



AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UKRAINIAN ORGANISATIONS
СОЮЗ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ АВСТРАЛІЇ

Representing 22 Peak Ukrainian Organisations in Australia
Member of Ukrainian World Congress

The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Minister for the Arts
Minister for Cyber Security
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email to tony.burke.mp@aph.gov.au

2 February 2025

Dear Minister,

We write to bring to your urgent attention the scheduled screening of *Russians at War* at the Antenna Documentary Film Festival (ADFF) to be held in Sydney between 6 and 16 February 2025. This documentary, presented as a neutral examination of Russian soldiers, is, in reality, a vehicle for Kremlin-aligned propaganda. Its inclusion in the festival is deeply concerning, particularly given that Screen Australia is a lead sponsor of the event.

As you are aware, Australia has been steadfast in its support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's illegal, unprovoked and genocidal war. This commitment has been reflected in bipartisan government actions, military and humanitarian aid, and public solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The screening of *Russians at War* runs counter to these values, providing a platform for Russian disinformation that seeks to distort the truth, obscure war crimes, and humanise the aggressor while erasing the suffering of Ukrainian civilians.

The documentary's director, Anastasia Trofimova claims she is an independent journalist, yet has a background working for *Russia Today*, a state-controlled propaganda outlet banned in multiple democratic nations for spreading misinformation and manipulating global narratives. Trifimova says she travelled and embedded herself with a Russian military unit for 7 months in occupied Ukraine without the approval of the Russian Ministry of Defence. To be clear: Russian authorities do not grant access to the front lines to independent journalists — they only permit those whose messaging aligns with Kremlin interests — so this is clearly a film vetted and approved by the Russian state. The film was also edited in Russia, raising further concerns about its integrity and objectivity.

The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO), the Ukrainian Ambassador Vasyly Myroshnychenko, and the Ukrainian Council of NSW (UCNSW) have all strongly opposed the film's screening. In Ukraine, the state-funded cultural advocacy agency, the Ukrainian Institute, has published a [powerful statement](#) about the film's attempt to whitewash the crimes of Russian soldiers and absolve them of responsibility. The Ukrainian Government has also noted that it considers Trofimova has violated Ukrainian legislation by travelling to occupied Ukrainian territories without permission. Although this would make the ADFC complicit in this illegal action, the ADFC continues to defend the film's inclusion under the guise of artistic freedom. However, propaganda is not art, nor is it journalism — it is a tool of hybrid warfare that exploits democratic values to undermine truth and international solidarity.

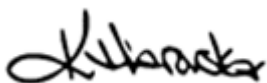
This film risks misleading Australian audiences by fostering false equivalence between aggressor and victim. It further undermines the principles of multiculturalism and social cohesion by glorifying members of the same military forces that have committed atrocities against Ukrainian civilians. For thousands of displaced Ukrainians now calling Australia home, including survivors of Russian occupation, this screening is deeply distressing and harmful to community harmony.

The ADFC's decision to provide a platform for narratives which feed Russian propaganda — fundamentally that there is another 'human' Russian side of the story' that needs telling, while Russian war crimes go entirely unacknowledged and unexplored — has been deeply distressing for our community. The film fails to acknowledge that Russia invaded a sovereign nation in violation of international law, just as it fails to criticise the Putin regime. Audience members are encouraged to feel sympathy for Russian soldiers as just 'regular people,' instead of recognising them as active participants in a genocidal war. The danger of this narrative is to inject doubt, create false moral equivalence, and sap the will of democratic societies to stand with Ukraine.

The fact that an event receiving public funding via Screen Australia is amplifying such Russian messaging is entirely at odds with the Australian Government's principled support for Ukraine. We urge you to immediately review Screen Australia's sponsorship of ADFC and take appropriate steps to ensure that taxpayer funds do not facilitate the dissemination of foreign propaganda.

We respectfully request an opportunity to meet with you or your office to discuss this matter further. We thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Kateryna Argyrou
AFUO Co-Chair

CC: The Hon Julian Hill MP, Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs