Daily reports of the ongoing pain and devastation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine prompt some reflection on how we, as a research community, can and should respond, not just to the situation in Ukraine, but to the implications for research and scholarship on children’s rights.

It is trite to note that research on the impacts and legacies of war for children’s rights have always featured in this journal from a legal, philosophical and empirical perspective. Indeed, the UNCRC itself has been described as ‘both a project and rejection of the Cold War’ (Waiting for Children’s Rights Theory, Hanson and Peleg, vol. 28: Issue 1). The journal welcomes and regularly publishes work on transitional justice, on labour and sexual exploitation, the enlistment of children as soldiers, on mass displacement, family separation and cultural dislocation, and on the physical and mental health effects of conflict.

But there are other ways in which we might question our role and responsibilities to respond to war. As editors, we have been grappling with the question of whether this journal should follow the example of others and boycott the Russian academic community, refusing to publish Russian-authored articles or any other work with Russian affiliations. Should we urge our research colleagues to bring their academic collaborations with Russian partners to an end? Some funders, including the European Commission and the UK’s national research funder, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), have suspended

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payments to Russian research partners under global funding programmes such as Horizon Europe.²

The issues are, of course, complex, and there as many reasons to avoid a boycott as to impose one: many – not least children – in Russia are as outraged and devastated by the Russian invasion as those in Ukraine. Methodologically rigorous research is upheld as an important means of exposing the impacts of war on regions associated with the oppressor as much as the oppressed. Editors of journals from other disciplines remain equally divided: Nature announced recently that a publishing boycott against researchers in Russia, ‘would divide the global research community and restrict the exchange of scholarly knowledge’.³

There is also the question of where we draw the line: war and conflict affects multiple regions worldwide. Making a stand against Russian researchers arguably requires us to take a position on those associated with other regions in conflict, now and in the future. It is not always possible or, indeed, advisable, to take such a stance, particularly in a discipline such as ours where the universality of children’s rights can only be achieved if the universality of research is pursued and protected.

We believe there are rather more constructive ways of expressing our solidarity with Ukraine and with others enduring the brutal effects of war and conflict. We can mobilise and extend our research resources – including our digital and institutional resources – to researchers whose research infrastructure has been destroyed or depleted. We can arrange and support placement schemes and visiting fellowships to researchers who are displaced; and we can play a small part in rebuilding the academic infrastructure in the years to come.

As editors, we remain committed to promoting and publishing children’s rights scholarship of the highest quality. Our decision not to implement a boycott is accompanied by an ongoing pledge to ensure we are open to all academic research that addresses the impact or implications of conflict on children’s rights anywhere in the world. All submitted work is subject to rigorous, independent review, and it is important that we continue to offer a space for work that not only advances our knowledge and understanding, but that challenges our thinking around these difficult questions.

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³ Russia’s brutal attack on Ukraine is wrong and must stop (nature.com).