

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

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Analysis That Matters

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER ISSUE 7 MARCH 2022

WAR AND ARMS TRADE THREATENING SDGs



Issue 7 – March 2022

Bringing You Stories and Issues
Relevant To Achieving The SDGs
in The Post-COVID Era

INDEX

Editorial	2
The Ultimate Winner in Ukraine Are the World's Arms Merchants	3
Ukraine War Threatens Development Aid to World's Poor Nations	5
Ukraine-Russia Crisis: Africa Concerned About Consequences For the Continent's Economy	7
Africa Anxious about Rising Farm Prices	10
The Ukraine Crisis Amid Fractured International Legal Order: Hypocrisy of the Powerful	12
Covid Recovery: Fault Line Expose Migrant Workers to Higher Health and Safety Risks	14
Pandemic Pushes SDGs Further out of Reach of Asia and Pacific	17
In the Age of Fake News, Radio Aim for Trust & Accountability	18
Anti-Vax and 'Freedom' Move- ments Threaten to Hijack Legitimate criticism of MSM	20
UCA: Going online & Quarantine Upsets Students	22
Snippets of News from Non-IDN Sources	24
Recent Reports on SDG Issues From International Think Tanks	25
Ukraine-Russia: Understanding the Concerns of the Other	26

**War is like a fire in the human community, one whose fuel is
living beings – The Dalai Lama**

FROM THE EDITOR

A few days after Russia launched its first airstrikes against the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the German Parliament convened for a special Sunday session. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz took the floor and, within half an hour, did away with decades of political restraint and ushered in a new era of German foreign and security policy. He proposed the creation of a special fund of €100 billion (US\$112 billion) to be spent on military procurement and pledged to allocate more than 2 per cent of Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) to defence. For a country that had long been wary of military power and has continuously delayed plans to reach the 2 per cent expenditure goal set by NATO, Scholz's historic speech represents a watershed moment. Dialogue and trade interdependence - the cornerstones of Germany's policy towards Russia - had failed to deter President Putin from waging war against Ukraine and uttering threats against other European states. Under this new German thinking, it is military hardware, not gas pipelines or other trade mechanisms, that will deter further aggression and manage relations with Russia. Interestingly, the German electorate appears to back Scholz's decision: according to a recent poll, 69 per cent of voters support the government's proposal to boost military spending, up from 39 percent in 2018. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has evidently heightened threat perceptions, thereby bringing about a dramatic shift in public opinion. Security now comes at a higher cost – Alexandra Marksteiner, Researcher in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Program.

The Ukrainian crisis has nothing to do with Ukraine. It's about Germany and, in particular, a pipeline that connects Germany to Russia called Nord Stream 2. Washington sees the pipeline as a threat to its primacy in Europe and has tried to sabotage the project at every turn. Even so, Nord Stream has pushed ahead and is now fully operational and ready-to-go. Once German regulators provide the final certification, the gas deliveries will begin. German homeowners and businesses will have a reliable source of clean and inexpensive energy while Russia will see a significant boost to their gas revenues. It's a win-win situation for both parties. The US Foreign Policy establishment is not happy about these developments. They don't want Germany to become more dependent on Russian gas because commerce builds trust and trust leads to the expansion of trade. As relations grow warmer, more trade barriers are lifted, regulations are eased, travel and tourism increase, and a new security architecture evolves. In a world where Germany and Russia are friends and trading partners, there is no need for US military bases, no need for expensive US-made weapons and missile systems, and no need for NATO – Mike Whitney, Washington-based journalist writing in Eurasian Review.

The above two viewpoints reflects the challenge the world face today to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to change militarist mindsets that could easily be triggered by corporate media that may have a vested interest in promoting military spending rather than sustainable development cooperation. What is happening in Germany is a classic example of what Noam Chomsky calls “manufacturing consent” by the media.

In this month's issue we decided to look at how the Ukraine-Russia conflict could impact not only the achievement of the SDGs by 2030, but also on the socio-economic post-pandemic recovery. Two articles by Thalif Deen looks at while world's arms merchants would be the ultimate winners of the Russia-Ukraine conflicts, many poor communities far away from the theatre of war will be the losers as development aid to the world's poor will be cut by richer nations. Meanwhile, African countries are concerned by rising farm prices as Lisa Vives reports.

In our viewpoints, Professor Rafiqul Islam points out how the hypocrisy of the powerful has fractured the international legal order, and occupational health specialist Mahinda Seneviratne looks at the fault lines of the COVID-recovery where migrant workers are left exposed to higher health and safety risks.

Two articles on media and SDGs address the challenges of going beyond the mainstream media systems to reflect peoples' perspectives on development issues. One addresses the role of radio while the other, looking at New Zealand's experience, ask the question whether the anti-vax movement has hijacked legitimate criticism of the mainstream media?

In our feature focus, Malaysian Islamic scholar Dr Chandra Muzaffar argues passionately for understanding each other for solving today's conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne – Editor, Sustainable Development Observer



Laser Weapon System (LaWS) on USS Ponce. Photo:
Credit: US Navy

The Ultimate Winners in Ukraine are the World's Arms Merchants

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS (IDN) — The war in Ukraine may not be a head-on conflict between Russia and the United States but it is certainly a battle between the heavily-stocked military arsenals of two of the world's major military and nuclear powers.

At a press briefing March 22, UN Secretary-General António Guterres was forcefully explicit when he said the war in Ukraine “is unwinnable”.

“Sooner or later, it will have to move from the battlefield to the peace table. This is inevitable. The only question is: How many more lives must be lost? How many more bombs must fall? How many more Mariupols must be destroyed? How many more Ukrainians and Russians will be killed before everyone realizes that this war has no winners—only losers?” he asked.

But judging by the staggering array of weapons deployed since the Russian invasion on February 24, the ultimate winners will likely be the world's arms merchants, as defense stocks have been rising against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

Armed with Western weapons systems, mostly from the US, the Ukrainian armed forces are giving the Russians a run for their rubles. But Russia's military forces are armed with some of the most sophisticated weapons compared with Ukraine, including hypersonic missiles deployed for the first time March 19.

Still, the Biden administration, which is trying to boost the Ukrainian military, has authorized an additional \$800 million in military aid to Ukraine bringing the total to more than \$2.0 billion, which is part of a hefty \$13 billion US aid package, both military and humanitarian.

US President Joe Biden, who called Russian President Vladimir Putin “a war criminal” and “thug” announced a new security assistance package that includes 800 anti-aircraft systems, “primarily to stop attacking planes and helicopters before they destroy more of Ukraine”; 9,000 anti-armour systems to destroy tanks and armored vehicles; 7,000 small arms, including machine guns and grenade launchers; and 20 million rounds of ammunition.

At a press briefing March 19, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: “We're also helping Ukraine acquire longer-range anti-aircraft systems and munitions, at President Zelenskyy's request. And I have been in almost daily contact with Foreign Minister Kuleba, coordinating to respond swiftly to Ukraine's most urgent needs.”

Blinken also told reporters that “our allies and partners continue to step up with their own significant shipments of security assistance. I've authorized more than a dozen countries to provide US-origin equipment, and dozens more around the world have provided security assistance of their own.”

“I'd also note that, in addition to assistance from the Department of Defense, we're sending support from other agencies, including \$10 million worth of armored vehicles from our own Diplomatic Security Service,” he noted.

As for weapons from Western powers, the *New York Times* said March 3: The Dutch are sending rocket launchers for air defense. The Estonians are sending Javelin antitank missiles. The Poles and the Latvians are sending Stinger surface-to-air missiles. The Czechs are sending machine guns, sniper rifles, pistols and ammunition.

Even formerly neutral countries like Sweden and Finland are sending weapons. And Germany, long allergic to sending weapons into conflict zones, is sending Stingers as well as other shoulder-launched rockets.

In all, the *Times* pointed out, about 20 countries—mostly members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), but not all, are supplying arms to Ukraine. Britain's gift was the Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapon (NLAWs), a product of the Swedish-based Saab, but which is assembled in a factory in Belfast. According to the *New York Times*, Britain has sent 4,200 NLAWs to Ukraine, a weapon described as "one of the best short range defensive anti-tank weapons around".

All these weapons supplied to Ukraine—mostly as military or security assistance—have to be replaced by the donor nations sooner or later.

Dr Natalie J. Goldring, a Visiting Professor of the Practice in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, told IDN the US government is walking an extremely fine line - trying to defend Ukraine without being drawn into direct conflict with Russia. There are so many ways this could go badly.

"The US government seems to have assumed that its declared objective of helping Ukraine defend itself will be viewed in that light by Russian President Putin. Instead, Russia is viewing US and NATO weapons transfers as offensive acts. Undertaking transfers of defensive weapons is probably a risk worth taking, but it's important to consider the possible consequences and try to decrease the associated risks," she said.

Although much of the focus has been on conventional weapons for example, Russia's President Putin has already brought possible nuclear weapons use into the conflict by increasing the readiness of Russian nuclear forces. The risk of nuclear use because of accident, miscalculation, or President Putin's desire to "win" the war is unacceptably high, said Dr Goldring who also represents the Acronym Institute at the United Nations on conventional weapons and arms trade issues.

"We should learn from the current instability and fear of Russian nuclear weapons use. This should strengthen the world's understanding of the need for nuclear disarmament and the full implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Nuclear weapons can only exacerbate this conflict and risk enormous loss of life; they have no useful role," she noted.

Analysts often draw a distinction between offensive and defensive weapons. Ukraine is a strong example of why the best answer to fighting a tank is often not another tank. In Ukraine's case, they're using anti-tank weapons effectively to defend themselves against Russian attacks, in a situation where they're vastly out-armed.

"The immediate pressure to help arm Ukrainian forces to defend themselves is intense. But it is also important to remember to think about the longer term. The US supplied Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the mujahideen in Afghanistan and was subsequently unable to account for many of them", warned Dr Goldring. "In the rush to get weapons to Ukrainian forces, it's not clear what the safeguards are. Who will be making sure these weapons get to their intended recipients? How will we keep these weapons from falling into Russian hands?"

And once again, she pointed out, the incentives are powerful for the US weapons manufacturers to continue to be actively involved in selling weapons wherever the US government permits. "It's not surprising that Raytheon and Lockheed Martin's stock prices have surged since the Russian invasion," Dr Goldring said.

On February 28, the London Guardian ran story under the headline: “Defense and cybersecurity stocks climb amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine”.¹ Raytheon Technologies, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman were cited as registering increases in their share prices in the stock market.

Meanwhile, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effect in populated areas heightens the likelihood of unlawful, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks. These weapons have a large destructive radius, are inherently inaccurate, or deliver multiple munitions at the same time.

“Long-term effects of their use include damage to civilian buildings and critical infrastructure, interference with services such as health care and education, and displacement of the local population.” HRW said Russia and Ukraine should avoid using explosive weapons in populated areas. Every country, including Russia and Ukraine, should support a strong political declaration that includes a commitment to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effect in populated areas.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing March 21, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said “since February 24, more than 10 million people have been forced from their homes in search of safety and security – nearly a quarter of the population of Ukraine”.

This includes an estimated 6.5 million men, women and children who are internally displaced, and that’s according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and nearly 3.5 million people who have crossed international borders out of Ukraine as refugees, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

Humanitarian organizations are concerned about the risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation and IOM has scaled up its trafficking prevention measures, providing verified and safe information to refugees and third-country nationals on the move. IOM has also reinforced its regional hotlines to help people with important safety and resource information.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says it has verified six additional reports of attacks on health care in Ukraine yesterday. As of 20 March, WHO has verified 52 attacks on health care in 25 days. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 22 March 2022] (SDGs 1-9)

** Thalif Deen is a former Director, Foreign Military Markets at Defense Marketing Services; Senior Defense Analyst at Forecast International; and military editor Middle East/Africa at Jane’s Information Group, US.*

Ukraine War Threatens Development Aid to World’s Poorer Nations

By Thalif Deen



A group of school children walk hand in hand after school in rural Nepal. Photo Credit: World Bank/Aisha Faquir

UNITED NATIONS (IDN) — UN Secretary-General António Guterres has warned that the current devastating war in Ukraine has an equally destructive impact on the outside world: an assault on the world’s most vulnerable people and countries.

The worst affected are the world’s poor as food, fuel and fertilizer prices are skyrocketing while one of the world’s major bread baskets, Ukraine, is being bombed - a country which alone provided more than half of the World Food Programme’s (WFP) wheat supply.

The conflict in Ukraine is also undermining development aid provided by Western nations to some of the world’s poorest nations.

In a report released March 18, the London-based humanitarian organization Oxfam said the global repercussions of the Ukraine crisis - already being felt in fast-rising food, commodity and energy prices - could undermine official aid efforts to help people in other humanitarian hot-

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/28/defense-cybersecurity-stocks-russia-ukraine-eu>

spots. Oxfam is concerned that some donor governments are already shifting aid budgets to pay for Ukrainian assistance and the costs of hosting more than 3 million people who have fled the war-torn country recently.

Other Western donors are holding back funding approvals for other crises, said Oxfam, while it urges donors to meet Ukraine's needs with new funding, particularly Official Development Assistance (ODA). Oxfam says it is aware that the European Union (EU) has more than halved its humanitarian funding to Timor-Leste, and that some donors have indicated they will cut their ODA to Burkina Faso by 70 percent, with other West African countries being warned in advance.

Meanwhile, German donors have indicated they cannot decide on pending funding proposals until decisions on Ukraine have been taken, which risks humanitarian assistance in other parts of the world, said Oxfam.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines ODA as government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries. The DAC adopted ODA as the "gold standard" of foreign aid in 1969 and it remains the main source of financing for development aid but it also remains in jeopardy primarily because of the crisis in Ukraine and its fallout.

A long-standing United Nations target is that developed countries should devote 0.7% of their gross national income to ODA.

According to Oxfam, Nordic donors have pledged €300 million for Ukraine - most of it by Norway - but if Norway's contribution is not made additional this will claim almost 40 percent of Norway's combined humanitarian aid budget and force deep cuts elsewhere. Sweden has allocated new funds but there are fears that its aid budget could be "adjusted" ahead rather than additional resources being found.

Oxfam also said that Denmark has confirmed that its support will come out of its existing aid budget with its Minister for Development warning of "some tough choices and re-prioritization"—likely delaying or cancelling programs in other crisis responses.

Still, "amid the generous public outpouring of support in Europe and beyond", Oxfam applauds Spain, the Netherlands and France for new funding to support refugees from Ukraine and is calling on them to publicly confirm these funds will be additional to their other humanitarian budget lines.

Italy has said it will refund the €110 million allocated from its existing aid budget for refugees from Ukraine, but no official commitment has yet been made. The UK government has matched a public appeal with £25m - its largest ever donation - and opened a scheme to reimburse families who volunteer to house Ukrainian refugees.

According to Oxfam, Europe has a spotted track record. In 2015 - when half as many refugees made their way to Europe from Syria and beyond - donor countries responded by counting on average 11 percent (\$15.4 billion) of their aid commitments to pay to support them.

"We must avoid a repeat where some rich countries end up effectively spending their aid budgets domestically," said Head of Oxfam's EU Office, Evelien Van Roemburg. She said only 3 percent of funds have so far been given to the UN's \$6 billion appeal to relieve widespread hunger happening now in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan.

"The people of Yemen and Syria, all those millions now facing desperate hunger across East and West Africa, those still in camps in Bangladesh and beyond, those hit hardest by COVID and climate change - they must not be penalized and left paying the price of our duty of care toward the people of Ukraine".

"After rightfully spending trillions to save their economies from the impacts of COVID-19, we reject any assertion that helping a refugee from Ukraine or a hungry Somalian farmer is a choice," Van Roemburg said.

Asked about the shortfall in wheat supplies from Ukraine, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters March 17 WFP gets about 50% of its wheat supplies from Ukraine. WFP, he pointed out, buys on the open market. "The problem is that the commodities prices are going up all over the place. And so, I think it's adding, if I'm not mistaken, about \$71 million a month to their monthly purchase bill."

Meanwhile, Guterres said last week that Russia and Ukraine represent more than half of the world's supply of sunflower oil and about 30 percent of the world's wheat. He said grain prices have already exceeded those at the start of the Arab Spring and the food riots of 2007-2008. The FAO's global food prices index is at its highest level ever.

Forty-five African and least developed countries import at least one-third of their wheat from Ukraine [or] Russia – 18 of those countries import at least 50 percent. This includes countries like Burkina Faso, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 18 March 2022] (SDGs 1 and 2)

Ukraine-Russia Crisis: Africa Concerned About Consequences for the Continent's Economy

By Kester Kenn Klomegah

MOSCOW | RABAT (IDN) — In an emailed interview with IDN's Kester Kenn Klomegah, Dr Mohamed Chtatou, a senior professor of Middle Eastern politics at the International University of Rabat (IUR) and Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, discusses Africa's position on Russia-Ukraine crisis, its effects on Africa as well as the implications for future relations. Here are excerpts from the interview:



Dr Mohamed Chtatou. Photo:Credit: The African Exponent

Q: What would be the future relations with Russia for African states that opposed Russia and those that support Russia in Ukraine?

A: Africa represents more than 25% of the seats in the UN General Assembly. In a vote on a resolution condemning Russian military aggression, only Eritrea voted against the resolution, while 28 African countries condemned the Russian action. But seventeen African countries abstained and eight other countries did not take part in the vote. How to explain the different positions within the African continent?

We should rather speak of "the" Africans, insofar as Africa is not a monolithic block and the contingency of international relations means that many reactions are due to national issues. Kenya's reaction at the UN Security Council is enlightening in this respect: the Kenyan representative calmly recalled that the African continent had been colonized by the great European powers and that the populations had been separated by the borders drawn, but that this did not mean that there were incessant wars because the African states had learned to live with this division. This is a good lesson for Russia.

We can see that the current situation is summed up by the power games between the West and Russia. Europe is more present in the discourse than in the Middle East, but there is no distinction made between NATO and the West. It is interesting to follow the distinction that could be made between the cautious diplomatic positioning of the diplomats and the more assertive and clearly pro-Russian public opinions. They have nothing to do with a form of third way.

On the contrary, they share with Russia a rejection of Western values and denounce a form of Western hypocrisy, which condemns the invasion of Ukraine but has not hesitated to intervene in Syria, Libya or Afghanistan. The double standard is denounced. From the Afro Barometers, we see that the share of positive popular perceptions of Russia and China has increased significantly over the past five years. This reflects Russia's economic, political and military commitment, but also the role of its propaganda media.

There is also some African ambiguity about Russia, with the public seeing Putin as a strongman who would therefore have the right to decide on a country's future security alliances, while being very concerned about their sovereignty. It seems to him that there is a great deal of Russian political mythology, disseminated and maintained by Putin, that is shared by African populations: moral equivalence between Russian and NATO interventions, strong anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, the politics of humiliation, the feeling that history is written by the victors. All this will be interesting to follow.

Wheat and other grains are once again at the center of geopolitics after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. With both countries playing a major role in the global agricultural market, African leaders need to pay attention.

Agricultural trade between the continent's countries and Russia and Ukraine is significant. African countries imported \$4 billion worth of agricultural products from Russia in 2020. About 90% of these products were wheat, and 6% were sunflower oil. The main importing countries were Egypt, which accounted for almost half of the imports, followed by Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Kenya and South Africa. Similarly, Ukraine exported \$2.9 billion worth of agricultural products to the African continent in 2020. About 48% of these products were wheat, 31% corn, and the rest was sunflower oil, barley and soybeans.

Russia and Ukraine are major players in the global commodity market. Russia supplies about 10% of the world's wheat, while Ukraine produces 4%. Collectively, this represents almost the entire wheat production of the European Union. This grain is intended for domestic consumption and export markets. Together, these two countries account for a quarter of global wheat exports; in 2020, they amounted to 18% for Russia and 8% for Ukraine.

These two countries are also key players in the corn sector, with a combined production of 4%. However, when it comes to exports, Ukraine and Russia's contribution is much larger, with 14% of global corn exports in 2020. They are also among the leading producers and exporters of sunflower oil. In 2020, Ukraine's sunflower oil exports accounted for 40% of global exports, compared to 18% for Russia.

Russia's military action has caused panic among some analysts, who fear that the intensification of the conflict could disrupt trade, with serious implications for global food stability.

I share these concerns, particularly with regard to the consequences of a spike in global grain and oilseed prices. These are among the driving forces behind the rise in global food prices since 2020. This is mainly due to droughts in South America and Indonesia, which have led to crop failures, and increased demand in China and India.

The disruption of trade, due to the invasion, in this important Black Sea grain-producing region would contribute to higher international agricultural commodity prices, with potential negative impacts on global food prices. An increase in commodity prices was visible only days after the conflict began.

This is a concern for the African continent, which is a net importer of wheat and sunflower oil. In addition, there are concerns about drought in some parts of the continent. The disruption of shipments of essential commodities would only add to the general concern about food price inflation in a region that imports wheat.

Q: Watching the war in Ukraine, what are the likely consequences for the African economy?

A: The war in Ukraine has, undoubtedly, terrible consequences on the African economy: increase in the price of gas, oil, agricultural raw materials... The invasion of Ukraine by Russia risks destabilizing the African economy still in remission of the COVID 19 pandemic.

In an interconnected world, any conflict can have repercussions beyond the battlefield. Africa will not be spared the economic and political consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, observes the continent's press.

The lasting relationship that Russia has built with Africa will be put to the test by the current crisis in Ukraine, as indicated by analysts at the Pan-African website *Africanews*. In the African press, the most glaring concern is about grain imports from Ukraine and Russia and the fear of

disruptions in supply and prices, says *Africanews*. The Continent has the same analysis, recalling the importance of Russian wheat.

The outlook for African countries is bleak in the wake of the war in Ukraine. The cessation of exports of cereals, including wheat, and other agricultural inputs, will hit most of them hard, as they are already facing a structural food crisis (climatic disturbances, conflicts) or have been considerably weakened by price increases and stock market speculation on essential products.

Moscow and Kiev account for 34% of trade in wheat, a commodity that has increased by 70% since the beginning of the year. The countries around the Mediterranean are suffering greatly. For Egypt, this represents 80% of imports. It is the largest importer of wheat in the world (12 million tons). The country has three or four months of stock, estimates Jean-François Loiseau, president of the French cereal interprofession Intercéréales. The price of bread has jumped by 50% since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Cairo is considering an increase in the price of the subsidized wafer intended for low-income earners. A risk not taken since the bread riots of 1977.

This is a source of concern for other countries in the region, such as those in the Sahel and West Africa, historically net importers of food. Algerians, for example, remember the riots of 2011 following a sudden surge in oil and sugar prices that spilled over into other consumer goods. In some areas of Algiers, stores were stormed by groups of young people. Demonstrations broke out 250 km away in the city of Béjaïa, in Kabylia, and as far away as Constantine, the capital of the east of the country. However, Algiers is hoping to cushion this shock with additional earnings from gas exports, just like Morocco for phosphates, whose price is rising.

Q: *Do you think the African Union (continental organization) has reacted authoritatively over Russia's special military operation in Ukraine? Under these circumstances, what challenges and lessons has the current crisis offered African countries?*

A: The current Chairman of the African Union and President of the Republic of Senegal, H.E. Macky Sall, and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, are following closely the developments in Ukraine and are particularly concerned about reports that African citizens on the Ukrainian side of the border are being denied the right to cross the border to safety.

Both Presidents reiterate that all persons have the right to cross international borders during conflict and, as such, should have the same rights to cross the border to safety from the conflict in Ukraine, regardless of their nationality or racial identity.

Reports that Africans are subject to unacceptable differential treatment are offensive and racist and violate international law. In this regard, the Presidents urge all countries to respect international law and to show equal empathy and support to all people fleeing war, regardless of their racial identity.



Ukrainian refugees crossing into Poland.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

** Kester Kenn Klomegah is a frequent and passionate contributor to IDN. During his professional career as a researcher specialising in Russia-Africa policy, which spans nearly two decades, he has been detained and questioned several times by federal security services for reporting facts. Most of his well-resourced articles are reprinted in several reputable foreign media.*

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews –on19 March 2022]



Somali women and children stand outside temporary tents in the Dagahaley refugee camp near the Kenya-Somalia border. Photo Credit: UNICEF/Kate Holt

Africa Anxious About Rising Farm Prices Due to Russia-Ukraine Crisis

By Lisa Vives

NEW YORK (IDN) — Wheat and other grains are back at the heart of geopolitics following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both countries play a major role in the global agricultural market.

That was the clear-eyed assessment of Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz), a member of the Presidential Economic Advisory Council, and a visiting research fellow at South Africa's University of the Witwatersrand.

According to the economist, African countries imported agricultural products worth \$4 billion from Russia in 2020. About 90 per cent of this was wheat and 6 per cent was sunflower oil. At the same time, Ukraine exported \$2.9 billion worth of agricultural products to the African continent in 2020.

But Russia's military action has raised fears that the conflict could disrupt trade with significant consequences for global food stability. "I share these concerns," writes Sihlobo, "particularly the consequences of big rises in the price of global grains and oilseed. They have been among the key drivers of global food price rises since 2020."

He attributed higher costs to dry weather conditions in South America and Indonesia causing poor harvests combined with rising demand in China and India. A disruption in trade would add to higher prices for farm goods. Rising prices were already evident just days into the conflict, Sihlobo said.

To top it off, parts of the African continent, a net importer of wheat and sunflower oil, are struggling with drought. Kenya's agricultural lands, for example, are becoming dried out and barren as weather patterns change. Drought has left farmers without the crops they have relied on for generations.

For farmer Safari Mbuvi, it's a devastating blow. He sank 50,000 Kenyan shillings (US\$439) in this season alone in planting. "Since I was young, my father used to get a bounty harvest in this farm, but now, there seems to be a change in climate and the rains are no longer dependable," he told the AP news service.

"I will not harvest anything, not even a single sack of maize is possible. I have cultivated four or slightly above three acres and the expense I incurred is not recoverable. And I am not the only one. Every farmer in this area has lost everything."

From an African agriculture perspective, the impact of the war between Russia and the Ukraine will be felt in the near term through the rise or fall of farm product prices. A rise in prices will be beneficial for farmers, Sihlobo said. This will be particularly welcome given higher fertilizer costs

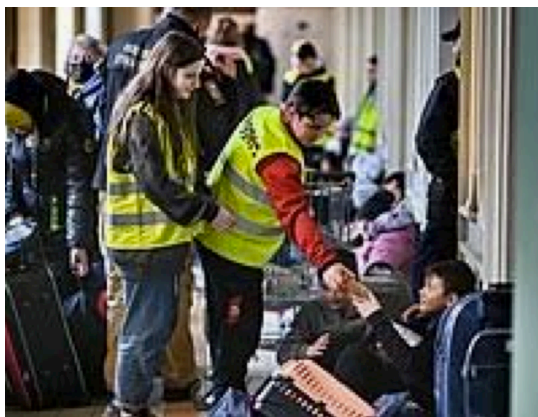
which have strained farmers' finances. But rising commodity prices are bad news for African households, the agricultural sector and food security which have already experienced food price hikes over the past two years.

"There's still a lot that's not known about the geopolitical challenges that lie ahead. But for African countries there are reasons to be worried given their dependency on grains imports," wrote Sihlobo for The Conversation, a network of media outlets. "In the near term, countries are likely to see the impact through a surge in prices, rather than an actual shortage of the commodities."

Other wheat exporting countries such as Canada, Australia and the U.S. stand to benefit from any potential surge in demand.

Meanwhile, the rising price of oil on global markets - sparked by the crisis in Europe - will have a direct impact on the cost of transport and fuel prices - now already at record levels, South Africa's automobile association predicts.

Much to the disappointment of the IMF, Nigeria has already backed away from its plans to cut fuel subsidies after planned protests from labor unions and opposition parties. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 01 March 2022] (SDGS 2 and 12)



Feeding refugees Ukrainians (left) and Africans (right). Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

WAR WILL FURTHER PUSH BACK THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – WHICH ONE? TAKE YOUR PICK.



The Ukraine Crisis Amid Fractured International Legal Order — Hypocrisy of the Powerful

Viewpoint by M Rafiqul Islam

SYDNEY (IDN) — The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine once again has solicited world attention to the international legal order that has repeatedly been fractured by powerful states in the post-cold war era. Obviously, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is illegal in international law and a clear violation of the peremptory norm of prohibition of force in international relations and non-intervention under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.



Emeritus Professor Rafiqul Islam

The West has reacted angrily and held Russia responsible for violating Ukraine's sovereignty in total disregard of international law and bombarded with sanctions. In an identical way, Russia opposed and condemned the US and its allies' invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The world is too familiar with the military posturing of powerful states imposing their vested interests despotically by sheer power. These military adventures and reactions by powerful states exhibit the hallmark of the cold war that has coerced and vandalised the international legal order, the bedrock of world peace and security.

The end of the cold war in the early 1990s offered a new world order with hopes to move from independence to interdependence and confrontation to collaboration. It created a new unipolar world with the US as the only superpower. The US was in a unique position to establish a peaceful world.

Instead, the US opted to elevate itself to the status of an 'exceptional state', strengthened its alliance with other western and non-western states and pursued its so-called 'assertive multilateralism' to advance its foreign policy, strategic goals, and economic interests.

It projected a self-perpetuating image of a benevolent leader in international rule-making and standard-setting that were implemented selectively only to advance its strategic interests through military might, economic coercion, and veto power in the UN Security Council (SC). It continually exonerated itself from abiding by international legal principles it promotes for others.

This unilateralism fragmented international law and weakened its regulatory authority to the extent that it can no longer ensure the peaceful co-existence of states, powerful and weak alike. This is how the US and its western allies pursued their version of a 'just world order' that was a major contributor to the downfall of the world order propelled by the rule of law.

The sovereign equality of states is meant to address global power imbalance, protect vulnerable small states from powerful states. This legal order is being routinely undermined by powerful states, which have introduced a pervasive tendency of reducing the international legal order subservient to their self-interest. Their asymmetric power has grown so exponentially that has rendered them more equal than others. Small states, which are not enamoured with their hierarchical power, are less sovereign and overwhelmed by predatory power, as has happened in the invasion of Ukraine, 20 years after the invasion of Iraq.

Is Putin's invasion different from the Iraqi invasion? Is Putin's recognition of the Ukrainian breakaway republics worse than the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? How would the West and its allies justify their violent occupation of Iraqi and Palestinian territories against Putin's forcible occupation of Ukraine? How would the former justify 53 US vetoes on SC resolutions criticising Israeli illegal occupation of Palestinian territory against Russian veto on SC resolution condemning Russian aggression on Ukraine?

The chronology of manufactured wars against those states not submissive to the will of powerful states suggests that what Putin has started in Crimea and Ukraine, the West has already done that to destroy Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan with absolute impunity in the post-cold war era.

It is not only Putin who violates international law. The US too refuses to be bound by international law. We well remember Bush's claim that 'the UN Charter is dead, and the US is not bound by international law' (The Observer, London, 14 July 2002, p 14). This rejection of the international order has exposed its arrogant unilateralism in zealously guarding its authoritative militaristic and dogmatic patriotic behaviour.

Anti-war public demonstration around the world including in Russia has not deterred Putin in the same way unprecedented worldwide public demonstration failed to deter Bush, Blair, and Howard from attacking Iraq on the false pretext of possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). These western leaders were never brought to justice for committing war crimes.

Putin has regarded Ukraine's bid to join NATO a threat to Russian security and asked the West not to expand NATO to its backyard. Putin's demand is an interference with the independent decision-making of Ukraine. But the West and its allies have been pursuing the same policy to prevent Iran from developing alleged nuclear weapons that the West thinks would destabilise the power balance in the Middle East, where Israel is the only nuclear power.

Iran has been bearing the full brunt of successive sanctions by the US and its allies to deny Iran its sovereign right that the US and other nuclear-weapon states take for granted. No nuclear state has signed and/or ratified the Nuclear Weapons Prevention Treaty 2017.

NATO, a cold war leftover, remains the western military muscle to dominate the world through gunboat diplomacy. The proposed NATO membership of Ukraine has led Putin to attack, which NATO has termed 'reckless'. NATO has forgotten what massacre it had inflicted on Libya in 2011 as the mercenary of the West.

The US claims that Putin is set to remove the present pro-West government of Ukraine by a pro-Russian government. This is precisely what the US and its allies did in Libya (and Iraq, attempted in vain in Syria) in violation of the SC resolution 1973 (2011).

Putin has been branded as a war criminal to be brought to justice. Neither Russia nor the US is a party to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The US did everything to frustrate the ICC. Bush enacted the American Service Members Protection Act 2002 prohibiting US cooperation with the ICC and allowing the President to use all means to release its nationals in ICC custody for committing ICC crimes.

It concluded agreements with states under intimidation requiring them not to surrender to the ICC any US nationals guilty of the ICC crimes. It threatened to veto the renewal of the UN-led peacekeeping operations if its peacekeepers were not granted immunity from the ICC prosecution. It refused entry of the ICC prosecutor to investigate whether the US troops committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

This write-up highlights the credibility crisis of the West in resisting Putin's aggression. Notwithstanding worldwide anti-war demand for peace and security, the post-cold war era is dominated by leaders with a cold war confrontationist mindset, who think they alone can solve world problems by force.

Consequently, the international legal order continues to eclipse under the shadow of power. The US and its allies first and now Putin have invented legitimacy of invasions through power yet opposing each other's invasion as illegal. This is how they have divided the world, swallowed international law, and vandalised the international order by provocative double standards and shedding crocodile tears for legitimacy with veiled ulterior geostrategic and arms trading motives. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 10 March 2022]

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Migrant farmworkers in the Italian region of Calabria. Photo Credit: ANSA/Quotidiano Del Sud

COVID-Recovery: Fault Lines Expose Migrant Workers to Higher Health and Safety Risks

Viewpoint by Mahinda Seneviratne

SYDNEY (IDN) — Disruptions from war, impacts of climate, and the growing inequities in wealth distribution are some main factors that drive over 160 million international migrant workers to seek work for a living in overseas countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) that migrant workers face in their host country while exposed to precarious work.

These conditions regularly expose these migrant workers to an unequal risk to their health and safety at work within and in host countries. From emergency physicians, other health care workers, and quarantine guards in the COVID-19 frontlines to the unrecognised essential workers in retail, hospitality, transport, agriculture, construction, and several other industries, migrant workers have borne an unequal share of illness and deaths. According to the limited published research now available from several countries where the necessary data was gathered.

Expert practitioners from four continents explored the impact at a special session on migrant workers' health at the 32nd Congress of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) in early February. The Congress is the major triennial gathering of the world's leading occupational health professionals to share knowledge, research, and practical experience. The event planned for April 2020 in Melbourne was postponed to a virtual Congress with the revised theme "Sharing solutions in Occupational Health through and beyond the Pandemic".

Various emerging workplace health issues such as the gig economy, climate change and heat stress, and the increasingly unpredictable future of work with rapid technological, demographic and social changes were given close attention at the Congress. There was renewed concern about the unknown toll of long-latency cancers and other serious diseases from exposure to the increasing number of hazardous substances in workplaces.

Silicosis, the long-known occupational disease that has claimed thousands of lives each year in India, China, South Africa, and several other low to middle-income countries for decades, was addressed at several sessions of the Congress. This deadly respiratory dust disease gained renewed attention before the pandemic after several artificial stone fabrication workers, mainly overseas-born migrants, in Australia and other high-income countries such as Spain, Italy, Israel, and the USA were diagnosed with an accelerated type of this incurable illness.

"The 164 million international labour migrants globally are at a greater risk of work-related illness, including psychiatric and physical morbidities as well as workplace accidents and injuries," said Professor Sally Hargreaves of the Migrant Health Research Group at the University of London, who recently reviewed and analysed studies on the occupational health and safety of

migrant workers. She expressed concerns that the health of migrant workers and its governance is politicised and remains at the margins of policymaking.

This is evident in several high-income countries with a large proportion of migrant workers in its workforce for several decades, where calls for focussed policy and programs on migrant worker health and safety have been largely ignored or only given ineffective piecemeal attention.

Dr. Hargreaves believes such attitudes are a mistake because "investment in the health of migrant workers aligns with the host country's commitments to promote health and can also result in gains in productivity as well as in public health."

With the FIFA World Cup soccer tournament kicking off later this year in Qatar, the toll of migrant construction workers in the deadly desert heat could be an own goal for the hosts, who have avoided close attention to their unsafe and unhealthy working conditions.

An Amnesty International report '*In the prime of their lives*', released at the height of the pandemic's second wave in 2021, drew attention to Qatar's failure to investigate, remedy, and prevent migrant workers' deaths. The human costs of building airconditioned stadiums over a long period in hot afternoon heat were evident, for example, in the association with excess cardiovascular deaths among migrant Nepali construction workers. The local *kafala* system of migrant-employer contracts requires those sponsoring foreign workers to place tight restrictions on changing employers. This traps foreign workers in abusive or exploitative work conditions in construction, domestic, and other service sectors with predominantly low-skilled migrant workers.

Migrant workers who perform the harsher outdoor manual labour tasks in the wealthy Persian Gulf countries are primarily from the Indian subcontinent, the largest source of migrant workers globally (south to south migration). Dr. Radheshyam Krishna KC, Migration Health Officer from the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) in Kathmandu, spoke on the cross-border migration of Nepalese workers to India, which has occurred for several decades. Cross-border migration for people from the western part of Nepal is one of the surviving strategies, and this kind of migration is also facilitated by the 1950s India-Nepal friendship treaty. He estimated that there were 3-4 million Nepalis in formal and informal sectors in India alone and drew attention to "... the high rate of children, girls, and women trafficked to sexual and other exploitative work without any legal recourse".

Vaccine nationalism has contributed to less than 10% of vaccination against COVID-19 in the African continent, where large populations regularly move across borders in search of work. "Impacts of transport disruptions, border restrictions, vaccination passports and expensive tests and quarantine costs added to the burden of stigma and discrimination faced by affected migrant workers in Africa", noted Dr. Barry Kistnasamy, Compensation Commissioner of the Department of Health in South Africa.

Social compacts such as the ILO's Decent Work, one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, can play an important role through multilateral agencies such as WHO and the international social security body—ISSA. Dr. Kistnasamy called for collaboration across migrant-sending, transit, and receiving countries so that culturally and linguistically appropriate information is available within migrant communities. This should be at point of exit and entry into countries and within their health, employment, and social services.

In several host countries, political opportunism, racist undertones, and other short-term priorities have marginalised and hidden migrant worker health and safety issues from much-needed government attention for decades. Not until the Covid-19 pandemic starkly exposed several fault lines and the social determinants that contributed to widespread inequity.

The pandemic also drew the sidelined 'industrial health' (occupational health) dealing with a work-related illness, disease, and disability closer to its much-deserved position as an integral component of public health. The workplace is now increasingly recognised as a key environment to control the airborne spread of an infectious illness that can easily affect large sectors of the community.

As wealthy host countries open borders, governments are taking steps to increase international migrant worker intakes to sectors that depend on their low-paid labour and bolster workforces with critical shortages of low-skilled workers. This should be an opportune time for

policymakers and health practitioners to give attention to the injustice, where vulnerable migrant workers who are regularly and unequally exposed to workplace hazards, are primarily seen as a dispensable cheap labour commodity.

Community-based cooperation and culturally sensitive programs can be an effective approach to provide quality services to the most vulnerable migrant workers. Dr Acran Salman-Navarro of the New York University School of Medicine showed how this was done in that city to prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders that are highly prevalent among migrant workers. Dr Salman-Navarro believes that bringing primary health care and occupational health services together can be applicable in several other industries with vulnerable occupations and contribute to the future of decent work.

Workplace health should no longer remain a 'blind spot' in health care systems and needs to be better integrated with public health programs and initiatives. As Dr Hargreaves noted, "COVID-19 is a wakeup call that says inclusive approaches to public health such as vaccine programs are crucial and that tackling the health needs of international migrant workers is an urgent public health priority."

Migrant workers generally do not have the organised bargaining power of trade unions nor the lobbying capability for political impact. But they are an increasingly crucial sector of the workforce and economy in many countries, where their health, safety and well-being with decent, dignifying and safe work conditions have for far too long been ignored and overlooked.

** The writer is an occupational health professional in Sydney, Australia. He chairs ICOH's scientific committee addressing the occupational health of informal workers.*

[Transmitted y IDN-InDepthNews on 06 March 2022]

FIFA World Cup's Hidden Crime



"IN THE PRIME OF THEIR LIVES"

QATAR'S FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE,
REMEDY AND PREVENT MIGRANT
WORKERS' DEATHS



Ever since FIFA awarded the 2022 World Cup to Qatar in 2010, there have been repeated allegations that migrant workers were dying in significant numbers while working on vast infrastructure projects, and with the World Cup just months away, the safety of workers in Qatar remains an issue of continued controversy hidden from global scrutiny.

Over the last decade, thousands of migrant workers have died suddenly and unexpectedly in Qatar, despite passing their mandatory medical tests before travelling to the country. Yet despite clear evidence that heat stress has posed huge health risks to workers, and one peer-reviewed study suggesting that hundreds of lives could have been saved with adequate protection measures, it remains extremely difficult to know exactly how many people have died as a result of their working conditions. This is because in most cases Qatari authorities do not investigate the underlying cause of their

death. Instead, death certificates usually report their deaths as simply due to "natural causes" or "cardiac arrest" - descriptions that are almost meaningless in certifying deaths - and thus no connection to their working conditions is made. As a result, bereaved families are denied the opportunity to know what happened to their loved ones. Importantly, in a context where many rely on remittances, this prevents them from receiving compensation from the employers or Qatari authorities. This Amnesty International Report draws attention to an issue that has been buried by FIFA corruption and international football community's indifference. Report could be downloaded from - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/4614/2021/en/>



Photo Credit: VCG | China Daily

Pandemic Pushes SDGs Further Out of Reach of Asia and The Pacific

Viewpoint By Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

BANGKOK (IDN) — 2022 marks the second anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, and while an end to the pandemic is in sight, it is far from over and the consequences will be felt for decades to come. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is becoming increasingly distant. The region must use the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a roadmap to a fairer recovery.

This year's edition of the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report* published by ESCAP reveals three alarming trends. First, the region is losing ground in its 2030 ambitions. In addition to our slowed progress, human-made crises and natural disasters have also hampered our ability to achieve the Goals. We are seeing the gaps grow wider with each passing year: at its current pace, Asia and the Pacific is now only expected to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2065 – three-and-a-half decades behind the original goalpost. The region must seize every opportunity to arrest this downward trend and accelerate progress.

Second, while headway on some of the Goals has been made in scattered pockets around the region, we are moving in a reverse direction for some of them at a disturbing rate. Although the climate crisis has become more acute, there has been regression on responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). And the news is marginally better for targets dealing with industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9) and affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) as they fall short of the pace required to meet the 2030 Agenda.

Lastly, the need to reach those who are furthest behind has never been greater. The region is experiencing widening disparities and increased vulnerabilities. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups -- including women, children, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, rural populations and poorer households -- are the victims of our unsustainable and non-inclusive development trends. Some groups with distinct demographic or socioeconomic characteristics are disproportionately excluded from progress in Asia and the Pacific. Understanding the intersection of key development challenges with population characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, health, location, migratory status and income is critical to achieving a more equitable recovery. We must work together as a region to ensure that no one or no country falls behind.

Although these trends are extremely worrying, there is some good news that helps our understanding of them: The number of indicators with data available have doubled since 2017. Collaboration between national and international custodian agencies for the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals has significantly contributed to enhancing the availability of data.

We must, however, continue to strengthen this cooperation to close the remaining gaps, as 57 of the 169 SDG targets still cannot be measured.

The sole focus on economic recovery post-pandemic is likely to hinder progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, which was already lagging to begin with. As the region strives to build back better and recover, the 2030 Agenda can serve as a guiding mechanism for both economic *and* social development. We – the governments, stakeholders and United Nations organizations that support them – must maintain our collective commitment towards a more prosperous and greener world. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 18 March 2022]

** The writer is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)*

Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid COVID-19

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC SDG PROGRESS REPORT 2022

Widening disparities amid COVID-19



This report analyses progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia and the Pacific and its five subregions. It also examines inequalities and vulnerabilities among different population groups. It assesses gaps which must be closed to achieve the goals by 2030 and leave no one behind. This assessment is designed to ensure the region's actions remain on target and shortcomings are addressed as they arise. It is a resource for all stakeholders involved in prioritization, planning, implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

Published by: UNESCAP – 17 March 2022

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<https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022#>

Global Inequality and Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) SDGs and Media's Challenge - from IDN Cast

In The Age of Fake News, Radio Aims for Trust and Accountability

By Arlene Mukoko



Radio studio broadcast in the Philippines.
Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

NEW YORK (IDN) — Radio, it is generally agreed, is the most useful medium of social communication for humanity. Radio waves go beyond borders, reaching everybody everywhere, and being a very affordable receiver compared to other forms of media. We remember the pioneers who contributed to the great invention of the radio.

Distinguished researchers such as Heinrich Hertz of Germany, Alexander Popov of Russia, Edouard Branley of France, the American of Serbian origin Nicola Tesla, the Italian Guglielmo Marconi, the British Oliver Lodge's, the Spanish Cervera Baviera, and the Indian Chandra Bose.

This year's World Radio Day theme has been divided into three sub-themes namely Trust in radio journalism, Trust and accessibility, and Trust and viability of radio stations

Acknowledging radio's ability to reach a wide audience, UNESCO sees it as a critical force to shape humanity, diversity and democratic discourse. With this year's celebration coming on the heels of a global pandemic where timely information is critical, radio can be invaluable. In Africa, for example, content in the area of health and safety as well as information that can help to frame and provide structure that can work for the benefit of many can be key.

Radio Day was first proposed by the Spanish Radio Academy in September 2010. This Spanish initiative had the unanimous support of the international radio industry and many important institutions from different countries. So, after a long debate held on Sept. 29, 2011 within the UNESCO Executive Board, the date was finally set for Feb. 13, which corresponds to the birth of the UN radio in 1946.

The special thing about radio is how relevant it still is in our daily lives. During those long drives for vacation or maybe to work, the radio is still with us, keeping us singing and keeping us informed. It's like a great friend and neighbor, one who's always there and never lets you down - except radio will never borrow your weed whacker and forget to return it.

Sadly, recent world events have eroded trust in the media, fueled by the circulation of false content rapidly spreading on social media.

Still, radio continues to be one of the most trusted and used media in the world.

If we look at history, radio dates back to the mid-19th century in the world. It worked with the help of sound waves and signals which transmitted the messages to a specified bandwidth. In India, Radio arrived in the early 20th century. However, it took several years before it became the popular medium of mass media.

Radio met the need for information dissemination, especially for those citizens unable to read newspapers; Those who were unable to read advertisements and newspapers were able to listen and understand things after the emergence of radio. Among member states that include, Nigeria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, many stations have worked to keep communities abreast of the latest developments during the COVID-19 crisis.

In Ghana, with a population of over 32 million (Worldmeters.info), radio is the most prevalent medium according to Media Ownership Monitor with 481 stations across the country and 354 of them active providing key content for communities also in the area of sports and the arts. Meanwhile in Gabon with a population of over 2.2 million, according to Logfm.com, there are 14.

The power of radio has been no better demonstrated than during the coronavirus crisis, where, among other things, the medium has made it possible to ensure the continuity of learning, and to fight against misinformation, read the statement.

Even as much of the global media landscape appears to be dominated by visual and online services, the importance of radio is proved by the continued popularity of all genres of radio programming. UNESCO wrote: "Radio continues to be one of the most trusted and used media in the world, according to different international reporters." In cultivating this, they are charging member states to accomplish this through building Trust in Radio Journalism by cultivating independent and high-quality content, in the face of, "the present high-tempo digital age," with "verifiable information that is shared in the public interest."

Finally, UNESCO wants radio station to thrive and grow and so they've included a third category called, Trust and Viability of Radio Stations which looks to see them survive a financial crisis impacting the medium while transforming loyal audience engagement into financial sustainability. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 20 February 2022]



The scene in the grounds of NZ Parliament in Wellington early on in the anti-vaccine mandates protest. Photo: Credit: RNZ

Anti-Vax and ‘Freedom’ Movements Threaten to Hijack Legitimate Criticism of the ‘Mainstream’ Media

Analysis by Sean Phelan

WELLINGTON (IDN) — One striking feature of the “freedom convoy” protests in Ottawa, Wellington and elsewhere has been the intense antagonism towards “mainstream media” (MSM). These antagonisms are expressed not only in now familiar descriptions of MSM journalists as sinister agents of a wider power elite, coupled with pity or scorn for the befuddled “sheeple” who believe everything they hear in the media.

They can also take an uglier, more menacing form. Witness the clip circulating on Twitter of protesters spitting on CTV journalists in Vancouver. Or earlier reports of New Zealand journalists being “punched and belted with umbrellas” or harassed in person and online.

These kinds of encounters are becoming more common. Increased violence against journalists, particularly women journalists, has been a feature of the global rise of far-right politics. This anti-media rhetoric has a clear “us” versus “them” dynamic. People start to define their own identities in opposition to the “MSM”. The media are framed as enemies (one of a gallery of interchangeable enemies) in ways that destroy the distinctions between journalism and propaganda, journalism and ideology, journalism and politics.

This language is then normalised in far-right media channels, sometimes with considerable success that might leave one wondering about the precise location of the mainstream: a Livestream broadcast from one Facebook channel linked to the Wellington protests apparently had more views than the videos broadcast on *The New Zealand Herald’s* website.

The abuse and harassment of journalists trying to do their jobs are worrying. Journalists are right to suggest these attacks are an attack on democracy and the best democratic ideals of journalism. At the same time, the cultural politics driving the antagonism to mainstream media and journalism are not as straightforward as is sometimes assumed.

In an official public sphere preoccupied with online disinformation and misinformation, one could be forgiven for thinking the problems could be fixed if people stopped feeding the social media algorithms and affirmed their trust in corporate news media instead. It’s also not enough for journalists to insist (in good faith) they do nothing more than present balanced and objective news coverage - as if the vast academic literature documenting the problems with these professional rationalisations didn’t exist.

The increasingly reactionary connotations of contemporary references to the “MSM” need historical context. Like the “media” itself, the term “mainstream media” is a relatively recent invention. My research suggests academic scholars only started routinely referring to something called “mainstream media” from the 1980s onwards.

The term is nearly always taken for granted as if it is perfectly obvious what the mainstream media is. But only 20 or 30 years ago, the term was associated primarily with left-wing critiques of capitalist media, and proposals for alternative media models. We still hear those arguments today, and there are good reasons for critiquing mainstream media. The destructive impact of the market on contemporary journalism is more profound than it was in the 1980s and 1990s.

And there is an ironic dimension to the anti-media rhetoric of the convoy protesters, given that they benefit from the commercial appeal of “wall-to-wall mainstream media coverage”.

However, the meaning of media critique can become confused in a political context where the people who seem most critical of media and journalism are aligned to the far right.

This, in turn, can alter perceptions of the alternative. The online “rabbit hole” becomes a potential site of empowerment and agency—an archive of resources for mocking the conventions of “left-wing”, “woke” media. But just because the ideological connotations of “MSM” have shifted, it does not mean the differences between authoritarian and democratic media criticism dissolve.

On the contrary, making such distinctions is more important now than ever. Being able to thoughtfully analyse how various media construct or define the world we live in is vital for our democracy.

Our democracies would be in even more trouble than they already are if anyone voicing suspicion of mainstream media was dismissed as a conspiracy theorist. It would be a world where the far right has successfully monopolised the terms of media criticism.

Nonetheless, the politically confused nature of media criticism today is a symptom of a general ideological confusion that has accelerated during the pandemic and found another expression in the “freedom” convoys.

Talking points that might have once sounded inherently progressive start to float in unpredictable and chaotic ways. (A case in point: listening to one Livestream broadcast from inside the Wellington convoy, I heard what sounded like an attempt to link the rhetoric of the sovereign citizen movement to notions of Māori sovereignty and self-determination.)

Anyone committed to a culture of vibrant democracy needs to be alert to this ideological confusion. We need to minimise the chances of our own political and media critiques compounding the problem and be vigilant for reactionary rhetoric that loves to blur left-right boundaries.

Our defence of journalists against “aspirational fascists” should be unambiguous. But our democratic imaginations will be seriously impoverished if the public conversation is reduced to a Manichean alternative of wild, paranoid denunciations of the “MSM” versus unquestioning support of our present media systems. [Transitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 05 March 2022]

** The writer Dr Sean Phelan is an associate professor of communication at Massey University, New Zealand.*

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Campus of the University of Central Asia in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan.
Photo Credit: Sharofat Shafieva

University of Central Asia: Going Online and Quarantine Upsets Students

By Sharofat Shafieva

NARYN, Kyrgyzstan (IDN) — The University of Central Asia (UCA) is a unique institution that brings together students from across Central Asia and Afghanistan building bonds between young people in the region. But, the pandemic has disturbed this process and disappointed many new students

who were looking forward to this unique experience.

Mehrangez is a new student from Tajikistan who joined UCA last year to accomplish a major in communications and the media. The academic year of 2020-2021 at UCA started online for all students in the Khorog campus of Tajikistan and Naryn campus of Kyrgyzstan. Though the communications and media program is offered at the Naryn campus, the restriction of Covid-19 limited the travel of students to Kyrgyzstan. Thus, students from Tajikistan were asked to join the Khorog campus to start the courses online.

“As a new student, I wished to start the academic year on my based campus in Kyrgyzstan. But we were asked to join Khorog campus, where I spent a month in total isolation and a year with Covid limitation and restriction” says Mehrangez.

A private, not-for-profit, secular university, UCA was founded in 2000 through an International Treaty signed by the Presidents of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Kazakhstan, and His Highness the Aga Khan. The university works very closely with the Aga Khan Development Network, to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities. UCA has established its three Campuses away from major urban centres and they are on the historic Silk Road that is being revitalised today.

The University campus here in Naryn is a small community, where the buildings and facilities are clustered together, and shared by students and faculty. In total 170 students are studying in Naryn, and 42 of them are freshers, with 21 of them female.

To avoid the spread of Covid-19 within the campus, the university was in lockdown for most of 2020 and 2021. To protect the students and faculty from each other the university administration quarantined them for two weeks after returning to the campus.

“We were isolated for two weeks in our rooms, when we came to campus and were not allowed to go out of the room at all. As I’m a person who enjoys walking and getting some fresh air, meditating, and gaining energy and motivation for further studies, it was very tough for me to be in the room. First, I started to lose the motivation, and the more the days passed the more I felt physical and mental discomfort,” adds Mehrangez

Robin Higgins, the university counsellor of UCA in Kyrgyzstan acknowledges that for many people Covid was stressful. “There were mental health problems that developed from the worries, the social isolation and the constant uncertainty about studies, internet, health and finances,” he told IDN. “We also had many students who lost family members during the pandemic, so grief and loss were also part of this difficult journey.”

In addition, Higgins said, “many of our students became sick themselves with Covid and I suspect we might have some students who are still struggling with some of the after-effects of long Covid which can impact energy, focus and overall wellbeing”.

During the covid restrictions, Naryn campus followed the dining hall schedule with isolation areas. The University doctor was available 24/ 7 as well as the counsellors. Additionally, during the lockdown, students were allowed to walk outside only in the territory of campus for 30 minutes. Specific schedules for different cohorts were applied.

“I was longer in isolation than others. After the overall quarantine, I had to stay the extra 14 days as I visited the doctor and went out of campus twice. I constantly wanted to sleep and I was tormented by constant headaches. That reduced my concentration and I couldn’t study well. Moreover, the classes were taught online and my faculty thought of me as irresponsible and not an active student,” says Mehrangez, who was not used to the schedules of online classes.

“Some students enjoyed having more time reconnecting with family and community, but for many, the constant uncertainties created anxiety, panic and sometimes depression,” said Higgins.

Mehrangez admits, that she was in fact impacted by this. “I wouldn’t say the issues with mental health were life-threatening but they were highly affecting the quality of my life. After the 10 to 15 minutes of panic attacks, I felt broken and a lack of energy,” she explains. “I started to forget things quickly, which also influenced my grades.”

She is now happy that they have come back to offline classes. “I feel very well both physically and mentally,” she says with a smile. “Even my coursemates noticed that I look energetic and healthy. Moreover, my grades during the offline courses are better than during online.”

In the current academic year, Mehrangez is back to her base campus—which is Naryn—and feels much better compared to last year, when she was stuck at Khorog campus unable to cross the border. She is full of energy to do her studies and even takes some internship opportunities. Her concentration is good and she can focus more on her studies. The improvement of grades is also visible.

As Higgins says: “On the positive side, during these challenging times many students reached out to counsellors, friends, community supports and internet resources to understand their mental health and develop a tool-box of strategies for helping themselves and others to cope with these difficult situations.”

“I can take care of my health both mentally and physically,” says Mehrangez. “I started to develop the good habits like doing sport, eating healthy food and meditating.” [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 06 March 2022]

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Students at the IT lab of the Naryn campus of UCA. Photo Credit: UCA

Russia-Ukraine war: UN chief warns of global food system 'meltdown'

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned on Monday (Mar 14) that the world must act to prevent a "hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The secretary-general told reporters in New York that the war risks sparking far-reaching consequences for the global food supply that will have a devastating impact on the poorest.



Source: Channel News Asia - <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/world/russia-ukraine-war-un-chief-warns-global-food-system-meltdown-2564101>

Pandemic pushes 4.7 million more Southeast Asians into extreme poverty

About 4.7 million people in Southeast Asia fell into extreme poverty last year, even as countries are slowly recovering from the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This means that 23.1 million, or 3.4 per cent of Southeast Asia's 680 million inhabitants, are now living on less than US\$1.90 a day — a global standard set by the World Bank. The region saw rapid economic growth in recent years, albeit from a lower base compared to many other parts of the world. The number of people living on under US\$1.90 a day has risen for the second year in a row. Inequality could worsen across generations as retrenched workers stagnate and opportunities for the poor continue to slip away.

Source: Eco-Business - <https://www.eco-business.com/news/pandemic-pushes-47-million-more-southeast-asians-into-extreme-poverty/>

NATO Is Past Sell-By Date: Self-Serving Uncle Sam Is No Longer Europe's Best Guarantor

Given the destruction and damage caused by the Russia-Ukraine war right inside Europe, the big European powers, especially France and Germany, need to ask themselves a basic question: is NATO the answer to the Russian threat? Is the US the right helmsman for NATO, when European interests diverge widely from American ones? This is one reason why the Ukraine war has become so bloody and difficult to resolve. Once America became the prime sponsor of Ukraine, and compounded the problem by imposing the most draconian of sanctions against Russia — a country it once dealt with as an equal — there is no way the war could have been avoided. It may suit Uncle Sam to humiliate the Russians, but not Europeans who have to learn to live with them.

Source: Swarajya (India) - <https://swarajyamag.com/world/nato-is-past-sell-by-date-self-serving-uncle-sam-is-no-longer-europes-best-guarantor>

Ukraine's Indian Students Experience War Back Home

Ukrainian universities have started online classes for their students, many of whom are scattered throughout the world. But lessons are often interrupted by sirens, shelling and internet outages, and no one knows how long such classes will be feasible. Prior to the Russian invasion, India had almost 20,000 students in Ukraine — the largest group of international students in the country. Given the uncertainty of the situation in Ukraine, they are now campaigning to be allowed to continue their studies at universities in India.

Source: University World News (London) - <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220324141037582>

Food security implications of the Ukraine conflict

The conflict in Ukraine has plunged global food and energy markets into turmoil, raising high food prices even further. These increases, once passed on to domestic markets, will limit people's access to food. They will simultaneously increase operational costs for WFP, constraining its response at a time when people need it most.

Source: World Food Program

Published: 21 March 2022

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<https://www.wfp.org/publications/food-security-implications-ukraine-conflict>



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Issue No. 742 (1-15 Mar 2022)

Ukraine war darkens economic outlook

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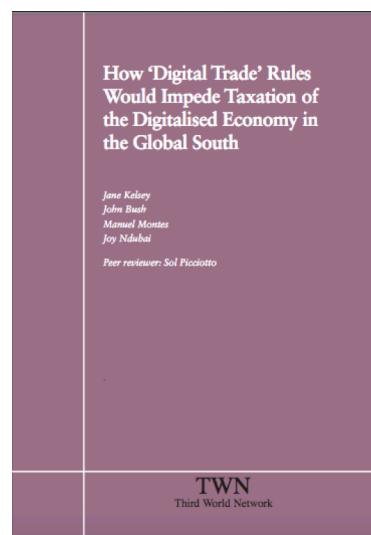
<https://www.twn.my/title2/twe/2022/742.pdf>

How 'Digital Trade' Rules Would Impede Taxation of the Digitalised Economy in the Global South

Strengthening the capacity of developing countries to protect and broaden their tax base is essential for financing sustainable development and achieving the SDGs. Governments need revenue to perform their roles and responsibilities as part of the social contract, which includes ensuring sustainable livelihoods. The creation of regional and national strategies for digital industrialization that can fuel the development of business, jobs and consumption, and generate revenue in a dynamic process, require support, investment, vision and policy space. The targets set by the SDGs underscore the urgency of developing an international system for the fair allocation of taxing rights over the incomes of multinational companies that are utilising digital technology, especially as large companies from developed countries hold monopolistic positions in their markets. This report is a guidance for developing country policy makers.

Source/Publisher: Third World Network (Malaysia)

Download copy from - <https://www.twn.my/title2/latestwto/general/News/Digital%20Tax.pdf>



Ukraine-Russia: Understanding the Concern of The Other

Viewpoint by Dr Chandra Muzaffar

SELANGOR, Malaysia (IDN) — The mainstream Western media is almost unanimous in demanding that Russia and Vladimir Putin stop their military operation in Ukraine immediately. This in their opinion is the only solution to the current conflict. However, if one attempts to understand how the current conflict had evolved, one would ask not Russia but the US led Western alliance to bring down the political temperature as a first step.

The roots of the present conflict have to be traced back to the end of the Cold War in 1991. The leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Russia's predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev felt that if peace is to greet the demise of the Cold War then the military posturing that signified that era should be buried once and for all.

For his part, Gorbachev was prepared to dismantle the Warsaw Pact that the USSR helmed which was his country's response to the US led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). All that he asked for in return was a firm commitment that NATO would not expand eastwards, extend its military power to the states adjacent to Russia thus posing a security threat to the latter.

Though the undertaking that Gorbachev sought was not engraved in written language, American leaders at that time like President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State Chris Baker had some notion of the gravity of the verbal pledge they had given to their Russian counterpart.

It is a pity that in the years that followed, the US government made no attempt to give substantive meaning to that pledge. On the contrary, in 1997, three former Warsaw Pact states, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, were invited to hold talks on joining NATO. On March 27, 2004, all three joined NATO, in spite of protests from elements in the Russian leadership. A few other states that were once part of the USSR and others allied to Russia in the past have now joined NATO.

It is against this background that one should view events in 2014 that exacerbated Russia-Ukraine ties in relation to NATO. These events are directly linked to the current conflict in Ukraine. The democratically elected president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, who was not prepared to follow blindly the dictates of Western powers was unceremoniously removed from power through the manipulation of parliamentary procedures and replaced by a new regime more inclined towards Washington.

Though the Yanukovich government was seriously flawed in some ways, his engineered ouster which strengthened the hands of neo-Nazi and fascist elements, spawned virulent anti-Russian rhetoric and spiked street violence has left deep scars upon Ukrainian society. The separatist tensions and turmoil in parts of Eastern Ukraine in the last eight years that have taken the lives of at least 14,000 people can only be understood within the context of this post-2014 scenario.

It is also this scenario that explains in part why Russian president Vladimir Putin acted the way he did in Crimea in Eastern Ukraine. The overwhelming desire among the vast majority of the people of Crimea to re-link their land to Russia affirmed in the 2014 Referendum is irrefutable proof of how ordinary citizens view their security and well-being.

This is why loose talk in Kiev and Washington in the last few months that "Ukraine should join NATO" or that "Ukraine should acquire nuclear weapons" in the end produced a backlash effect. It increased anxiety among both elites and citizens in Russia about security concerns.



Dr Chandra Muzaffar
Photo Credit: Wikimedia

It is important to emphasise yet again that this concern for their collective security as a nation and as a people is what Vladimir Putin, Sergei Lavrov and other Russian leaders have tried to convey to their counterparts in Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and indeed every other Western capital for more than 20 years since the end of the Cold War.

Simply put, Russia does not want a Western military alliance – NATO - perched at its gate. The West has refused to address this very legitimate concern. Worse, it has wilfully chosen to brush aside Russia's fear.

Bluntly put, Moscow has now been provoked to act. Since Washington in particular was not willing to use diplomacy to address Russia's fear, its concern, Moscow has opted for a special "military operation". Moscow's response is perfectly understandable. It is completely rational.

Perhaps we should all remind Washington and the West of a fragment of their own history to help them appreciate better what is happening now in Ukraine. In 1962, there was a huge international political crisis. We thought we were on the verge of a world war. The USSR had deployed missiles in Cuba, on the soil of its ally, facing their common foe, the United States. Cuba was just 90 kilometres from the US shoreline.

The US president, John Kennedy, saw it as an act of provocation. He wanted the missiles removed immediately. Otherwise, he would attack Cuba. After some negotiations, Cuban leader Fidel Castro requested his Soviet friends to remove the missiles. The Cuban crisis was defused.

In response to Castro's decision, Kennedy, it is alleged, undertook not to overthrow Castro through illegal means. Whether he kept his word or not, it was not really tested because Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 before he could complete his second term as US president. Some of his successors tried to undermine Castro but that is another story.

Cuba 60 years ago is relevant to the present situation in Ukraine. Just as the US did not want Russian missiles at its doorstep 62 years ago, Russia in 2022 does not want overwhelming Western military power at its gate today. The Cuban leadership understood what had to be done to assuage American fears. One hopes that the US and Western governments today realise why it is so important to allay a legitimate Russian concern about its security.



A US Navy P-2H Neptune of VP-18 flying over a Soviet cargo ship with crated Il-28s on deck during the Cuban Crisis. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

In a nutshell both situations demand an appreciation of that ancient truth found in all spiritual and moral traditions: do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you. It is a truth that has been described as the fundamental ethic in relations between human beings, communities, and states. It is, in plain language, the Golden Rule of Life. The US elite in particular has shown so little regard for this golden rule in international affairs. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 26 February 2022]

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