



Leo Docherty MP
Minister for Defence People and
Veterans
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London
SW1A 2AS

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10 March 2022

Dear colleague,

Supporting Ukraine and the veteran community

The UK, with our international allies, is totally focused on the response to Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine and I'm writing to ask for your support with regard to our veteran community. We fully understand the strength of feeling to support the Ukrainian people following the Russian invasion – because this is about freedom and democracy in Europe.

With our allies, we are providing a range of support to Ukraine, including to enhance Ukraine's defence capability and to provide financial and humanitarian assistance. The UK has been the leading European supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty. Since 2015, British troops have trained more than 20,000 members of the Ukrainian armed forces through Operation Orbital. Challenger 2 tanks, armoured vehicles and 800 additional troops are arriving in Estonia imminently, plus RAF Typhoon fighter jets have already conducted their first air policing missions across the region, with an additional four aircraft now based at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. This support is necessarily defensive in nature. We have also put more than 1,000 more British troops at readiness to support a humanitarian response in the UK. Over the past few days, there have been a number of media reports of members of our veteran community aspiring to travel to the Ukraine to fight.

I am asking for your assistance in diverting and dissuading any travel attempts that come to your attention. The UK Government's position remains that travelling to Ukraine to fight, or to assist others engaged in the conflict, may amount to offences against UK legislation and could lead to prosecution. Ukraine needs equipment and funds, rather than volunteers who, although well meaning, will put further pressure on stretched resources. I am very concerned about the risk to individuals in what is a dangerous situation. Any attempts to travel should firstly be responded to in accordance with your safeguarding procedures. As a second port of call, you can contact the OVA or MOD to discuss any particular issues of concern, including how we might be able to step up our communications and deterrence efforts. Serving Personnel should also be reminded that as members of the British Armed Forces, regular or reserve, you are not authorised to travel to Ukraine to support the ongoing conflict against Russia in any form, whether you are on leave or not.

There are many ways in which our veteran community can make a difference during this period, including through charitable donations. The UK government has pledged to match fund donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee. I encourage everyone in our Armed Forces community to show their strong generosity of spirit and dedication to public service by donating and fundraising for this important cause. The government has outlined further ways in which people can help here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukraine-what-you-can-do-to-help> and I would be grateful if you are able to highlight this within the community where possible. Charities and service associations provide a vital source of support and comradeship to our veterans and through your networks you can play a key role in helping channel the energies and enthusiasm of the community in the most impactful way possible. I remain of course extremely grateful for the support you will be providing to those in the community who find their mental health and wellbeing affected by the war and encourage you to ensure that anyone who needs it is referred to the appropriate help:

- Details on Op Courage and the NHS support available for veterans in England can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/armed-forces-and-veterans-healthcare/veterans-nhs-mental-health-services/>
- Support can also be accessed through Veterans UK's helpline, which can link callers to the Samaritans veterans programme.
- The Veterans' Gateway has an around the clock support service: <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>
- NHS Wales has a Veteran Therapist (VT) in each Local Health Board (LHB): <https://www.veteranswales.co.uk/>
- NHS Scotland has health resources dedicated to veterans: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/access/health-rights-for-veterans#health-resources-for-veterans>
- The Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office (NIVSO) is the lead support and signposting service linking individual veterans, veterans' groups, statutory and non-statutory bodies, and charities supporting veterans in Northern Ireland: <https://nivso.org.uk/>

If you have any concerns or wish to discuss this further with my officials, please do not hesitate to contact Jessie Owen and the OVA team.

Yours,



Leo Docherty MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Defence People and Veterans