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NEWS

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In letters to Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian and Russian Friendship Force clubs urge peace Open World Program hopes for peace and mutual understanding

ATLANTA, GA (Feb. 14, 2022) – In a joint letter to U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, [Friendship Force International](http://www.friendshipforce.org) Clubs in Ukraine and Russia urge the two leaders to seek a diplomatic solution to a war that could engulf the entire region, if not the world.

“I have been a Friendship Force Club member since 1996. 25 years in the club taught me to understand the difference between nations and governments. I have many friends on all continents. I hope there will be peace!” declared Ukrainian Friendship Force member Tanya Zgodinskaya.

“Especially in the conditions of the current international tension, it is important to maintain face-to-face contacts and dialogue between people of different countries in order for them to get to know and understand each other better to avoid conflicts,” observed Russian Friendship Force member Elena Parubochaya, Director of the Center for Public Diplomacy, Assistant Professor, Volgograd State University. “In addition, the dialogue between people makes it possible to deepen the cultural interaction of cities and countries, to reveal the country's humanitarian potential in the international arena.”

The Congressional Office of International Leadership (COIL), sponsors of the Open World program, added: “We strive to promote authentic dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding in all countries. At this critical time, personal ties and aspirations together help to bring people together to work for the common good. All of us at COIL hope for peace and understanding.”

The letters were sent today by UPS overnight to Biden at the White House and the Russian ambassador to the U.S. in Washington, with a request to transmit to Putin.

Headquartered in Atlanta since its founding in 1977, Friendship Force International has provided a process for tens of thousands of people in almost 70 countries around the world to get to know each other through homestay journeys that generate mutual respect, understanding and friendships that contribute to a more peaceful world.

“Members of our Russian and Ukrainian clubs, and indeed members of our more than 300 clubs worldwide, know the value of kitchen table diplomacy, as our founder Wayne Smith put it,” said Jeremi Snook, CEO of Friendship Force International. “They reject the notion that military force can ever solve the world’s problems and are dedicated to our motto that a world of friends can be a world of peace.”

Here is the body of the letters:

RE: FRIENDSHIP FORCE CLUBS IN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA URGE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

Dear Messrs. President:

For 45 years, Friendship Force International has promoted world peace through personal friendships and travel homestays among Friendship Force clubs in more than 70 nations around the world, including Russia and Ukraine.

We are writing to you to express the profound, serious concerns of our Russian and Ukrainian clubs, and indeed the more than 300 Friendship Force clubs globally, that an unnecessary war between Russia and Ukraine has the potential to escalate into a regional, if not global, conflict.

You both know that although in war there are victors and vanquished, in fact everyone loses.

In our more than four decades of promoting peace through personal interaction, Friendship Force has learned that through sincere and open communication, people who recognize and even appreciate their differences can reach the common ground of understanding, and even friendship.

Thus, in the name of humanity, our Friendship Force clubs in Ukraine and Russia, and more than 15,000 members of Friendship Force around the world urge you – beseech you – to back away from the brink and continue a constructive dialogue that will reduce tensions, deescalate mobilization and sow seeds of eventual peace between Ukraine and Russia.

Most sincerely,
Jeremi Snook
President
Friendship Force International

Tanya Zgodinskaya
Friendship Force Ukraine

Elena Parubochaya
Friendship Force Russia