World Leaders Meet in Switzerland to Discuss Peace in Ukraine Amid Ongoing Conflict

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On Saturday, June 15th, and Sunday, June 16th, Switzerland hosted leaders from around the world to discuss a possible future peace in Ukraine. With around 160 invitations sent out by the Swiss, about 90 attendees showed up, with roughly half from European countries. Around 50 of these attendees were heads of state from countries such as France, Poland, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. Notably, Kamala Harris, standing in for US President Joe Biden, announced more than $1.5 billion in aid for Ukraine. About a third of this will go to new funding for energy assistance, and another large portion will go toward emergency energy infrastructure repair. Harris stated that the goal is to bolster the country's resilience, help rebuild critical infrastructure, and respond to Russia’s latest attacks.

On the eve of this peace summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed a ceasefire, which included ceding territory to Moscow and demilitarizing Kyiv to end the conflict. The conditions laid down by President Putin were the withdrawal of troops from Donbas and Novorossiya, the renunciation of plans to join NATO, the neutral and non-aligned status of Ukraine, and the lifting of Western sanctions. Ukraine immediately rejected these terms and also refused to allow Russia to attend the peace summit. However, the Swiss maintain that Russia must eventually be involved and participate in the process at some point.

The Conference was based on elements of a 10-point peace plan proposed by Zelenskyy in late 2022, which Putin’s government swiftly rejected. That plan outlined, among other objectives,
the expulsion of all Russian forces from Ukraine and ensuring accountability for war crimes, even as both sides are engaged in largely static combat along a roughly 930-mile front line.

As the war nears its 900th day, attacks near Toretsk on the front line in the eastern Donetsk region have intensified, as has the targeting of surrounding towns and villages. Russian troops have made some territorial gains in recent months and currently control nearly a quarter of Ukrainian territory in the east and south. Putin has received “unwavering” support from China and North Korea. This has manifested in the discovery of North Korean missile fragments on the Eastern European battlefield in Kharkiv. China had not attended the Conference and was rumored to dissuade other countries from attending.

Regardless of Zelenskyy’s proposed peace plan, Putin's government insists that any peace deal should be based on a draft agreement negotiated in the early stages of the war. This June 14 proposition included provisions for Ukraine's neutral status and limits on its armed forces while postponing discussions about Russian-occupied areas. Ukraine's ongoing efforts to join the NATO military alliance have long been a source of irritation for Moscow.

The ongoing conflict has severely impacted Ukraine's civilian population, leading to widespread displacement and a humanitarian crisis. The United Nations has reported that millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in neighboring countries and beyond. Efforts to deliver humanitarian aid have been hampered by continuous fighting and
logistical challenges. The international community continues to call for safe corridors to deliver essential supplies and support to those in need.

Economic ramifications are also profound, with Ukraine's economy suffering from the relentless conflict. Infrastructure damage, loss of industrial output, and disrupted trade routes have plunged the country into a severe recession. Rebuilding the economy will require substantial international assistance and long-term investment. The $1.5 billion aid package announced by Kamala Harris is a crucial step, but experts argue that sustained support will be essential for Ukraine's recovery and long-term stability.

Despite the bleak outlook, there are glimmers of hope. Grassroots efforts within Ukraine have seen communities band together to support each other, demonstrating resilience and solidarity. International organizations and NGOs are working to provide aid, rebuild infrastructure, and support displaced populations. Diplomatic efforts continue, with leaders worldwide advocating for a peaceful resolution and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

While immediate prospects for a resolution remain uncertain, the international community's commitment to supporting Ukraine and seeking a diplomatic solution underscores the importance of continued engagement and cooperation. As the conflict grinds on, the hope for a lasting peace and the rebuilding of Ukraine remains a vital priority for global leaders and citizens alike. Even if NATO and EU membership may be distant, scholars hope Ukraine will emerge from the conference with a renewed sense of momentum and confidence in its allies' commitments.
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