Trade Union (Britain): Unite Executive Council – Statement on Ukraine crisis

written by Unite Union / Unite the Union | March 6, 2022



The Unite executive council unreservedly condemns Putin's invasion of Ukraine and stands in full solidarity with the millions of victims of the attack. Unite calls for an immediate cease-fire and a withdrawal of all Russian forces from Ukraine.

In line with the oldest traditions of the international trade union movement, Unite believes wars are never in the interests of working people and that working people and their families always pay the highest price, and suffer most, when conflicts erupt that are led by elites with fully different interests to their own.

In continuation with the strong working-class history of cross-border solidarity, Unite salutes the actions of many of its members in donating to humanitarian relief efforts, ensuring the multinational companies they work in withdraw from engagement with Russia, refusing to unload Russian oil, and in providing relief and assistance to those directly affected by the invasion. Unite reiterates the general secretary's declaration of full support for members – such as those at the Stanlow refinery – who refuse to unload Russian oil from any ship regardless of the nationality of the vessel that delivers it, and Unite repeats the call on the UK government to close the loophole that is still making these deliveries possible.

Unite also stresses the vital importance of welcoming refugees with compassion and assistance. The UK government has a shameful record of creating a hostile environment for refugees, which is now impacting those fleeing the conflict in the Ukraine. This is underlined by reports that Ukrainians are not getting visas because of bureaucratic obstacles and inadequate resources such as staff shortages. Unite also notes with extreme concern reports that some refugees from the Ukraine have been met with prejudice from other governments because they are 'non-white', have other nationalities or LGBT+ people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries governed by homophobic leaders. The UK Government and the wider international community must do everything in their powers to welcome and support all refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere as is determined under international law.

In addition to the awful human suffering, the crisis has already caused huge economic disruption that will impact on working people in the UK and Unite fully supports calls for measures to protect UK families struggling with the cost of living crisis as the conflict drives up energy prices. Unite will also reject any and all attempts by the UK Government to use disruption caused by this conflict as cover to obscure its own failings or as an excuse to introduce unpopular and unacceptable policies.

Unite makes it clear that in expressing its full support for the Ukrainian people it in no way sees Russian workers as its enemy and stands in solidarity with those brave people inside Russia who oppose the war and are seeing the Russian conscripted soldiers returning to their families in body bags.

Unite notes the numerous reports of links between Vladimir Putin and Far Right parties across Europe, the presence of Russian oligarchs in the UK and huge amounts of Russian money flowing through the city of London, as well as the allegations of Russian financial support for some political parties in the UK.

Unite acknowledges the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory within internationally recognised borders. Unite is also conscious that any expansion of this conflict could have unimaginable consequences for Europe and the entire world. Unite therefore reiterates the strongly held belief that all efforts must be exerted to achieve an immediate ceasefire and for negotiations to be supported by governments at the highest level.

The comings days and weeks will be critical in defining how the continent and the world move forward and whether the path for a return to peace and stability can be found. Unite therefore demands the UK government use all its efforts in the international arena to bring about a cessation of hostilities and find a negotiated solution, using all means at its disposal, including sanctions and divestments, but rejecting military escalation and intervention.

To speed up the process of securing that peaceful settlement, Unite demands action from the UK government, including:

- Effective and immediate sanctions to be placed on the Russian economy including the seizure of Russian state assets held in the UK.
- An effective and enforceable regime of sanctions against Russian traded goods, including raw materials, components and finished goods. Such a ban must include a prohibition on Russian cargo from UK ports, refineries and terminals alongside exports to Russia of UK goods.
- Action to stop the institutions of the City of London being used as a global money laundering hub for the wealthy and the seizure of UK held or traded assets, including housing and corporate holdings, of targeted supporters of the Putin regime.
- A comprehensive programme of support for UK workers, their families and companies impacted by such actions above, including wage protection and company support while alternate supply chains are established.
- Immunity from third party litigation for those workers and their unions taking direct action against Russian goods in support of Ukraine and in line with the objectives of this motion.
- To provide full support for all those fleeing the conflict and to receive Ukrainian refugees – and all refugees – with compassion and assistance.