



**UNITED
HELP
UKRAINE**

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**U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
(U.S. Helsinki Commission)**

Congressional Briefing
Russia's Ecocide in Ukraine:
Environmental Destruction and the Need for Accountability
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2322
July 16, 2024, 2 pm

Statement of
Dr. Maryna Baydyuk
President and Executive Director
United Help Ukraine

Today I will speak on behalf of the non-profit, United Help Ukraine, and how the stories and information that our team receives on a daily basis informs our understanding of the immense environmental devastation and human impact caused by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Our organization's mission is to provide the people of Ukraine with critical support that will enable them to survive in the face of adversity, to defend and regain their sovereign territory, and to rebuild and thrive well into the future.

UHU is committed to maximizing the impact of contributions by providing humanitarian, medical and psychological assistance to those affected by the war. Additionally, we focus on raising awareness and advocating for Ukraine to remain a free, democratic and independent nation.

When considering the ecocide and environmental impacts of the war, various images and harsh realities come to mind:

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Water Pollution: Contaminated rivers and lakes affecting both human populations and wildlife.

Impacts on Soil and Biodiversity: Destruction of fertile land, leading to loss of plant and animal species.

Destruction of Land and Marine Ecosystems: Devastation of forests, wetlands, and coastal regions.

Air Pollution and Climate Change: Increased emissions and long-term effects on the global climate.

What ties together all of these issues is Russia's persistent targeting of Ukrainian civilian populations and infrastructure, especially in frontline zones, exacerbating the already challenging conditions during over two years of full-scale war. It's crucial to recognize that environmental destruction is directly aligned with the Russian Federation's goal to dismantle Ukraine and harm Ukrainians in every conceivable manner, including through the destruction of the land and environment valued by Ukrainians.

Allow me to discuss some of United Help Ukraine's programs that have identified these realities and provided innovative solutions as opportunities to combat ecocide.

As a non-profit organization continually assessing the evolving situation in Ukraine, we strive to respond promptly and adjust accordingly. One notable project born from such circumstances was our initiative in response to the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in southern Ukraine.

The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam not only had devastating effects on the local civilian population—resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives due to direct flooding—but also profoundly impacted wildlife, water supply, farming, energy, and the broader environment. The dam's destruction washed away vegetation, eroded riverbanks, and



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contaminated drinking water sources, along with polluting sediment and leaving behind human and animal remains.

As soon as the effects of the dam's destruction became clear, United Help Ukraine acted promptly by dispatching humanitarian and medical supplies to affected locals within days of the disaster. Our team also identified serious health and environmental risks posed by contaminated well systems, and took swift action to address these concerns by setting up water filtration systems in affected communities.

Focused primarily on rural areas in southern Ukraine, particularly in the Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk regions, the UHU team installed reverse osmosis systems capable of serving between 6,000 to 12,000 people daily with clean water. Due to their proximity to the front lines and Russia's disregard for international humanitarian law, these stations must actively avoid direct targeting and destruction. Moreover, they face ongoing challenges in maintaining connection to power, given Russia's targeting of the Ukrainian power grid.

It's important to note that in some villages and towns that have taken in internally displaced people, the population has doubled or even tripled, overwhelming the existing infrastructure, including the water supply. This sudden population increase places significant additional strain on water resources, exacerbating the challenges of providing clean and reliable water.

For over a year now, these stations have successfully provided local communities near the front lines with a vital resource—access to clean water, addressing a basic necessity that many rural communities urgently require.

Environmental devastation is a crucial issue for Ukrainians returning to their homes, especially poignant for those in recently liberated territories. Many return to find



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destroyed infrastructure, limited access to social services, and challenges in farming and land use.

United Help Ukraine addresses this issue by directly assisting people in frontline zones through a program that distributes seed packages. In 2023, we distributed over 5,000 packages containing a variety of seeds such as tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, melons, and others, each package containing more than 20 different types of seeds.

The full-scale invasion has had a profound impact on the Kharkiv region in the East, bordering Russia, where daily rocket attacks and extensive infrastructure damage have occurred. The seed program has been crucial for rural communities in this region, particularly as residents began returning after Ukrainian forces liberated occupied areas.

The demand for these resources has increased significantly over the past year, with our team distributing 12,000 seed packages in 2024. While the Kharkiv region remains a priority, recipients also include areas such as Zaporizhzhia, Sumy, Chernihiv, Dnipro, and Donetsk. Many recipients have shared with us how our projects enabled them to survive through these challenging times.

Addressing environmental impacts serves not only to meet essential needs for sustainability and self-sufficiency during wartime but also to uplift returning residents by including flowers in the seed packages, providing a symbol of resilience and optimism amid their enduring hardships. The connection to the land has been a vital element of Ukrainian resilience and resistance during this period.

By offering a sustainable means for Ukrainians to reclaim their liberated homes and restore green spaces amid the destruction caused by the Russian military, this initiative has become a unique form of resistance during these difficult times.

Through our work with United Help Ukraine and local partners, we witness daily the profound environmental devastation and human impact in Ukraine. The challenges



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posed by ecocide and deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure by Russia underscore the urgent need for sustainable solutions. United Help Ukraine's initiatives, from providing clean water in frontline communities to supporting agricultural recovery and advancing green energy solutions, exemplify resilience and innovation in the face of adversity. These efforts not only mitigate immediate crises but also lay the foundation for a sustainable and independent Ukraine.

Despite ongoing attacks on critical infrastructure affecting energy and the power grid, Ukrainians and local partners are steadfast in addressing environmental destruction and advancing sustainable solutions. United Help Ukraine started collaborations with American companies like Energy Select and Amicus Solar to foster a sustainable, energy-independent future. This partnership focuses on enhancing solar energy production and transitioning from unreliable Soviet-era systems. Solar initiatives support economic continuity, operate internally displaced persons (IDP) centers, and aid recovery efforts amidst the ongoing war.

Our organization, alongside hundreds of others in Ukraine and abroad, seeks solutions rooted in community empowerment. Ukrainians demonstrate a deep commitment to tackling these issues, evident in rebuilding efforts, wildlife initiatives, and the resilience of rural communities. Accountability and progress are essential as we confront the impacts of war, particularly in frontline zones where Russia disregards international law.

Sustainable, innovative approaches to energy and water sources are enabling Ukrainians to provide for themselves and support the local economy. By focusing on broader issues of ecocide and beyond, we emphasize the importance of respecting international law and protecting the environment.

Ultimately, providing Ukraine with everything it needs is the top priority to ensure that both the Ukrainian people and their land are protected as required. As we navigate this period of the war, the global community must stand in solidarity with Ukraine, supporting

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its path to stability, democracy, and environmental stewardship. Together, we can empower Ukrainians to rebuild their nation and safeguard their future.

Born in Kyiv, Ukraine, **Dr. Maryna Baydyuk** has successfully led United Help Ukraine as a Board Director since 2017 and as President since 2019. Since the full scale invasion, United Help Ukraine provided over 66 million dollars in humanitarian, medical, and psychological assistance to Ukrainians affected by the war.

She has received several prestigious honors both domestically and internationally, including the Order of Merit, 3rd Class, presented by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. This award is given to individuals for outstanding achievements in the fields of economics, science, culture, military, or political activities.

Furthermore, Dr. Baydyuk is a Research Professor in the Department of Biology at Georgetown University, where her work focuses on understanding the mechanisms of function and repair in the central nervous system, and where she leads advanced research on discovering novel drug treatments for multiple sclerosis.