

## **Stop the humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ukraine**

On February 19<sup>th</sup> it is three years since the government of Sweden in the foreign political declaration explicitly called on the government of Ukraine not to use violence against the opposition. Three days later, these humane principles were thrown overboard. Once a new Western oriented government had risen to power in Kiev, Sweden ceased to advocate oppositional civilians not being targeted by violence

Sweden must now act for constructive solutions to the greatest humanitarian crisis and refugee disaster of Europe. The silence surrounding the war in Eastern Ukraine and its consequences for the civilian population must end. 2,5 million people are estimated refugees. A predominant majority still live in the self-proclaimed people's republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. For those who fled the country, Russia is solely the largest recipient country.

This year 2,3 million are estimated to be in immediate need of humanitarian assistance in the people's republics and equally many are in peril due to water shortages with consequent risk of outbreaks of water related diseases. 70% are elderly, women and children. Access to food is uncertain. Hospitals, schools, residences and other buildings are destroyed. This is also the case regarding vital infrastructure.

The situation is worsened by the fact that 60% of the population of the people's republics rely on pensions and other social benefits as their main source of income, while the government of Ukraine has suspended all payments. Only five border passages are open. Tens of thousands pass through, putting their lives in jeopardy, on a daily basis. Humanitarian aid is only allowed through two border passages.

In August of 2014, we called on the government of Sweden to act for solutions to the extensive humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ukraine. Since then, the crisis has deteriorated further while the red-green government of Sweden has continued the path, initiated by the former foreign minister Carl Bildt and the former centre-right government. The civilians' suffering has been ignored. The locals in the areas of Eastern Ukraine who have chosen to revolt have been made invisible and reduced to tools of Russia.

Ukraine and in particular the voluntary battalions that participate in the military assault on Donbass, take advantage of the unwillingness of the EU and the US to put pressure on also the government of Ukraine to honour the Minsk agreement. In the agreement, for instance complete ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the frontline, secure delivery of humanitarian aid to subjected individuals, national dialogue, relative independence and restoration of socioeconomic conditions in Eastern Ukraine are stipulated.

Civilians on both sides are subjected, but especially by the artillery shelling from the Ukrainian side. The OSCE registered eight times more injured civilians on the rebel side in the people's republics in October. In violation of the Minsk agreement, the Ukrainian army has during quite some time advanced the frontline and once again civilians have been subjected to artillery shelling.

Infrastructure is being destroyed in the reciprocal bombardments following the pickets being too close to each other. Furthermore, the water filtration facility in Donetsk has been damaged, which has affected the civilians of Donetsk, but also on the Ukrainian side in Avdeyevka. There are grave problems concerning vital societal functions including electricity and heating on both sides of the frontline, but civilians in the people's republics are particularly hard hit as fighting continues and lack of materials prevents reparations.

Far too long, Sweden has made itself a one-sided party in the conflict. Ahead of Sweden's minister of foreign affairs, Margot Wallström's trip to Moscow on February 21<sup>st</sup>, we call on the government of Sweden to superpose humanitarian issues to grand politics. The passivity that both the government and civil society in Sweden have demonstrated towards the civilian suffering in Ukraine must come to an end. We support the campaign which Activists For Peace initiate today in order to shed a light on crimes against human rights in Ukraine and support fundraising to civilian victims of the war as well as call on others to do the same. It is also time for the government of Sweden to actively put equal amount of pressure on all involved parties in order to honour the Minsk agreement and end the civilians' suffering.

Tord Björk, Activists for peace

Lars Drake, former Consulting Professor of Economics, SLU

Per Gahrton, green debater

Maj Wechselmann, documentary film director