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## **Australia is no place for Kremlin-aligned propaganda: Ukrainians protest screening of film *Russians at War* at 6 February protest**

The Australian-Ukrainian community will hold a rally in Sydney today **6 February**, protesting the planned screening of blatant pro-Russian propaganda film *Russians at War* during the Antenna Documentary Film Festival.

**Protest location: Ritz Cinema Randwick - 6:00pm, 6 February, 45 St Pauls St, Randwick NSW**

*Russians at War* seeks to humanise invading Russian soldiers fighting in occupied Ukraine. Directed by Anastasia Trofimova — who spent 7 years as a producer at Russia Today, a state media outlet noted for its disinformation efforts — the film has faced sustained global criticism for its one-sided view of the invasion of Ukraine.

The film portrays Russian soldiers as ‘regular people’ while omitting any context or facts about the truth of the Russian invasion and the Russian military’s war crimes. The film makes no mention of the more than 140,000 registered war crimes committed by Russian soldiers since the full-scale invasion began. Trofimova claims that Russia “hasn’t participated in wars for many years” - ignoring wars and occupations in Transnistria (1992-93), Abkhazia (1994-96), Chechnya (1999-2009), Georgia (2008), Syria (2015-2022), and Ukraine (2014). In Russian media Trofimova has referred to Russian soldiers active in Ukraine as ‘heroes’. Her allegiances and biases are clear as day.

The protest on 6 February will feature supporters with blue and yellow flags, banners and signs that call attention to the devastating impact of Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine and its grave impacts on the Ukrainian people. Speakers at the rally will include displaced Ukrainians living in Australia:

- Kateryna Kyrychenko, Ukrainian filmmaker, and her son, Iliia, originally from Bakhmut — a city that has been wiped from the map by Russia. Kateryna’s father was savagely beaten by Russian troops, endured three major surgeries, but was unable to be saved. Iliia’s best friend lost his life during the Russian attack on the city.
- Mariia Mykytuik, and her two children, Anastasiya and Kyrlo, from Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv. Mariia survived the Russian occupation of Bucha and has spoken about the horrors she witnessed committed against civilians by Russian troops.

Kateryna Argyrou, Co-Chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said the issue is far bigger than the screening of one film — it is about the far-reaching impacts of propaganda in shaping views and undermining support for Ukraine through a selective narrative which echoes key Kremlin talking points. The key question is whether an Australian cultural institution like Antenna should serve such messages up to Australians.

“Art is not only a tool for expression, it’s often a medium weaponised by authoritarian governments, like the Kremlin, to push a narrative which serves their geopolitical interests,” said Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO).

“*Russians at War* does not spend a moment reflecting on the well-documented war crimes committed nor does it speak to the impact of the war on the Ukrainian people, instead focusing on normalising the illegal invasion to Western audiences.

“The director’s history of working for Russia Today, of describing Russian soldiers active in Ukraine as ‘heroes’, and statements that Russia ‘hasn’t participated in wars for many years’ all should have been red flags to the Antenna organisers. Propaganda can be bold and easy to spot, but the most pernicious form is subtle; it lies through omission,” said Ms Argyrou.

Despite open objection from the Ukrainian Ambassador to Australia, Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, the Ukrainian Council of NSW and more than 1,000 protest emails sent from members and supporters of the strong and resilient Australian-Ukrainian community, the festival organisers have chosen to continue with plans to air the film.

“At this protest, we will continue to call upon the Antenna Film Festival to consider the evidence, and take responsibility to prevent the toxic spread of misinformation by cancelling future screenings of *Russians at War*,” said Ms Argyrou.

“Our protest will pose no threat to public safety or festival staff. The Ukrainian community in Australia has a long history of peaceful protest and advocacy which has brought about positive change, so we hope that Antenna does the right thing after realising their festival should not be used to platform pro-Russian propaganda,” concluded Ms Argyrou.

**ENDS | Media queries:** Nadia Mencinsky 0416 253 963