



## Dear Mr. President: Ensure That All of Ukraine, West to East, Enjoys Access to Water

Kyiv, 24/10/2018 – *This month the heating season for the winter starts, yet still too many in Ukraine risk to be left freezing. 3.6 million people in the Donbas face daily risks of water cuts. This causes colder winters, health risks, and is a deprivation of basic rights for people who already suffer due to the conflict. A coalition of NGOs urges the President of Ukraine to take prompt action to address this issue for all citizens to enjoy their water rights.*

A group of 7 international and national organizations ([Mama 86](#), [ADRA Ukraine](#), [People in Need](#), [Polish Humanitarian Action](#), [Première Urgence Internationale](#), [Terre des Hommes](#), and [Proliska](#)) working in the Donbas, and worried by recent trends of insufficient access to water and the related humanitarian suffering, have joined forces to ask the President of Ukraine to prioritize this issue and take urgent action to ensure that such basic good is available to those who live there.

In the Donbas area, natural water scarcity is exacerbated by reliance on 70 years old water systems which have been damaged by shelling in the ongoing conflict, and which are also close to collapse due to lack of maintenance. To that end, there are **3.6 million people whose water supplies are affected and at risk due to the conflict** in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. Here, in the first half of 2018 alone, 57 serious conflict-related incidents affected water infrastructure, in which 6 water utility staff members were injured, while 9 have been killed since the beginning of hostilities in 2014. “Water is life. We didn’t think about it before, but now we’ve learnt how to save it. For instance, we have to use the same water several times. To cook first, and then to water the garden. I also wash dishes without soap, so I can then re-use it to water my seedlings”, said Tatyana, now supported by one of the signing NGOs. Aged 75, Tatyana survives on her low pension and is unable to buy expensive trucked water.

Through a petition and a social media campaign under the hashtags #правонаводу (#RightToWater in both Ukrainian and Russian) and #RightToWaterUkraine, the organizations are encouraging people to engage with the government, asking it to take action. A [video](#), showing how lack of water affects people’s daily routines, will also help everyone to understand what many in the Donbas go through, or risk, unless action can be taken.

**This month represents** a perfect opportunity to remember that access to water also means the right to health and to adequate, warm housing here in Ukraine. On Monday October 15 we celebrated Global Handwashing Day, whose slogan this year is: “Clean Hands – A Recipe For Health”. It reminded us that when, due to lack of maintenance, shelling and damage to water infrastructure, or impossibility of repairing the damages due to ongoing fighting, water does not reach our taps—it is our right to water, but also our right to health that are affected.

In October **the heating season** starts officially as well. In areas with centralized heating systems, where water is needed for radiators to work, thousands could be left out of water, and heating, due to one shelling hitting pipes that run through active conflict areas. They would be therefore forced to be displaced, or resort to expensive alternatives. This is a region where many people have already been displaced once, and the economic situation has been deteriorating over the past nearly five years. “Every day, in the Donbas, in our agencies’ work to support people who are suffering from the conflict,

we witness how great the impact of insufficient access to water is. When shelling damages water infrastructure, we rush to deliver hundreds of thousands of liters of water to families who would otherwise be left with none. While crucially needed, this is also not a sustainable solution, which is why we want to look further, and ask the government of Ukraine to look at those issues with a human approach, because individuals—women, children and elderly first—are suffering. We hope the Government will answer to our call and will take this matter in its hands with some concrete steps: make clean water available to all conflict-affected people in the Donbas; protect key water infrastructure and its workers in conflict-related activities; and take all measures to protect water sources from pollution that could result from fighting”, says Artem Dikhtiaruk, Program Director of ADRA Ukraine.

The petition will be available for signing on the Presidential website, at the following link: <https://petition.president.gov.ua/petition/47447>, for three months. We hope that by this action, people from all over the country will get together in asking their government to ensure that water rights are granted to all of its citizens. This represents a crucial step in supporting the country in its reforms, and to ensure that its people can live health, safe lives.

*\*Ends\**

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