

The United Nations General Assembly is expected to vote this week, diplomats said, to call out Russia's invasion of Ukraine for creating a "dire" humanitarian situation, urge aid access and again demand Moscow stop fighting and withdraw its troops.

It will be the second time the 193-member General Assembly votes on the Ukraine crisis since Russia launched what it calls a "special military operation" on Feb. 24 to destroy Ukraine's military infrastructure.

Ukraine, the United States and allies are looking to improve on the 141 yes votes cast to adopt a March 2 General Assembly resolution that deplored Russia's "aggression against Ukraine." Russia, Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria voted no, while 35 states - including China - abstained.

However, diplomats said South Africa has proposed a rival draft text on Ukraine's humanitarian situation. The draft, seen by Reuters, makes no reference to Russia. It was not immediately clear whether South Africa planned to put it to a vote. South Africa's U.N. mission did not respond to a request for comment.

General Assembly resolutions are nonbinding, but they carry political weight. The March 2 vote illustrated Russia's international isolation over its invasion of Ukraine. While Russia is a veto power in the 15-member U.N. Security Council, no one country can block a General Assembly resolution.

The draft resolution put forward by Ukraine and allies for a likely vote this week focuses on the humanitarian situation - demanding the protection of civilians, medical personnel, aid workers, journalists, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.

Ukraine and Western allies have accused Moscow of attacking civilians indiscriminately. Moscow denies attacking civilians.

The Ukraine and allies draft resolution, seen by Reuters, also demands an end to the siege of cities, in particular Mariupol.

Ukraine defied Moscow's demand for its soldiers to lay down arms before dawn on Monday in besieged Mariupol where hundreds of thousands of civilians are cowering from Russian bombardments laying waste to their city.

The second General Assembly vote comes after France and Mexico drafted a similar Security Council resolution, but did not call a vote because they said Moscow would have blocked it. Russia then put forward its own draft council text, but pulled it from a planned vote last week.

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