Women. In 2024, many women are still victims of violence, in peacetime but especially during armed conflicts or terrorist attacks. Sexual violence against women is part of a very elaborated strategy to terrorize and humiliate not only women but their families and their entire community. We will talk about their actuality thirty years after the war in former Yugoslavia (1991-2001). In another point, we will talk about the role of women in Russia, spur, and bad conscience for the Russian army. In a next point, we will present the commitment of Ukrainian women, again exemplary at the front, and the abuses committed in the back by Russian troops. In conclusion we will ask ourselves: if women are the future of men, are they for all women?

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\* the logo was designed by Caritas Canada in February r 2022

## Violence against women, war weapon

« Thelma et Louise » (1) marked the spirits in the early 1990s by its strength and the message addressed to millions of spectators - rape is one of the most degrading and humiliating crimes for women, especially when it is denied or ignored. At the same time, a war began in Europe, in the Balkans, with the implosion of the former Yugoslavia and the nationalist and totalitarian project of a Greater Serbia. The Serbs attacked their neighbours-Slovenia, Croatia, but above all Bosnia-Herzegovina, openly practicing and claiming for «ethnic cleansing». The Muslim community has been the prime target of abuses by the Serbian army. Bosnian men have been victims of mass crimes and genocide in Srebrenica with the massacre of more than 8,000 men and male teenagers. The women were subjected to particularly degrading treatment; they were systematically raped and reduced to sexual objects by Serbian troops. The abuses and sexual violence were documented for the first time thanks to the work of the International Criminal Court, created in LaHaye (Netherlands) to investigate the trial of Serbian torturers.

Rape and sexual violence are used as weapons of war against women, but also against their families and their entire community. They are part of the total psychological war of the terrorists, denounced by the law of war. The terrorist and totalitarian movements not only wish to win but literally destroy their opponents who have become intimate enemies by degrading them. The Palestinian terrorist movement Hamas perpetrated sexual violence and multiple rapes against Israeli women (and men) during the October 7, 2023 attacks - youth participating in a music festival for peace and in peaceful kibbutz in southern Gaza (2). Sexual violence consisted of genital mutilation, humiliations (filmed by the terrorists and broadcasted on social networks worldwide), and desecration of corpses (desecrated bodies could not always be identified). The degree of brutality was documented by the Israeli police, with the help of an Israeli rescue association (called Zaka, involving many volunteers). They collected damning evidence of young girls “who had been raped so brutally that their pelvis was completely broken” or “targeted shots at the genitals of men,” or “bodies marked by gunfire, deep cuts, bruises and broken heads (.../... ) who had been raped” (3). The detailed description is important to understand the reality of the exactions. The Israeli mission to the United Nations presented the scale of the abuses committed by Hamas on October 7 at a conference held on December 4, 2023 (4). After months of silence from humanitarian associations or the UN, United Nations experts finally recognized the scale and gravity of the abuses committed on January 8, 2024 (5).

Silence and denial are yet the other crimes committed against the victims of these war crimes of a particular brutality and inhumanity.

## Resistance of women in Russia

Throughout Russia, women's groups are demanding the return of their husbands or sons from the Ukrainian front. Official numbers are undervalued – 300,000 men mobilized since September 2022 (6). In early November 2023, women invited themselves to a Communist Party rally in Moscow. The police intervened but the images were captured and released. The success of the action has allowed hundreds of women to organize across Russia through Telegram groups. The authorizations to protest have all been refused in the name of the fight against Covid which does not apply to patriotic or festive daily gatherings in Russia. Unequal treatment is not only for the right of expression and manifestation.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu had assured that the influx of volunteers would allow the return of the mobilized in 2023. Even the wounded are sent back to the front after their recovery. The head of the Defence Commission in the Duma (Russian Parliament) said in September 2023 that the mobilized should fight “until the end” of the war. The feeling of injustice is total: soldiers recruited in prison first by the mercenary group Wagner (in known territory), then by the army, serve only six months. They have an amnesty to go home and start killing or terrorizing their neighbours again. Many crimes and felonies have been documented in the past months.

Russian women, mothers, and wives of soldiers are the «Jiminy crickets» of the Russian army. In the fall of 2022, they posted videos asking that their husbands or sons be better equipped, better trained, and not considered as “cannon fodder”. Vladimir Putin had organized a large reception, an unconvincing «happening»; the women invited were officials or belonged to patriotic groups. In 2023, the strategy is officially soothing but threatening unofficially with undermining work on Telegram groups. Waves of troll comments intimidate the participants (by their faults their husbands or sons are endangered; they risk prison) or discredit them (they are agents from abroad). Fake groups were created by imitating theirs. One remembers the tragic episode of the Russian K-141 "Kursk" cruise missile launcher nuclear submarine in August 2000 (7). The military boat had participated in a naval exercise in the Barents Sea in northern Western Russia, the first large-scale exercise since the fall of the USSR in 1991. According to the new Russian president, Vladimir Putin, the operation was to «remind the world that Russia is an unavoidable force on the world's oceans».

The prestige operation turned into a disaster with two explosions, one of such a magnitude that it was recorded by seismographs in Alaska. The submarine sank. On board, at least 23 of the 118 crew members survived and took refuge in a compartment. For nine days, the whole world followed the rescue operations, which failed one by one. Russia categorically refused international aid. The staff's communication, opaque and contradictory, was disastrous. Russia too late accepted help from British and Norwegian forces. Norwegian divers discovered all the drowned submariners. The attack on Vladimir Putin by Russian mothers and women had been a public national and international humiliation.

## Commitment of women in Ukraine

In Ukraine, mobilization is not only for men. In August 2023, according to the BBC, 18 months after the Russian invasion, 60,000 women served in the country's armed forces (8). More than 42,000 of them hold military positions, including 5,000 women soldiers on the front line, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. No woman can be enlisted against her will under Ukrainian law. The percentage of women in the Ukrainian army has increased since the first Russian invasion in 2014, reaching more than 15% in 2020. The BBC interviewed three of the 5,000 women soldiers on the front lines who are fighting both the enemy and sexist attitudes in their own ranks. Some believe that women are better able to fulfil specific roles in the fight against Russia. Thus several women became snipers. For one of them, elite shooters have been romanticized since World War II, for a very practical reason "If a man hesitates to shoot, a woman will never do it. Perhaps this is why women give birth, not men". She adds that the first time she had to shoot, she trembled like a leaf, knowing that her act would be irremediable. It also takes an amazing mental strength not to crack. Many female soldiers serve in combat roles against Russia, with an additional battle in their own ranks against sexist attitudes. A woman says she had to face these inappropriate attitudes before she could finally establish her authority and confidence as an elite shooter.

In the territories occupied by Russian troops, many abuses were committed. Ukrainian investigators opened 100,000 files for 40,000 crime scenes, from bicycle theft to the worst executions, torture, and rape (9). They try to distinguish those which were perpetrated on order of Moscow or in the passage of certain units (for instance the private militia Wagner). The steering brings together the police services in cooperation with the prosecutor and the secret services. A male colonel, Oleksander Shapovalov, is in charge to document war crimes. A female colonel, Khrystyna Podyriako, investigates war crimes. Colonel Shapovalov uses highly sophisticated software that combines millions of information about crimes and felonies, victims and witnesses, and criminals and suspects. For the massacres in Boutcha, 3,482 criminal cases were opened for 536 civilians killed or missing and 501 bodies found. Multiple cases of rape have been documented. Several documentaries broadcast on Western channels, also provide the testimonies of women, of all ages, raped, tortured and left for dead in several cities that had been attacked and occupied by Russian troops. At the national level the "Road map" software constitutes a detailed database of crimes and potential suspects – 230,000 Russian soldiers are listed with their chain of command, the movement of their units, the bases where they were stationed, and crimes of which they are suspected. The information is provided by the intelligence services but also telephone operators. '

## Women are men's future (10)... and for other women ?

In «America», the American writer and journalist Joan Didion wrote «It is easy to see the beginning of things, more difficult to see the end» (11). Alice Zeniter, a French writer, whose paternal family is Algerian, echoed her in «The art of losing» (12): «propaganda is an excellent fuel for anger». Who could have imagined thirty years ago, and the Balkan war, and the advances of the feminist struggle that allowed women in Western countries to access political, economic, social, educational and even military responsibilities, that there would be such a reversal and decline of feminism, when it is not used in a shocking way?

The phenomenon of backlash (13) refers to the backlash that threatens and jeopardizes the rights of minorities or women after each advance. American journalist Susan Faludie (14) explains that after years of feminist struggle, which was part of a broader civil rights movement (against racism, anti-Semitism, inequality, and discrimination in general), conservative and reactionary movements that had never disarmed were first awakened in marginal fringes, then amplified with the rise of evangelical currents within an ultra-conservative Christian right. There are many examples worldwide: in the United States with Donald Trump ; in Brazil with Javier Bolsonaro. In Europe, the rhetoric of Hungarian President Victor Orban or Slovak President Robert Fico is similar, both openly pro-Russian supporters. It is more surprising to note in the United States and in Europe in so-called progressive circles that feminist activists do not condemn all the crimes committed against all women.

In Russia, in the name of defending «traditional values», the right to abortion is attacked. According to a Russian feminist activist «For Putin, and even more so with war, the role of women is to be mothers, pregnant in the kitchen» (15). If the link between abortion and demography is false, a decisive indicator is the place and role of women in society, economy, and politics. Their importance and real participation, especially in the governing and executive bodies (companies, parties, governments, education, etc.), are the best indicators of the degree of democracy in a country.

In Africa, Denis Mukwege, gynaecologist and Kivu-Congolese human rights activist, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner (16), has been denouncing sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war for thirty years. He specialised in repairing «the bodies and souls of women», victims of sexual mutilation in Congo. In Europe, Ukraine is once again exemplary, with «powerful women» (17) actively participating in the fight for democracy and for the defence of the rights of women, of all women, without exception.

- (1) Riddley Scott “Thelma et Louise”, USA , 1991
- (2) New York Times ; What We Know About Sexual Violence During the Oct. 7 Attacks on Israel-  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/world/middleeast/oct-7-attacks-israel-hamas-sexual-violence.html?smid=nytcore-android-share>
- (3) Samuel Forey “Israël enquête sur les violences sexuelles commises par le Hamas », Le Monde, samedi 9 décembre 2023
- (4) Israeli Mission to the United Nations « Hear Our Voices: Sexual and gender-based violence in the October 7th Hamas terror attack”, New York, 4 December 2023 -  
<https://lnkd.in/dXAEcKDM>
- (5) Talya Minsberg “Oct. 7 Assaults, Including Sexual Violence, Could Be Crimes Against Humanity, 2 U.N. Experts Say”, New York Times, 8 janvier 2024-  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/08/world/middleeast/hamas-sexual-violence-un-israel.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.Mko.MzWV.0zyAV3DA8odM&smid=em-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/08/world/middleeast/hamas-sexual-violence-un-israel.html?unlocked_article_code=1.Mko.MzWV.0zyAV3DA8odM&smid=em-share)
- (6) Benoît Vitkine « En Russie, des femmes protestent contre la mobilisation infinie », Le Monde 23 novembre 2023
- (7) Ilyass Malki, « Le naufrage du Koursk a révélé au monde entier de l'état de délabrement du système militaire russe" <https://www.zerodeconduite.net/article/le-naufrage-du-koursk-revele-au-monde-entier-de-letat-de-delabrement-du-systeme-militaire>
- (8) Olga Malchevska, war in Ukraine : "C'est comme jouer avec la mort" - Les femmes soldats ukrainiennes de la ligne de front, BBC News, 5 août 2023-  
<https://www.bbc.com/afrique/monde-66364917>
- (9) Rémy Ourdan « Les enquêteurs de Kiev veulent prouver qu'un génocide est en cours », Le Monde, jeudi 7 décembre 2023
- (10) Louis Aragon, « La femme est l'avenir de l'homme » in « Le fou d'Elsa », Paris : Gallimard, 1963, quote made famous by singer Jean Ferrat , eponymous album, Barclay, Paris, 1975.
- (11) Joan Didion, « America », a selection of article , article published in 1967 ;
- (12) Alice Zeniter (2017), « L'art de perdre », Paris : Flammarion
- (13) Marion Dupont , « Le « backlash » ou le retour de bâton conservateur », Le Monde, 21 septembre 2022- [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/09/21/le-backlash-ou-le-retour-de-baton-conservateur\\_6142513\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/09/21/le-backlash-ou-le-retour-de-baton-conservateur_6142513_3232.html)
- (14) Susan Faludi (1991) « *Backlash. The Undeclared War Against American Women* publié en français sous le titre *Backlash. La guerre froide contre les femmes*, Paris : Editions des femmes, 1993
- (15) Benoît Vitkine, « En Russie, le droit à l'avortement attaqué et peu à peu rogné », Le Monde, 29 novembre 2023
- (16) recipient of the Sakharov Prize, the United Nations Human Rights Prize, Freedom from Want; Denis Mukwege is a candidate in the presidential elections of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2024; for thirty years internal fighting (but also external with neighboring Rwanda) have caused millions of deaths and those responsible for abuses never punished , a culture of impunity denounced by Denis Mukwege  
<https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/guerres-du-congo-apres-27-ans-de-crimes-lindispensable-lutte-contre-limpunite-en-rdc-35249>
- (17) Marie Ndiyae « Trois femmes puissantes », Paris : Gallimard , 2009

Newsletter written on 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, updated on 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2024



## Useful contacts

We mean to share the following contacts

- 1- National Union of Journalists of Ukraine- [HTTPS://NUJU.ORG.UA/](https://nuju.org.ua/)
- 2- Ukrainian Parish of Saint Volodymyr –Paris – [paroisse.st.volodymyr@gmail.com](mailto:paroisse.st.volodymyr@gmail.com)
- 3- Catholic Mission of the Polish Church in France also suggests the following link:<https://mission-catholique-polonaise.pl/polska-we-francji/pere-brzys-la-mcp-lance-une-initiative-nationale-pour-aider-lukraine/>

A list of associations & ONG - **Source** : <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/actualites/A15542>

**Support Ukraine** – <https://www.supportukraine.co/>

**Croix-Rouge Française** - **Croix-Rouge française** Redcross - <https://www.croix-rouge.fr/Nos-actions/Action-internationale/Rechercher-un-programme/LA-CROIX-ROUGE-FRANCAISE-EN-UKRAINE>

**Médecins sans frontières** - emergency funds in countries bordering Ukraine and seeking to bring in medical equipment and personnel. - <https://soutenir.msf.fr/faire-un-don/~mon-don>

**Secours populaire** – a call for support .- <https://don.secourspopulaire.fr/ukraine/~mon-don>

**Protection civile** - un appel aux dons pour financer d'autres besoins (défibrillateurs, respirateurs, groupes électrogènes, etc.) : <https://don.protection-civile.org/soutenir>

**Fondation de France** - lance un [appel à la générosité](#) pour soutenir les centaines de milliers de personnes affectées par le conflit en Pologne et en Roumanie - - <https://dons.fondationdefrance.org/solidarite-avec-les-ukrainsiens/~mon-don?>

**Agence des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés** - situation d'urgence de niveau 3 pour la crise en Ukraine, le plus élevé.: [https://donner.unhcr.org/fr/fr-fr/urgence-ukraine?\\_cv=1](https://donner.unhcr.org/fr/fr-fr/urgence-ukraine?_cv=1)

**Unicef** - un besoin urgent de financement pour répondre aux besoins essentiels des enfants Pour faire un [don sur le site Unicef.fr](#) - [https://don.unicef.fr/b/mon-don?cid=322&\\_cv=1](https://don.unicef.fr/b/mon-don?cid=322&_cv=1)

**ONG Care International** - un [formulaire en ligne de dons d'urgence à l'Ukraine](#) pour apporter une aide d'urgence aux populations et aux réfugiés - .- <https://soutenir.carefrance.org/>

**L'ONG française ACTED** organise des convois humanitaires pour l'Ukraine

**association Solidarités International** –pour envoyer des convois de vivres et biens de première nécessité, distribuer de l'eau et des repas aux réfugiés - [https://dons.solidarites.org/b/mon-don?cid=880&\\_cv=1](https://dons.solidarites.org/b/mon-don?cid=880&_cv=1)

**Plan International**, pour apporter aide matérielle et psychosociale aux jeunes ukrainiens et à leur famille, et [sollicite des dons](https://formulaire.plan-international.fr/urgence-ukraine/~mon-don) pour ce faire.- <https://formulaire.plan-international.fr/urgence-ukraine/~mon-don>

**L'Aide médicale et caritative France-Ukraine** - envoi de convois d'aide humanitaire, des soins aux blessés, des échanges de savoir-faire médical, une aide psychologique et organise des colonies de vacances pour les enfants orphelins - [HelloAsso](https://www.helloasso.com/associations/aide%20medicale%20caritative%20france%20ukraine/collectes/aider-ukraine-amurgence-help-ukraine/don) - <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/aide%20medicale%20caritative%20france%20ukraine/collectes/aider-ukraine-amurgence-help-ukraine/don>

**Le Comité d'aide médicale Ukraine** - réfugiés en transit dans l'ouest du pays, et collecte fonds, médicaments et équipements pour l'hébergement et les soins via ses partenaires français, l'association SAFE et l'organisation FONDEMOS. - <http://www.cam-z.org/en/news/121/>

**JeVeuxAider.gouv.fr** est la plateforme publique du bénévolat, - une page dédiée [Mobilisons-nous pour l'Ukraine](https://www.jeveuxaider.gouv.fr/engagement/benevolat-ukraine/) .- <https://www.jeveuxaider.gouv.fr/engagement/benevolat-ukraine/>

**Les Banques alimentaires** - une [aide d'urgence à apporter aux frontières de l'Ukraine](https://www.banquealimentaire.org/urgence-ukraine), dans les pays frontaliers accueillant des réfugiés - <https://www.banquealimentaire.org/urgence-ukraine>

**La Protection Civile et l'Association des maires de France** ont établi une [liste](#) (lits de camps, sacs de couchage, lingettes, conserves, pansements hémostatiques, solutions antiseptiques ...).

**L'Association des maires de France** a dressé les [lieux de collecte](#) à travers toute la France. Les Maires de France appellent à la [solidarité avec l'Ukraine](#) . De nombreuses villes de France organisent des collectes de produits de première nécessité - <https://www.amf.asso.fr/documents-les-maires-france-appellent-la-solidarite-avec-lukraine/41122>

**La plateforme officielle** « [Je m'engage pour l'Ukraine](#) » lancée le 8 mars 2022 par le gouvernement pour accompagner les Français souhaitant héberger chez eux des Ukrainiens réfugiés et accueillis en France.- <https://parrainage.refugies.info/>

Les associations, fondations, entreprises et collectivités territoriales peuvent utiliser ce [formulaire en ligne](https://www.demarches-simplifiees.fr/commencer/hebergement-personne-morale-ukraine) pour renseigner leur capacité d'hébergement.- <https://www.demarches-simplifiees.fr/commencer/hebergement-personne-morale-ukraine>

**Bibliothèque sans frontière (BSF)** - elle mobilise et déploie, partout en Europe, des solutions d'urgence pour l'accueil et l'intégration des populations réfugiées. - <https://www.bibliosansfrontieres.org/2022/10/14/bsf-lance-bonjour-france-une-application-innovante-dapprentissage-du-francais-pour-les-refugies-ukrainiens/>