

STORIES

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



OSNAT LUBRANI

"After eight years the crisis in Ukraine is at risk of being disregarded on a global scale"

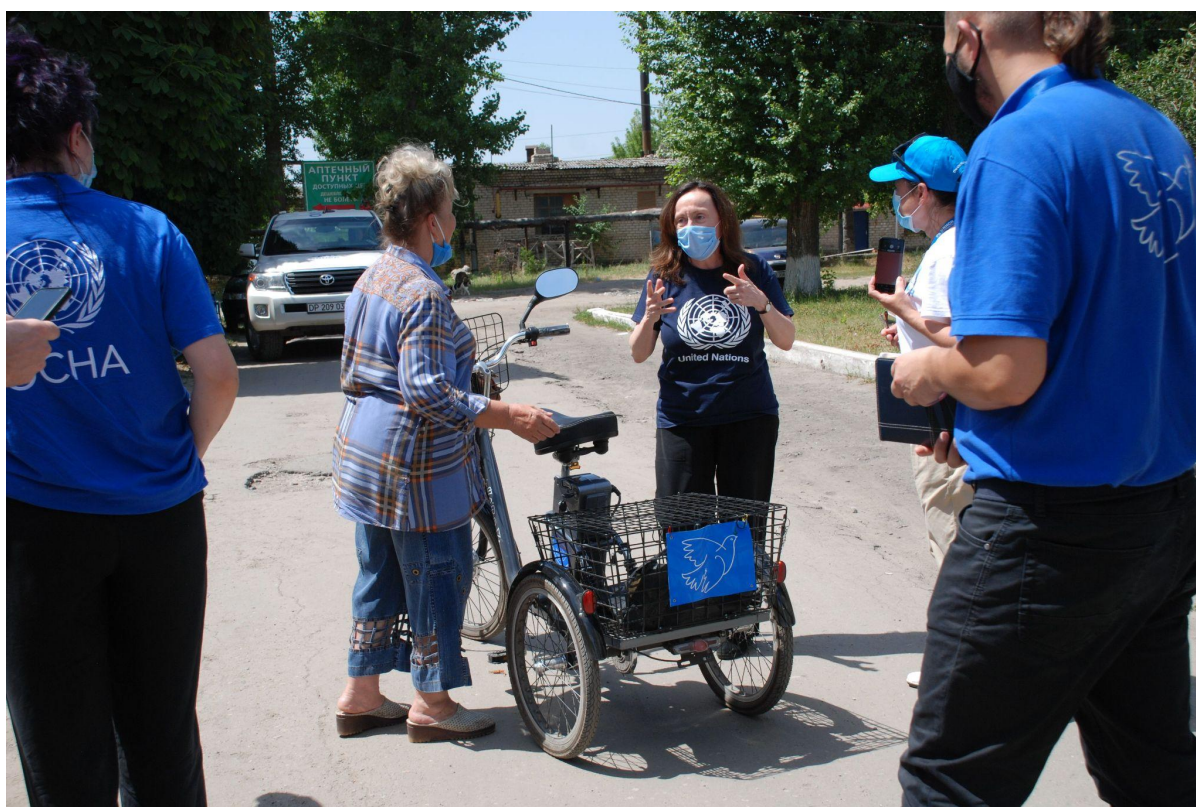
[The 3rd International Forum on Eastern Ukraine](#) organized by the international civil society platform CivilMPlus is fast approaching. The theme of the Forum is “Conflict resolution in Donbas as an intergenerational task: promoting justice, dialogue and reconciliation”. The Forum takes place on 25-26 2021 in a format of a teleconference between Kyiv and Berlin, and in partnership with the United Nations in Ukraine.

Ahead of the Forum, we talked to Ms. Osnat Lubrani, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine. United Nations in Ukraine is the partner of the Forum. In her interview, which we usually frame in the rules of life format, Ms. Lubrani talked about her hopes and visions with regards to the situation on Ukraine, shared

the stories he heard from people in the conflict, and admitted she became a little Ukrainian after over three years in the country.

Our job here in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world has a lot of diverse requirements but most important is that UN is here to help the people and help the country – we need to be sure that we are doing that effectively, efficiently, and that we are serving what people want and what they need. **To do what we do we have to stay very well connected to different parties**, of course we are working in a very close cooperation with the government but not only that. We need to be connected to the civil society, academia, and people, especially those effected by the conflict in Donbas. In my role as both UN Resident Coordinator and particularly Humanitarian Coordinator I do go very often to the east and I meet people to learn about the situation, so their issues and challenges are very close to my heart.

For us **it is important to imagine what it would have been if we were not here**, and we regularly receive feedback from our beneficiaries and our partners and there is a constant appreciation for what UN and its partners and donors have been providing. Now, after eight years, we need to think and plan the assistance in such a way that we see the transition from humanitarian support to the sustainable solutions, both economical ones and solutions in terms of conflict. And I think that is something that people really want.



What is mostly on my mind right now, is very much about the impact of the COVID-19 on Ukraine and the double impact that it has on people that are already being affected by the conflict. In a way **it is a double pressure – there is health impact,**

people are still getting sick – but they are also being disconnected from each other and had to follow severe restrictions. In terms of COVID we do provide material first-aid assistance, but we also try to connect people in these challenging circumstances.

It can be very sad to meet people, as some of their stories are heart-breaking. For example, I talked to two daughters who had not been able to see their parents and to help them because it became impossible to cross the contact line. People on the other side are not able to cross and thus cannot get basic services or access their pensions. This worries me a lot. And you know, before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, we were concerned sometimes about the conditions at the crossing points, with hundreds of people having to bear the heat, terrible heat, in summer, or freezing temperatures in winter, standing in the long lines, waiting to cross. I think there was an improvement on both sides to try and improve those conditions, also with the support from UN and our humanitarian partners. So, it is very sad for me that now people are not able to use these facilities. **There was one woman who told me: “You know, I used to suffer so much standing in line to be able to cross, and I could never imagine that I would miss those long lines, because now I'm totally disconnected from my family, from the opportunities. This disconnection has affected my livelihoods and my health”.** Conversations like this have a big impact over me, and I hope the solutions will be found to move forward.

What could bring positive development and progress after so many years of ongoing conflict, what would make a difference is to have more will to begin the conflict resolution. And here **it is extremely important to be more “on listening mode”** – to what people are asking for and what they want and what is needed to preserve the connection between them. That is the part where civil society becomes very important in countries like Ukraine, where there is sometimes a challenge of having good communication between the authorities responsible for governance at all levels, and people. Civil society organizations are such connectors, they live in the communities, and they know how to make that bridge not only within the country, but also to the international arena and to the global agenda.

International forums and discussions are particularly important now during the current state of events in Ukraine because **after eight years the crisis in Ukraine is at risk of being disregarded on a global scale**, and these meetings become a chance to remind the world that Ukraine still requires the world's attention, that it is being unresolved and requires continued support. Besides, after eight years it is time for all the parties to open to the possibilities to talk about pain and experiences. Such platforms are exactly the place where you can discuss issues related to the transitional justice which often comes too late. In our case the conflict is still there, but we may already start thinking to give it a try. And those platforms are good to get a more neutral ground, presentation of expertise and experiences. You cannot compare Ukraine experience with anything else, each conflict and each country is unique and has to find their ways to solve the particular crisis, but international platforms give opportunities to take a look at how others have done things, to pick up ideas and to pick up experiences.

As the UN long-time employee, when people ask me where my home is, I no longer know what to say. So, I say my home is wherever I live in the present moment. Having spent more than three years here, I feel a little bit Ukrainian, but I always feel that I never have enough time to visit and to learn more about the culture. What I love about this country is its diversity: in culture, in cuisine, the differences, the richness of whether it is art, music, clothing, food. I think that sometimes this cultural diversity of the country makes it more difficult to build that unity that Ukraine needs. But I also think that it is a source of great strength and potential for this country. It is a source of great pride for Ukraine.