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# Meeting with mothers of military personnel – participants in the special military operation

84–107 minutes





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During the meeting with mothers of military personnel – participants in the special military operation. Photo: Alexander Shcherbak, TASS

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Good afternoon once again.

As you know, the day after tomorrow Russia marks Mother's Day. It is not some pompous noisy celebration but a day that is filled with special, very warm meaning and emphasises the attitude towards mothers inherent in all the peoples of Russia: respect, reverence, admiration.

In this regard, of course, I would like to remember this. But I understand perfectly well that you, as well as so many other women in Russia whose sons are in the zone of hostilities, of course, have a different attitude to this event – not something that would be festive, but, most likely, associated with anxiety and worry, when you think about what is happening to your boys. After all, for a mother, no matter what age her son is, he is always a boy, always a child. And for those, including those of you who are here, and who have lost their sons, of course, this is also related to the thoughts of this tragedy.

In this sense I would like to say... You know I do not have the heart to say formal standard things expressing condolences. But I want you to know that the entire leadership of the country and I personally, we share your pain. We understand that nothing can replace the loss of a son, a child. Especially for mothers, to whom we all owe our lives, who bore and fed us.

I want you to know that we share this pain with you. And, of course, we will do our best, so that you do not feel forgotten,

so that you feel the support.

Obviously, life is more complicated and diverse than what they show on television screens or on the internet. One should not trust the internet completely because it is full of various fake stories, deception and lies. The internet is rife with information attacks because information is just another offensive weapon in the modern world, and information attacks are just another effective type of struggle.

We have gathered here, and I have suggested this meeting because I wanted to listen to you and to hear your first-hand assessments: you also receive your information from there. I receive a lot of information from various sources, but your assessments, your opinion, ideas and proposals are an entirely different matter. I will try to make sure that everything we discuss today will be taken into account and used in real life.

That is what I wanted to say in the beginning.

Concluding my brief opening remarks, I would like to say what I have been talking about all the time. First of all, the family is the source of everything. The very fact that most of your children have decided to serve and protect our Homeland, our Motherland, Russia, to protect our people, including those in Novorossiya (New Russia) and Donbass, is also, doubtless, the result of your work. This is not the result of any exhortations or moral admonitions. This is the result of your personal example, and this will always be so.

No matter what they say in school, although this is highly important, the personal example of a person's parents influences the foundation of his or her self-awareness and his or her basic values. A personal example is the main, most important and most fundamental method of education

and upbringing.

Judging by the heroic behaviour of your children, and I wanted to discuss precisely this aspect, this, of course, is your tremendous contribution. This is your contribution, as well as that of your men, your husbands. This is always a two-sided process in every family. However, only they, the young men themselves, know that they are real heroes.

Why so? This is because no one, except them and their immediate superiors, knows how difficult this work is, and how dangerous the risks to one's life and health are. They alone feel and realise this.

Sometimes I speak with them; I spoke with some of them on the telephone directly. In any event, I spoke with those who surprised me with their mood and their attitude towards work. They did not expect me to call them. By the way, these calls came through their mothers. This gives me every reason to say that they are heroes. This is true.

This is what I wanted to say in the beginning. Let's have a free discussion. As I have already said, I will certainly try to heed everything that you will say today.

Please.

**Suna Nabiyeva:** I am Suna Nabiyeva from Daghestan.

My son, Enver, graduated from the Kazan Higher Tank Command School and is serving in Buryatia. He has been part of the SMO from the first days. He was wounded twice and stayed in a hospital. Upon recovery, he returned to his unit.

Sometimes we talk by telephone. When he learned that I was going to meet you, he asked me to send his regards from all his fellow servicemen and say that they will do everything they must

do. He said: “My grandfather and two great grandfathers fought in the Great Patriotic War, and I cannot let them down.” His soldiers on the frontline also often recall their grandfathers. They come from all over the country, from different republics. You said recently: “I am a Lakh, I am a Daghestani, I am a Chechen, Ingush, Russian, Tatar...” People in Daghestan heard this and it’s the right thing to say.

Our family comes from the mountain village Dzhaba in the Akhtynsky District. We have a large multi-ethnic family. My mother-in-law is a mother-heroine; she has 12 children. I would like to thank you very much for introducing the high title of Mother Heroine. This is very important for the mothers of Daghestan and Russia.

**Vladimir Putin:** Ms Nabiyeva, first, thank you very much for the words from your son. I asked from the very start to give our men the most accurate and objective information on the attitude of the country towards their fighting, the performing of their duty.

I hope they will see this meeting, too. Modern technology makes it possible. Of course, radio communication poses a certain risk, and this is why it has certain restrictions, but they will hear it eventually, no doubt about it. So I would like them to see that a mother fulfilled the request of her son and that his greetings are gratefully accepted.

For my part, I wish all the best to your son and his army mates.

**Suna Nabiyeva:** Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** When did he graduate from the command school?

**Suna Nabiyeva:** In 2010.

**Vladimir Putin:** I am sure that he is performing his duty well. This is only natural for all Russian soldiers, even more so for the warriors from the Caucasus, from Daghestan. People there are with a special character. I know this very well from 1999 and will never forget the days and months linked with the events in Daghestan.

Daghestan is a multi-ethnic republic and Russia as a whole is a unique civilisation where people of different ethnic origins and various religions live side by side. A unique feature of this life is that over hundreds of years of co-existence, people not only found a common language but also learned to respect each other's traditions and religions. They have learned to celebrate holidays together and to overcome times of trial together when they come.

So, when I said the words that you just repeated I was simply talking from my heart – it is impossible to write them down, of course. I know this is how it is. I know that people do not divide themselves into separate castes or ethnic groups – all are equal, all help each other, realising that their lives depend on this mutual aid and support. This is a very important point. They are performing their service duty very well, as I have said.

So, thank you very much, thank you for your son. Please give my best regards to him as well, to him and his comrades-in-arms, to all his subordinates.

**Suna Nabiyeva:** Thank you.

**Nina Pshenichkina:** Mr President, I am from the Lugansk People's Republic, from the small city of Kirovsk.

The city is on the frontline. We are fighting and we are restoring everything thanks to the Russian Federation. We are under the patronage of the Irkutsk Region, and they are now restoring

55 facilities. Recently, the governor visited us, my library, my school, and I was here.

It is common knowledge now, but on September 30, we had a great, glorious event – we became Russian Federation regions, something first wave militia fighters were dreaming about.

When my son joined an armed volunteer unit in 2014 he told me: “Mom, I am going to fight for Russia, I’m going to fight for the Russian world, I am going to fight for the Russian word, for Russian memory.” My father fought in the war from 1941 to 1945 and came home with Victory. We have waited for this event for a long time. It has been an uphill road; we have lost many people dear to us, but we did not lose hope that we would be in Russia and would return home. And now this joyful event has taken place.

But my son, Konstantin Pshenichkin, was killed in a morning battle, defending the city. It so happened that the enemy came very close to their position. He jumped out of a trench to draw fire upon himself. His last words were: “Let’s go and chop up the Ukies, guys.” He was awarded the medal For Courage posthumously.

It’s heart wrenching, my soul is frozen, and gloomy memories are overwhelming my mind. My eyes are filled with tears. Suddenly my son begs me: “Mom, don’t be sad, we’ll see each other – we simply have to wait. Live this life for me and in the next life we’ll be together again.”

I looked up and straightened my shoulders and started to do all I could to help the families of the killed militia members. I was trying to get benefits for them. I was a member of the civic chamber. I helped organise the first two referendums. During

the second referendum, I was a member of the public commission. Nobody had seen such enthusiasm before. Old women went with flags and sang songs. “We’ll come to you.” “No, we want to come here ourselves. And say ‘hello’ to Putin, please.” They believe we are Vladimir Putin’s envoys. So, I know everything directly, not from hearsay.

Mr President, I’d still like to highlight several issues, if I may.

**Vladimir Putin:** Of course.

**Nina Pshenichkina:** We are young regions and we are just entering the legal field of the Russian Federation. The same applies to medicine. We have a problem when examining the wounded. They have to go to so many places and collect so many documents that a healthy person would hardly be able to get. They have to go from Kirovsk to Alchevsk, from Alchevsk to Belye where the hospital is, from Belye back to Lugansk. Meanwhile, the military medical commission in Lugansk is only open once a week. How can people from 20 cities and districts get through this examination in one day? And what if a man has lost his legs? How will he do this? Please, instruct the authorities to use one window or send commissions to all these places.

And one more question: commanders are not always attentive in making entries in journals. They write: “sent to hospital” but do not specify what wound a soldier has. Then these people have to prove the obvious even though they have sacrificed their health for the Motherland and have become incapacitated. I know this because people tell me about it.

And one more question. It is simply floating around in both the Donetsk People’s Republic and in our republic. Will the benefits that Russian military personnel or the families

of the dead are getting now also apply to the families of the people killed before September 30?

Mr President,

I would like to convey to you our gratitude, support and confidence – we believe in victory, it will be ours – and to wish you the strongest health on behalf of all residents of Donbass, the women of Donbass, the Union of Donbass Women, those mothers that sent their sons to the front.

And since we have gathered here today, I want to say that these are the best mothers, Mothers with a capital M. I would like to pass on to you the fervent greetings from the patient women of Donbass. And you know, ladies, you should be proud of your sons. You have brought up real heroes! All those who are there now are heroes!

I wish you the strongest health, to see everyone come back alive and with a victory!

Happy holiday, dear friends.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you.

Ms Pshenichkina, first about 2014. In hindsight, we are all smart, of course, but we believed that we would manage to come to terms, and Lugansk and Donetsk would be able to reunify with Ukraine somehow under the agreements – the Minsk agreements, which I am sure you know about. We were sincerely moving towards this. But we did not fully sense the mood of the people and all the details. It was impossible to fully understand what was going on there. But, today it has become obvious that this reunification [of Donbass with Russia] should have taken place earlier. Probably, there would not have been so many losses among civilians and so many children

would not have been killed by shelling, and so on.

It is good that it happened eventually. And this is happening owing to your son who is not with us and owing to the sons of the women that are here now and owing to our young men who are fighting there now, who are at the frontline, or in the second and third lines – it doesn't matter insofar as they are in the zone of the special military operation. I am referring to all our soldiers, including those who were mobilised to the Armed Forces. This is the first point.

Now the second point. Of course, it is an enormous tragedy, an empty place with nothing to fill in. You have just spoken about this so convincingly and described with such emotions what happens when your loved one is gone, especially when it is your son.

But you know, one idea occurs to me. I have already mentioned it once. In our country about 30,000 people die in traffic accidents and about the same number from alcohol. Sometimes it happens, unfortunately, that one's life takes such a turn. Life is complicated and diverse. It is more complicated than something that is written on paper. After all, we are all in the hands of God, Allah or Christ, talking about those who believe in the higher powers. It does not matter what religion they profess. What matters is that we are all mortal, we are all in God's hands. And one day, we will all leave this world. This is inevitable.

The question is how we lived. With some people, it is unclear whether they live or not. It is unclear why they die – because of vodka or something else. When they are gone it is hard to say whether they lived or not – their lives passed without notice. But your son did live – do you understand? He achieved his goal. This means that he did not leave life for nothing. Do you

understand? His life was important. He lived it, achieving the result for which he was striving. This is the first point I would like to make.

Ms Pshenichkina has brought up a very important issue – the operation of social services. Of course, you are right. If there are so many problems you just mentioned in organising trips and with those endless documents, it comes to mind that we in Russia have a “one-stop-shop” service in the civilian sector, which has proven very effective.

It might be harder to introduce the same there because this issue falls within the responsibility of several ministries, including defence departments. The military always do things hush-hush, even where there is no need for secrecy. Military people are present here today and they are probably aware of this. Even when there are no secrets whatsoever, they would still talk about the need to keep things secret.

Of course, this “one-stop-shop” service, even if it falls within the responsibility of civilian and defence ministries, must be put in place to make social services more effective so that they run smoothly and do not create any problems for people, in particular, for the men who have been wounded. I will not just issue instructions and forget all about it. We will see this matter through.

**Nina Pshenichkina:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** This matter might take us some time to deal with because it is not easy to resolve an issue that requires the involvement of the ministries I mentioned, but we will do it. This is my first point.

Now about the benefits. We have recently adopted a law under which the residents of Lugansk, Donetsk and two other regions

are entitled to all the benefits we have in Russia. They can, so to say, be backdated to 2014. Whenever we have one or two lawyers, there are at least three or four viewpoints but we will continue working on it and develop a system for issuing relevant benefits.

**Nina Pshenichkina:** To those who are entitled to them.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, we need to look at it.

I will say honestly, before I entered the room I talked to the Defence Minister and [Deputy Prime Minister] Tatyana Golikova because I realised whom I was going to meet and what questions might be asked. So, I talked this issue over with them in general and now I took notes, so I will be able to give more specific instructions. We will work on this. Agreed?

**Nina Pshenichkina:** Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you for paying attention to this topic, for caring about other people who are now in the special military operation zone and for thinking about their families. This yet again emphasises a special, as I believe, feature that is inherent in people living in Russia – a multi-ethnic, yet single, people that shares the same values. This is very characteristic of us.

Thank you very much.

Go ahead, please.

**Irina Sumynina:** Good afternoon.

Irina Sumynina, Krasnodar.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for simply being here today. Although I cannot claim any credit for this, I was sent here by our Kuban Cossack army.

**Vladimir Putin:** Are you a Cossack?

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes, we have a Cossack family, with four sons. My husband and two of my sons are now on a combat duty, so to say. They volunteered, they were not mobilised. Then again, they joined the forces as Cossacks.

My husband and my older son serve together in the Special Combat Army Reserve [BARS] and the younger one in the special forces, in reconnaissance. Their groups are very close-knit, very supportive of each other, I mean soldiers in the units, in general, not only my men.

**Vladimir Putin:** I know: BARS are very skilled soldiers.

**Irina Sumynina:** There is a strong camaraderie there. They help, support each other both physically and mentally, never leave their soldiers behind, even those who were wounded or killed. They even have to drop their equipment, like tactical gear belts and body armour to lighten the burden and to be able to carry their comrades and weapons, of course.

In this regard, I would like to mention a major problem of shortage of equipment, especially in the special forces. The Defence Ministry provided clothes and boots, but there is... I can speak for my younger son. He serves in a reconnaissance unit, so he needs a special uniform: light, warm, suitable for various seasons and in different colours. But they do not have camouflage suits... My older son is a sniper, he does not have a camouflage suit, he has only one uniform, the one he was given. In fact, the uniform gets worn out quite fast, because the trenches are muddy, wet and cold, and lighting a fire there is prohibited. Many soldiers fall ill, of course. But what is the point? The point is to have the uniform available as close as possible so that the old uniform can be swapped for a new one quickly and easily, as they get worn out very fast. Even the tactical

belts. My husband is a machine gunner, in a matter of just several months all of his ammo carriers have become worn out, and he has to carry ammo tins.

And another major issue. There is a host of homeless children in the combat area when new territories are being liberated, there are very many of them. The good news is that our soldiers are fed very well, so there are no problems with that. And they constantly share their food with the locals, especially children. These cookies, sweets and so on make them very happy.

I am aware that the efforts to find these children and help them and families, are underway, and they must not be abandoned, of course. But the work on providing aid to these children should probably be stepped up. Moreover, resort houses in the Krasnodar Territory will be vacant now – they could, at least, be taken there, as it is very cold and wet in the area, there is no light, no water, no food. That is a big problem.

The guys have great team spirit, they are positive, keep their chins up. Each and every one of them understands that they are where they belong – this is what they are. They say that they even love to have a laugh to relax sometimes.

**Vladimir Putin:** Well, the Cossacks are a special caste.

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes, you are right of course. I forgot to mention, our atamans constantly fill up cars with humanitarian aid, trying to make deliveries at least once a month. We are all taking part in this, of course – we get together and send boxes with sweets and pryaniki [gingerbreads] for children. Because our soldiers do not need this as much as the children.

**Vladimir Putin:** The Cossacks swapped horses for cars and are using them successfully.

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes.

**Vladimir Putin:** But I would like to reiterate, this is a very special caste. They have always been in a class of their own throughout Russian history, they have always been servicemen, always on combat duty and always in the front – this is obvious. It has always been this way in the history of Russia. They were in the vanguard because from the very beginning their primary task was to protect the borders. And later, over the course of the country's development, the borders were extending but they continued to serve the Fatherland in various ways.

The fact that they fulfil their duty to the Fatherland is traditional, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it shows that nothing goes away.

**Irina Sumynina:** This indicates that the Kuban Cossacks take an active part in the special military operation.

I would like to mention another thing about the family. We should try to be an example of how to raise children. Not only by talking the talk somewhere but by setting an example. My husband has been working with children at school for 13 years, he is a Cossack mentor. The children were raised in this spirit, their fathers fostered their interest in military science with regular hiking and shooting with the Cossacks in our military unit.

I am nervous and emotional, of course. You forget everything in such a situation.

**Olesya Shigina:** They were not born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

**Irina Sumynina:** No, they were not.

My husband was in Crimea and in Novorossiya in 2014, and he was awarded decorations. He was in Donbass last spring

and summer, and he has been decorated for that too. And our sons could not just sit at home, seeing what their father is like. This is a personal example set by my husband.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, definitely. This is exactly what I started with: everything comes from the family.

**Irina Sumynina:** I can confirm that.

**Vladimir Putin:** First, there are several Cossack units, not only the Special Combat Army Reserve.

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes, Kuban is one of them.

**Vladimir Putin:** The fact that it is headed by the supreme ataman is very important, too. I am aware of that and we will do our best to render support.

You have two sons on duty, it is time for one of them to come back, at least for a vacation.

**Irina Sumynina:** They offered him a vacation now but he said: “I will not leave, because my fellow soldiers are there.” And he is a group commander. He said: “I will not leave, I am staying.” I pray to God, he will be allowed to leave in January. Otherwise, he will not leave.

My youngest is 17 years old, and I am terrified to imagine that he will go to serve as soon as he turns 18.

**Vladimir Putin:** No need, that is enough.

**Irina Sumynina:** And everyone tells him: “You were left here to take care of your mother, so do it.”

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, of course.

**Irina Sumynina:** But there is no stopping him.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, but I believe that one of your sons needs to come back too – they have been fighting for a while.

Look, it is obvious that you are a Cossack because you are aware of such tactical details as body armour, assault vests, ammo carriers, tins. This is special terminology. You get it from them, from your men.

As for the clothes. I was glad to hear that the situation with the equipment and food is back on track. Is the information about uniforms up-to-date?

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes, it is. How do I know? When such things happen with my son, when they abandon everything, and he simply writes to me: mom, I need this, this and this. Fortunately, we have good shops in Krasnodar where you can buy all of these things.

**Vladimir Putin:** I see. The Defence Ministry tries to organise this work as efficiently as possible, taking the seasons into account. You can believe me, I am absolutely sincere and I say this as I look you in the eyes: I discuss this at every meeting with chief officials of the Defence Ministry, practically every day. Every day. We will monitor the developments in the next few days but I made a note for myself.

**Irina Sumynina:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** The second important thing – you mentioned homeless children. Russian social services have been deployed to these areas only recently, and they were not there before.

**Irina Sumynina:** Yes, of course.

**Vladimir Putin:** As far as I understand, there was not much before, but this work is gaining momentum. And this is what I thought while I was listening to you: simply initiating the work of social services is not enough; what they need is to take some special measures to search for these children and support them.

We will definitely work on this.

**Irina Sumynina:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you for bringing this up as well as the equipment issue.

**Irina Sumynina:** And of course, the Cossacks of the Kuban Cossack army asked me to send you their regards: “Lyubo!” [an exclamation of the Cossacks’ approval]

**Vladimir Putin:** And thanks very much to them, for their service and allegiance to the Motherland.

**Irina Sumynina:** Thank you. I will tell them.

**Yelena Nikulnikova:** Good afternoon, Mr President.

My name is Yelena Nikulnikova and I am from the Tula Region. I have brought you hugs from the women and mothers of our region and firm handshakes from our men. They asked me to tell you that the people are with you and support you.

I am a mother of a guards corporal who is serving in a reconnaissance unit. He was on a different trip at the beginning of the special military operation and he regretted being away from the Motherland. But from the very first days he told me that he would head to the front lines after returning home and resting for a couple of days. And there was no doubt in his words whatsoever, and this is right. Because the duty of every man is to protect his Motherland. Exactly like his father, who is no longer with us, but he spent 25 years serving to his country. He also went on combat tours and was a combat veteran. Just like his great-grandfather, who protected the Fatherland during the Great Patriotic War from 1940 to 1944, and in September of 1944 he personally led a battalion into attack, was wounded in combat and consequently died from

the wounds and was buried in Ukraine. He was awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, I degree, and the Order of Alexander Nevsky. He was a little older than my son is now: he was 26.

Our sons are defending our Motherland in the epicentre and we are doing our best to support them on the home front. Our Governor Alexei Dyumin, you know, he took the mobilisation effort not even as the head of the region but as a father who personally controls all the processes with equipment for the draftees, all training processes for the mobilised soldiers, which we are extremely thankful for. And we, ordinary people, do not stand aside. Stations to collect support for mobilised soldiers have been opened in each city, practically in every village. I have personally seen how everyone wants to take part and support our soldiers. Nine cargoes were sent in different directions even from our small town.

I absolutely agree with the previous speaker, Irina Sumynina, who spoke about lost things and bureaucracy preventing their quick replenishment. And the procedure for writing off both the destroyed vehicles and personal things has become outdated too.

Plus there is something I would like to add – the issue is a bit different though, it has to do with quadcopters. All units fighting at the frontline must have them in stock, and not only special units.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you once again on behalf of all mothers who love our country and on behalf of women for your efforts to take care of women who raised sons to defend our Motherland.

**Vladimir Putin:** Everything the mother said is true.

As for the drones, quadcopters and so forth.

We are well aware of this issue and we are working on it, and the industry is working on it too.

Unlike those we are having to face, and, in a sense, we are not just dealing with them but with the people who are supplying them with all these things and paying them, using them like cannon fodder. I am not exaggerating – they are not counting their losses at all. And those who do not behave the way they should, as they believe, are shot down in front of the unit formation – something our soldiers have witnessed – and the bodies remain lying on the ground, they do not even collect the bodies of those executed servicemen.

There was a case recently – five soldiers were shot down right in front of a unit – those who refused to move forward or abandoned their positions. There is a totally different moral atmosphere there. This shows once again that we are facing a Neo-Nazi regime – without exaggeration. I am saying this not to call someone names but in response to their behaviour. Nevertheless, what matters is that we perceive ourselves as human beings and feel that we are doing the right thing, protecting those of our people living in the areas that became part of the Russian Federation. This should have been done a long time ago, judging from what Ms Pshenichkina said. They waited for it for a long time.

As for the procedure for writing off property and so forth – I noted this down, and we will see. But first of all, this has to be connected with the replenishment order. We will consider all of this. I will tell Mr Dyumin what you have just said. I will see him today, we have a working meeting scheduled.

Thank you very much.

**Yelena Nikulnikova:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you very much.

**Maria Kostyuk:** I am Maria Kostyuk, mother of an officer, senior lieutenant Andrei Kovtun, who was in the combat zone from the very beginning of the special military operation. As he says, he went to fight and protect us from fascist non-humans, but then, when he returned, he continued and said, “As long as I am there, they won't come here.” “Because,” he says, “if you (as a mother, I somehow tried to say that anything can happen in life, and I can accept any of your decisions, for which I received a quick, harsh answer) knew what they were doing there with women and children, you would not even think about this. As long as I am there, they will not come here. You are here, and my wife, my son, so the boys and I are there.”

At first, he led a company in the 40<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment. This is that very crossing of Seversky Donets, which they bridged several times; the famous one. He returned home, and on July 29 he turned 26 years old. He was delighted that he was celebrating his birthday at home for the first time in 10 years, and on August 4 he again departed for the combat zone, now as a company commander in the 74<sup>th</sup> motorised rifle brigade, and on August 10, a reconnaissance group was ambushed near the village of Spornoye in the Donetsk People's Republic, and, having received a call for help, Andrei, with his characteristic independence and confidence, rushed to help and covered the direction of fire with his infantry fighting vehicle and his own body.

He saved the miners and was killed in the effort; but they are alive thanks to him. You know, when a video was played in the American media for a week after his death that they had

killed Senior Lieutenant Andrei Kovtun, I finally, probably, accepted his decision that he could not have done it differently. And faith has now taken root inside, faith in his work, which he did for life, for life, and, in our case, at the cost of his own life.

And today as a mother – and I say to all our women, our mothers that today we are the first who should set an example of how to appreciate the achievements of our sons, to not belittle them and, above all, to live. To live, no matter how painful or bitter it is, to open your eyes every day and to go on. To live, and to help others live and to teach them to live and appreciate this life, for which our men have fought and are fighting now.

Pain does not choose between an entrepreneur, a teacher or an official: it hurts people. Here I am, the mother of an officer, but I am the Deputy Chair of the Government of the Jewish Autonomous Region. I am an official, about whom they write every day that we are hiding our loved ones from the special military operation, that we are trying to sabotage the mobilisation. I do not know where they see this, where they see such officials; I know only completely different examples.

The boys are performing their military duty, and here, on the home front, we need to perform our civic duty. Because my son defended his Motherland, but every one of them has a lesser Motherland in their souls. Every boy who is there now has a lesser Motherland: their courtyard, their home entrance, the road they walked to school. And when they return, what will they see?

I believe they should see a new country. They need to see the country for life in which they are fighting. They need to see it improved, developed and clean. And probably we need to do

everything we can to achieve that. Maybe increase the funding of programmes ten-fold, or get together and join local communities, but we need to change the country for them.

If you allow me, I have just two examples. Everyone says on social networks and in the media that Moscow and other big cities became empty when the mobilisation was announced. There were queues in our cities. A line of people stood at the military commissariat early in the morning in the small town of Teploozyorsk in the Jewish Autonomous Region. Half a team came from the cement plant and asked, “Take us with him (the conscript). He is small and scrawny, he will not be able to do it alone, we will go with him.” Isn’t this proof that we need to do better for them?

Or, during joint training in the village of Bidzhan, a conscript named Mikhail approached Governor Rostislav Goldshtein, and asked him to talk to Mikhail’s wife. Everyone got tense and wondered what he could be asking him to say to her. He says, “She is collecting medical records that say I am poor service material. She does not want to listen to anyone, so please talk to her. I will not go back; I want to go with the guys. And then I will come back together with them.” So, these are the people we need to do everything we can for.

You know, the special military operation has truly united us all. So many people are taking part in civil activity and volunteering, I really appreciate that it is being supported and, God willing, continues to be supported. Because we have replaced the iron curtain with iron doors, we hid ourselves in our apartments and lost each other. And today it is such a real, large, powerful boost to this activity.

First, I would like to make a request, if I may. We need

to organise commemorative sites, memory gardens, memory places of sorts, or name art objects after our heroes, lay out parks, and not listen to those who write and say “we will do it when all this is over.” Why? Are we ashamed of our heroes? Or are we doubting our victory? Who doubts? Here we are, mothers, and there are millions more of us, we can explain to every resident of our country and other countries what this victory is and what price we pay for it. And that it will be ours. Bring me those who are in doubt.

And I would like to add, that... Of course, I would put stars on these heroes' doors like they did during the Great Patriotic War, as a sign of respect from society. And the veterans who returned, they need to go to the military commissariats. Why? Because they know the value of life and they know that there is a person with a story behind each battle unit. To avoid cases when a 25-year-old widow goes to the military commissariat, she is lost and does not know what to do. And they say to her, “Do you know how many women there are like you? Come back next month.” And the girl feels lost. And then these girls unite in, pardon the expression, widow kingdoms, of three or four people. They are 24–25 years old, and they are already lost. They hire some military lawyers. But for what? We need to show them that their husbands were heroes, we value their contribution and support their families.

It is good that there are guys there, they help them by bringing food and helping to take care of the children. But then they go back behind the contact line to continue working and doing their duty. What should these girls do?

They cannot receive pensions because it takes at least three months to receive the certificate, I can testify to that. Our regional commissariat has already joined the programme, but

we cannot even receive a certificate confirming that my daughter-in-law is not receiving a benefit there. But she has me. And those girls who do not have anybody, how are they making it? What do they feel? Their husbands gave their lives for our country.

I actually believe that special military operation veterans, those who are coming back, should come to speak at schools every day. Because it is they who know the meaning of life, who can openly explain who a hero really is. They can create a true image of today's heroes, you know, the hero of our time. They can do it. Not everyone can, but these men can.

I have one more request, if I may. There are horrible cases where on social media there are chats where members of the Ukrainian CIPsO [Centre for Information and Psychological Operations] and our foreign agents – ours, why ours, God, why did I say that – misinform our mothers. By appealing to their anxiety and hitting where it hurts, they convince them to talk to their sons and tell them that they should give themselves up as prisoners, leave their place of service and the military operation.

They tell them to go there and promise to give them their sons, release them from captivity or return their bodies. They write to them in chats pretending to be mothers too. What do our mothers do? They give their son's current phone number and tell them where he is now and then this place gets attacked. While writing in these chat groups, they indicate the specific sites of dislocation of a unit or a squadron where their son is serving. And then it gets attacked and her son dies along with other sons, husbands, brothers and fathers. It is a horrible thing, and I feel that we need to work with these mothers.

We are ready to help in this situation. But I believe that we cannot do without such an important agency as the Ministry of Defence. Because it is necessary to nip such things in the bud, it is necessary to educate the relatives and save the mothers, help them, and support them and explain that the situation is completely different from what they hear.

You know, I think my colleagues in other regions agree with me. We are ready to work 24/7 in this area because it is a very important thing. I am speaking today as a mother and as a person who works for the government because there is and will be assistance, care and support. And we are ready to provide this.

I should stop now, I can talk a lot about this; it is a hot button for me.

**Vladimir Putin:** First, Ms Kostyuk, I would like to point out something. You spoke about the heroes of our time. Lermontov had a different hero. He had an eternal spleen, he lacked something, he doubted. After all, he was sorry that he interfered in the lives of honest smugglers and so on and so forth.

Your son is different, and here are the mothers of those men, who are real heroes in the truest sense of the word. This is the first thing.

The second is about what happened. You see, he is a real hero, your son. He consciously did what he died for, what dedicated his life to.

I once said, “For one’s friends.” You know, there are things like this everywhere – in the Bible, in the Torah, in the Koran, do you see? Indeed, only a person with such an upbringing and with such an attitude towards his neighbours and towards the cause he serves could do what your Andrei did, judging by what you

said.

**Maria Kostyuk:** The guys told me.

**Vladimir Putin:** The guys told us, all the more so. They cannot deceive, these are not fake stories from the internet.

Regarding what you said about families and military enlistment offices. Still, all of us – big bosses, lower officials and ordinary people – are one people, no matter what position or post we hold. And there are always different people, and there are different officials: there are those like you and your family, and there are people in some departments and in military enlistment offices, who – and you just spoke about them with indignation – treat the families of our servicemen condescendingly or bureaucratically, casually and coldly. Therefore, our task, of course, is to get rid of such people, and this kind of communicating with people.

In this regard, of course, what you are doing, what Ms Pshenichkina is doing, and what many of those present are doing, is very important. It is very important to rip off this “skin of indifference” from the officials at various levels, from some state agencies. We must do this.

Frankly speaking, I asked you to get together today so that it would be clearer to me, too, where the problems are. Of course, I know much of what you are saying, almost everything. But it is one thing when you know something from paper reports, or even from the oral reports of your colleagues, and another thing when you learn it directly from people like you, from life, you see. It matters.

So, it is right and good that you are talking about this, and it is even better that you are doing it. Thank you for this. I know that there are various initiatives, various public groups are created.

They are essential for us to be more efficient. Ultimately, if we do as you propose, it will lead to more effective work and to the achievement of the result, which you also mentioned, for the country to be different. We should all work together in this direction.

As for the enemy's actions, and your guys are fighting directly with the enemy, which is directly opposite, but there are also enemies in the information sphere, too. When you say that they are trying to convince someone of something, to throw in some false information, to induce people to take some action. What action? They induce people to take destructive action, which would nullify and discredit that for which your son gave his life.

That is why this is done: to devalue what our guys are doing, and, in my opinion, to devalue our very noble efforts to defend our people in Donbass, in Zaporozhye, in Kherson. That is what they do: devalue all our efforts and what our guys are doing; they are trying to devalue, compromise and ultimately achieve their goals. And we, as you rightly said, as everyone here says, must achieve our goals, and we will achieve them, no doubt.

As for being attentive to servicemen, including the injured, so they can work in enlistment offices, for instance, there is such a team. The Defence Ministry is doing this and will continue to do it, but this is not enough. I think we need to develop a separate programme for the men who need additional support related to future employment. We need to develop a separate programme, and we will do this.

**Maria Kostyuk:** Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you.

**Irina Tas-ool:** Good afternoon.

**Vladimir Putin:** Good afternoon.

**Irina Tas-ool:** Mr President,

First, I want to thank you for the compassionate attention and support you are giving our men.

I represent the Republic of Tyva. My elder son is serving in the 57<sup>th</sup> Motorised Infantry Brigade of the Khabarovsk Territory. On March 7, he began to take part in the special military operation. As I learned later, on April 30 he was seriously wounded. I learned about this on May 7. First, he said he had simply caught a cold. Of course, I understand that he did not want to upset me. A few days later I managed to get hold of our deputy from the Republic of Tyva and asked him for help as I wanted to learn more about my son's illness.

My son stayed over six months in hospital – five months in the Vishnevsky Hospital in Moscow and over a month in a hospital in Khabarovsk. Currently, he is at home in the Republic of Tyva. He received aid in the form of follow-up care at the Serebryanka health spa in the city of Kyzyl.

As the mother of a wounded serviceman who needs extensive treatment, I am concerned about the development of the system of rehabilitation for wounded servicemen and support for their families. I would like a targeted programme to be developed to provide aid not only for wounded servicemen but also for their families, because their mothers, wives and children did not have to deal with this before and not everyone knows where to apply and who is in charge of this. It takes some families, shall we say, a long time to resolve this issue.

Also, in 2020, in keeping with your instructions, a medical diagnostic centre was built in the Republic of Tyva with a focus on efforts to protect people from the coronavirus, and this centre

did quite a lot to help and support people during the pandemic. However, the morbidity rate has been brought to a minimum now, and I hope this centre would be given the status of a military hospital, so that after returning home, in our case to Tyva, the servicemen know where they can receive treatment and follow-up care.

Also, as you have just said, it would be good if they were assisted in finding jobs. When signing the contract, my son believed he would be a serviceman and devote his whole life to this occupation. When on October 25, 2022, the military commission deemed him unfit for military service he had to start thinking about employment. These men should be invited to work at military registration and enlistment offices or in the education system where they can teach students to be patriots of their country. They could work as consultants at military enlistment offices because they have a lot of experience under their belt.

I would also like to express our gratitude to the government of the Republic of Tyva that has also provided aid to the families of the mobilised men and we, ordinary people, are thankful for it.

Thank you for your attention.

**Vladimir Putin:** Good.

Ms Tas-ool, first, we will see what we can do to help you. Generally, Ms Kostyuk already spoke about the need to invite these men to work at military enlistment offices, in particular, those who have been wounded. We will do precisely so. This is my first point.

My second point is that you have taken a broader view of the matter. In general, we need to consider this issue and create not just a system of follow-up care. The [Defence]

Minister says that the overall capacity of military hospitals is at 38 percent full, however, the civilian healthcare system is ready to accept our servicemen, including follow-up care. We will certainly get back to this, so that the men can receive follow-up care not only at medical institutions run by the Ministry of Defence but also at civilian healthcare institutions as soon as they are ready and willing to accept these men, in particular, those who have been wounded. The two ministries should coordinate their efforts in addressing this issue. We will do it and will be tapping the potential of the domestic healthcare system on a wider scale. This applies to regional, republican and federal centres.

Of course, we need a special rehabilitation programme in the broad sense of the word, including retraining and employment. There is definitely a need for retraining. We need to examine this issue thoroughly. I took notes and we will do it.

**Irina Tas-ool:** Thank you.

**Yuliya Belekhova:** Mr President, I am Yuliya Belekhova. I am head of the Popular Front's Moscow Region branch. I am a mother of many children. My eldest son was mobilised in October.

We discussed matters of supporting our soldiers' families on November 2 during the Civic Chamber-sponsored Community forum. The forum brought together public organisations and volunteers and was held at the Museum of Victory on Poklonnaya Hill, which is a signature spot. Today, we covered at length the help provided by volunteers, which we need, and the *We are Together* project, which is also quite helpful.

We spoke about supporting our soldiers' families. The dialogue was anything but simple, because almost everyone attending had either immediate family or relatives either in the special military operation zone or in formal training camps. Everyone came to the same conclusion: family is the source of information for our military. Who will a soldier call? Without a doubt, he will call his mother or wife. In fact, the family is the first to learn about the frontline soldiers' needs and concerns.

On the other hand, we understand the difficulties that these families are facing. Mostly, it is about psychological, material, economic, organisational and information help. Ms Kostyuk was right when she mentioned information help, because today we must protect our families from attacks. We must save them and help them.

During the forum, we arrived at the conclusion that we need to work together and organise our efforts in order to improve the assistance provided to families and military personnel. We decided to create a Fatherland Warrior Families' Committee and the leading Russian organisations – Women of Russia, the Union of Military Families, the Union of Women of Russia, and Mothers of Russia – acted as sponsors. Clearly, it is not an easy thing to do, because there are many issues that need to be addressed today.

We have already reached out to Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova, but Mr President, we really need help in starting a dialogue with the Defence Ministry, because families have many questions for them.

Of course, these are issues of support, too, that have been discussed just today; issues of missing persons, and also issues when they do not get in touch. It is not a matter of three days

or a week, when it is no longer just worry and concern in the family; and, of course, there are questions that must be answered. Today, it is a question of interaction with the Ministry of Health, and interaction with the social block. That is, everything that worries both families and soldiers today.

Of course, we have already begun this work, and our mothers have connected to the Popular Front hotline because we understand each other like no one else, we understand what we are talking about.

Of course, we will be organising New Year celebrations for children in families with a parent in the special military operation. We plan to set up committees in the regions, because there are a lot of issues there that can only be addressed at the regional level. And we have just announced that we will establish a committee, and we have already received requests.

One of them was from Khakassia, where, unfortunately – Nadezhda Uzunova is here – shall we say, the attitude towards families and the explanation of issues of regional support measures there was not quite right. It is necessary to speak honestly and directly and provide tools, among other things: where to apply and how if this assistance is not received for some reason. Therefore, of course, there are questions, and, most importantly, we want to become part of the solution, not part of the problem; we want to help. And here, Mr President, comes our very big request to support us in our work.

No less important is that we definitely need specific people assigned to us from every ministry and department that can answer questions and make decisions. Today we need to do everything promptly, without red tape, without delay. So, we have this request.

And, of course, thank you very much for your trust, because today I am a member of the HRC, the Human Rights Council, and I think this will help in the implementation of the plans that we have today, namely in helping both families and soldiers.

**Vladimir Putin:** Ms Belekhova, is this the official name, *Committee of Warriors of the Fatherland Families*?

**Yulia Belekhova:** It is.

**Vladimir Putin:** Is this official? Is it a registered legal entity?

**Yulia Belekhova:** Yes, it is formally established. You know, our committee is very transparent. There are a great number of impromptu organisations that are not formally established, but our committee exists officially, we have official legal status. We will not disappear tomorrow like some social media groups, leaving families without answers. These groups are just part of some sort of information war. But we exist officially as a registered legal entity. And our mothers are already helping today, answering questions and sharing the information and experience they have.

**Vladimir Putin:** You know, I will issue instructions to the Executive Office and the Government, as you asked. They will reach out to you to offer support. We will certainly do that.

**Yulia Belekhova:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** In the course of your work, you may deal with matters that require special attention and assistance from administrative bodies. It is difficult for me to tell now what kind of matters. I have a general idea about the issues that may arise, but each specific case needs an individual approach.

Overall, this is a case-by-case effort. It is most effective when,

instead of general methods, one works individually with a specific person or a specific family. Each case is unique when it comes to family make-up, family problems, social status, living conditions, getting all the necessary forms of support available by law and sometimes extraordinary forms of support, especially at the regional level.

I do not know if you have noted or if you see it on television when I have any public events (I do not have time to watch how they are covered), but at every meeting with the regional officials, I either begin or end by requesting that my colleagues in the regions be attentive and personally involved in the lives of the families of our service personnel. I always request this. In the majority of cases, I know that not only in Moscow and St Petersburg but in smaller cities as well, in almost every region, the local officials are working on this.

Frankly, it was strange for me to hear that the situation is different in Khakassia. We will look into the actual state of affairs there because it is a very important effort, without a doubt.

You have correctly said, I even wrote it down, that all first-hand information comes through families. It is their families that our personnel text and call when they have the opportunity. It is the family that receives the most objective information about what is happening and what kind of help and support is needed.

Of course, we will be helping you, absolutely.

**Yulia Belekhova:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** We just need your contact information. I am sure somebody will take your phone number an so on.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** I am Zharadat Aguyeva, and I came from Chechnya. I am a mother of two soldiers who are fighting

on the front lines. One is battalion commander Ismail Aguyev, battalion West, and the second is head of the Kurchaloy District Interior Department.

Our sons went there voluntarily the first time. Now, they are on their second tour with their unit. Ismail is wounded, his leg is still hurting, and he uses crutches or a cane to walk. He is fighting in Donbass. They are in Maryinka. I am proud that my sons went there for the first time voluntarily. I have no regrets about them being there.

Our President Ramzan Kadyrov provides them with everything they need, such as clothes and footwear. Ramzan Kadyrov provides their wives and children with food. He is providing humanitarian aid not only to the military, but even to the Ukrainian people. Our president is very proud of our boys and makes sure they have everything they need. He does not leave the families of the sons or husbands who are in the special military operation zone unattended. We do not have any homeless children in Chechnya, starving or needy people. Our president provides all mothers with everything they may need. Our boys are doing just fine.

I am a proud mother. I have one more son at home. If he needs to go, I will let the third one go as well. This is their second tour. Our boys from Chechnya have all their needs met. Basically, they have everything they need. Our president is the best, I think. I am not talking about the President of Russia. We have a special feeling for our president. I am grateful to Putin and the late Akhmat-Khadzhi for doing everything they could to end the war in 2000.

We survived two wars; I know what I am talking about. One of my sons went missing during that war. Now I have three sons.

I am proud of my nation and my people – all of them. We have no one in Chechnya who is starving, needy, or walks around asking for alms. He constantly provides everyone with everything they need, all the boys and their mothers; he does not leave them unattended. He provides everyone with what they need. I am proud of him.

Thank you too, Putin, that you and Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov helped our people very much to stop the war.

That is all I have to say about that.

**Vladimir Putin:** Ms Aguyeva, thank you for your kind words. The merit for what happened on Chechen land and the normalisation that took place goes to the Chechen people and Akhmat-Khadzhi, who gave his life for his people.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** Yes, his people.

**Vladimir Putin:** For the Chechens. He gave his life for that.

I will see Ramzan Kadyrov soon. I have a working meeting with him, and I will let him know what you said.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** He is very supportive of his people. Whatever he says – all our boys, my boys, I think, will lay down their lives for him, for his word. This is their second tour on the front line.

**Vladimir Putin:** The fact that your two sons are fighting there is great.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** I have two grandsons there as well. There are also my husband's relatives with our surname, nephews, a cousin, and four more with our name, the Aguyevs, there are many of them.

**Vladimir Putin:** You can tell your third son that the Commander-

in-Chief has ordered him to stay home. Let him control the situation in the family.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** I told those two to leave the third son alone; we need the third one here at home.

**Vladimir Putin:** I will also tell Ramzan now that the third one should stay home to oversee the family.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** And so we thank you, thank you very much.

I am very grateful to my President, my people and my nation for not forsaking us, for helping everyone. There is no time that he does not help us somewhere or that we really lack something. You can come to Chechnya any time to find out if my words are true or not.

**Vladimir Putin:** I know the difference between Grozny today and the Grozny I saw from an attack helicopter flying over the city in 1999 and 2001.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** Yes, it has blossomed, it is a very beautiful city, the sights are beautiful. It is thanks to our people, to our President.

**Vladimir Putin:** I remember Minutka Square: all in ruins, like it was in Stalingrad.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** Yes, we did not even think it would be rebuilt like this.

**Vladimir Putin:** They thought more about relocating the Chechen capital, because some thought it was impossible to restore it, everything was in ruins. Now it is a prosperous, even posh city.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** I also have a grandson at a Suworov

Military School. "Grandma , – he says, – when I am 18, I will also go to war along with my uncles." I said: 'Wait, maybe it'll be over, you probably won't get there. 'No,' he says, 'if it continues, I'll go.'" He is doing well at a Suvorov Military School, this grandson is 16 now.

**Vladimir Putin:** Please pass on to your loved ones, to all Chechens, pass on my gratitude for their contribution to the common struggle and for victory.

**Zharadat Aguyeva:** I am proud of my nation and my people.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you for what you said, for what you have done, raising such men.

Thank you.

**Marina Bakhilina:** I am Bakhilina Marina, Republic of Sakha. I am also a mother of three sons.

My middle son is a regular military man; he has stayed in since he was called up at the age of 18. He serves in an Airborne Forces reconnaissance unit. He has been in the special military operation from the first days.

**Vladimir Putin:** Airborne Forces, right?

**Maria Bahilina:** Airborne Forces, 83<sup>rd</sup> brigade.

When the special operation began, he was there from the first days. In April he was awarded the Order of Courage.

**Vladimir Putin:** The Order of Courage is not given for nothing.

**Maria Bahilina:** Yes. He was shown on TV.

He was very badly wounded. But he found the will, as they say, to recover. He is currently in hospital undergoing rehabilitation and plans to go back in January.

My eldest son was mobilised in September.

But what I want to say, I will be brief, I do not know how to say a lot.

In a word, I raised my sons with patriotism. As they say, the party told you, the Motherland told you, so go ahead. No one shied away from the army; everyone joined the army physically and mentally prepared. They do not hide behind their mother's skirt. The notice came to my son, so he immediately got ready and went to the assembly point. Now he is not far from the frontline in the special military operation. The only thing (well, we correspond rarely, of course) he complains about is food, there is no hot food. Do you understand the problem? If our soldiers cannot be provided with hot meals, then I, as a Master of Sport and a Candidate Master of Sport in shooting, would be happy to go to the front line to cook. I am not joking, really.

Please excuse me, but many mothers here in Yakutsk want to go and help, some as nurses, some as cooks. There is nothing shameful. Some young people are running and hiding... Why are we worse than our sons, as they say?

I wanted to add one more thing: that I would gladly serve, I do not need the money, my pension is sufficient.

The last thing. I would like to convey a huge thank you from the mothers and wives of military personnel to you, Mr President, and to Aisen Nikolayev [Head of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)] and the Magan settlement council for providing material and moral support to our military personnel.

You know, everything has been done so quickly and efficiently. I do not know what it is like in the city, but I go around

and collect parcels: it seems that everyone in Russia has received compensation of 200,000 to 300,000, and vegetable packages. In Magan, for example, the administration has responded very well in general: someone needs water, someone the yard cleaned, someone needs firewood, like that. So, many of us are very well provided for. Thank you very much for this, of course.

Yes, and I have a wish for some mothers who hide their children: there is no need to decide for them, the children themselves must do this, and not run away, pay off and the like.

That is all, Mr President. Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** Ms Bakhilina, you said that you cannot speak well. Indeed, you can, you do it very meaningfully and intelligibly. But the most important thing is not even what you say, but what you do, and the results of your work are in your sons. This work is of the highest quality and the highest standard, if you have such children. I congratulate you on this and thank you.

As for Aisen Nikolayev, he is an experienced leader, a very sensitive person, he is persistent and able to achieve results. Your republic is great. It is not only huge in territory, it is inhabited by very talented people, different people, different nationalities, the people are very melodious, amazing, and beautiful. Such a wealthy republic.

As for what you said about hot meals on the front lines. It would seem that the issues have already been largely resolved – we just heard that it is likely to be okay, but not everything is okay, in fact. Let us see what needs to be done additionally. This is my first point.

The second. Thank you for your readiness to take part

in the combat work of your guys. But I think that the relevant departments in the Defence Ministry should first restore order there. At your initiative, we will deal with this and step up this work, of course. It is not the first time I have heard this, including recently. Therefore, what I heard from you is very important.

I understand that everything is on track in your republic, there are no questions for local and regional authorities.

**Marina Bakhilina:** Yes, everything is on track.

**Vladimir Putin:** (*addressing Yulia Belekhova*) Ms Belekhova, keep in mind that there are good examples of the work of regional authorities.

**Yulia Belekhova:** Yes, Mr President, there are...

**Vladimir Putin:** And they should be replicated.

**Yulia Belekhova:** Yes, we should and will replicate them, because there are indeed examples of good regional work and care for families. Why we want to set up a regional committee on the ground, because maybe even the authorities need to be prompted somewhere on how this is done, how it is implemented. This is about caring for families today and helping them in the various situations they face.

**Vladimir Putin:** Sometimes they should be prompted, and positive examples are needed. They just need to be replicated, to show how this work should be done.

**Olesya Shigina:** I wanted to discuss this exact issue.

**Vladimir Putin** (*addressing Olesya Shigina*): Yes, Ms Shigina, you have the floor.

**Olesya Shigina:** I am a documentary filmmaker, I am a poet, and I have a son who was simply a conscription soldier. When

all this began, he immediately said, “Mother, who else will do this if not me?” So, he joined the ranks of those who were ready to serve the Motherland.

When I learned about my son’s decision, of course verses and tears poured out. Most importantly, I realised that I would go to Donbass to find out what was going on there. I had to see everything myself and understand who these boys were, including my son, or, maybe, as they say in the media...

**Vladimir Putin:** This is not so.

**Olesya Shigina:** Indeed, the situation was very tense at that time, people were saying “No to war,” and so on.

I eventually made this film called The Brave Ones. I went there myself, without even a bullet-proof vest.

**Vladimir Putin:** Did you make a film?

**Olesya Shigina:** Yes.

**Vladimir Putin:** What equipment did you use?

**Olesya Shigina:** In fact, I am a documentary filmmaker, I have the equipment. Not the most sophisticated because no cameramen went with me.

**Vladimir Putin:** Are you a professional film director?

**Olesya Shigina:** Yes, I have about 20 films to my credit.

So, when I went there, as a mother, as a film director and as a person who takes everything to heart, of course, I saw that the boys serving there were like saints. I saw the look in their eyes as they faced death and the Almighty, in the first place. But all of them realised they were fighting for Russia there. There is no division into Chechnya or Daghestan there; they are fighting for all of us together.

While deviating a bit from what I wanted to say, I would like to note that I told the women today how three men prayed in one trench. A Daghestani soldier told me how he, a Chechen and a Russian, all of them wounded, prayed together in three languages. The Daghestani soldier was holding a flag with the Holy Image of the Saviour Not Made by Hands that I gave him and said: “I will keep this close to my heart.” After that, he recited the Our Father in Russian.

All of us are rebuilding Chechnya together, and we are now rebuilding Donbass. My first film was on the militiamen who have been serving on those borders for the past eight years.

*(Addressing Nina Pshenichkina):* This is about your son.

Of course, they are heroes and our saints.

I wrote this verse: “The regiments of warriors and saints grow every minute. // The time of times and its sons are like eyesight for the blind.”

Today, this will help “blind people,” many blind people who have been brainwashed by this fake news and these endless terrible information attacks. To repel them, we need to call up regiments of people who are ready to serve the Motherland just like our sons do. We are patriots, including documentary filmmakers, poets, writers and actors. Indeed, we are true patriots, and we are ready to fill the ranks of those who are making films that audiences are eagerly waiting for.

I have a very big request. For example, twenty of my films. I can't get them on television and at cinemas. Do you understand? The audiences want to know: “Where are your films? Why can't we watch them? We want to see them.” We need to break this wall.

By the way, when I went there to shoot the film *Absolut Life*,

I didn't have a cameraman. I held the camera myself in my trembling hands; I am not a war correspondent, but I understand now how it must be done.

I appreciate the work of the Foundation for Cultural Initiatives. Before going to Donbass for the second time, I filed an application, but the Ministry of Culture was very hard to reach. And here I saw that social mobility exists. That is, the Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives supported my project, I got the support and I felt that I was together with the state, that I was not working alone, you see? Just like our sons should feel that they are not alone, that they will be provided with gear, and that we are waiting for them to return. Wounded or disabled, we will give them a roadmap on how to live. So, my first film about the militiamen will be released soon. I hope it will be shown.

I already have ideas about three more films, they were hard-won, but I already know how to make them. <...>

It is very easy to detect patriotic, creative people because they have not changed their patriotic stance in the past 20 years. It is very easy to find us, we are here and ready to serve the Fatherland. In all my films, the final shot always says, "Cinematography in service to the Fatherland."

I make films about mothers with many children, our soldiers or those people who create something constructive in Russia, these are my films about heroes. I would love it if there was a major festival... I am sorry, I am nervous because I want to say so much.

**Vladimir Putin:** No, your speech is very constructive, very interesting.

**Olesya Shigina:** But I am still nervous, so...

For so many years, film festivals like ArtDocFest and Kinotavr tortured our people with obscene content, films that were made without love, films that were about not loving Russia. And there we have so many people who are waiting to be called on so they can make films about love for Russia, our heroes, write about them, live there in Donbass and write books. I personally am ready to just live there in the trenches and write about them.

And this is so great that we, patriotic writers, poets and filmmakers are being heard now. We are starting to be heard.

Mr President, the very fact that I am here now shows that this is a means of social mobility. I think the Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives is your initiative. And while Zharadat Aguyeva is very thankful to the Chechen leader, I believe that everything that is happening and being built in Russia is governed by our President, and he acts in coordination with the people at the local level. If a region has a smart leader – you know, there is a saying at the front that it does not matter that a company is not able to think straight as long as their commander is not stupid – this leader listens to all your instructions, and everything is being done. Just like at social welfare bodies. All these levels need to appear.

So I have a big request (as a creative person I talk a lot).

The first thing is that I want to make these films with motherly love, you know, through love. I need the assistance of the Defence Ministry for this, because it's almost impossible to get into these units. I'm ready to shoot on the front lines, I've done it before, I have some experience now. I am not afraid, as far as it is possible.

I would very much like other documentary filmmakers, poets,

writers, to have access to cinemas, to television, to the main TV channels so that the main TV channels don't get carried away by their entertainment content alone, but finally start noticing us.

I would love to create a film festival "In service to the Fatherland." It does not have to be all about heroes of the special military operation.

So please. I now speak for all creative intelligentsia. I know what everyone wants to say. Mr President, we are counting on you.

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** All right. Thank you.

You know what thoughts came to my mind just now, when you were talking about patriotic people in the creative professions, and you said that some of the events in the cultural sphere were tormenting our people.

Why was this happening? I can tell you; it's very simple. Because we were in a state after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and we – many of us – thought that now the sweet life would begin, and tomorrow we would live like in Paris or somewhere else. But it turns out that many people do not want to live like in Paris.

**Olesya Shigina:** Absolutely, yes.

**Vladimir Putin:** They thought it would be great there. But in reality it is not like that; the cultural code is different there. I think anything is possible, but the way we are celebrating Mother's Day, the way we are sitting here and talking about the role of women, the role of the mother, in many places they no longer even know what a mother is. Really? There's just 'parent number one' and 'parent number two.' And they measure gender there by the dozens, some kind of "transformers" –

I don't even know what they're talking about. It's not our culture at all, it's a different code of some kind.

Like what Ms Shigina said about the young people from Daghestan...

**Olesya Shigina:** Yes, it is a mix of cultures, and the war is going on for spirituality, for our spirituality.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, of course. We have a unique civilization, the unification of people of different ethnicities, different cultures and different religions in one whole. This is the first thing.

Second. At the turn of the 2000s, in the 1990s we thought that everything would be good, but it turns out that it is not so. More than that, we started to live and play on someone else's turf and enthusiastically indulged in the fact that they were trying to rule us. And as a result, those who were trying to rule us – by and large thanks to their efforts, we ended up in this situation, including the special military operation. After all, they are the ones who pushed it to this point.

I understand that we are not here for a serious discussion on political issues, but still, if there had not been a coup d'état in Ukraine in 2014, nothing would have happened, just nothing. And so, they had a great influence over that country, and after 2014 they actually took control of the authorities and administrations in fact.

And who are they? Bandera followers. And what are Bandera followers? Neo-Nazis. Bandera was Hitler's follower, he shot Russians, and by the way, Poles, Jews, everyone in a row on Hitler's orders. And today they have raised these people to the rank of national hero; that is what and who our soldiers are fighting today in the special military operation. And many of those who oppose them do not even understand what they

are doing, do not understand that they are being used simply as pawns in someone else's game. They are playing someone else's game, but we have to fight for our interests, for our people, for our country. This is what we are doing.

And what happened in previous years was largely due to the fact that we behaved as if we had always lived on someone else's turf. And today's events are a way to find some kind of inner purification and renewal. And of course, people like you, people in the creative professions who think like you, of course, they have always been needed, and especially in such difficult times in the life of the country.

But since everything has developed in a certain way in recent years, clearing the ground for you is quite difficult, believe me, even at my level, because everything there is deep. But we will definitely do this.

**Olga Shigina:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, we will. And of course, assistance will be provided to you by the Defence Ministry. I have no doubt about this. We will think about how to organise this in such a way that it will give good result and also make it as safe as possible and try to do it. Okay?

**Olga Shigina:** Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Speaking about distribution, you said that it is difficult to do this through the Ministry of Culture. There is red tape there too, probably. But the Ministry of Culture will join in. The Minister [of Culture Olga Lyubimova] is also a patriotic woman, a very active young woman, she is experienced. I will talk to her, she will join in this too.

**Olga Shigina:** Yes, now is the time for documentaries.

By the way, Russian documentary filmmakers are considered among the best in the world, because the level of piercing the essence of a problem is very high among documentary filmmakers.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes.

And what you said about the people you saw there, almost at the front, is of course, worth a lot. And it was good for me to hear it now.

**Olga Shigina:** I can show you.

**Nina Pshenichkina:** We watched this film, she sent us.

**Vladimir Putin:** I would like to ask you to send it to me too, please.

Let's finish up, shall we? Or is there something else?

Please.

**Lyubov Rubanik:** I am a mother of seven children from St Petersburg.

**Vladimir Putin:** We have big families in St Petersburg – it is nice to hear that. Not only in Chechnya, not only in Daghestan, but also in St Petersburg.

**Lyubov Rubanik:** We have six sons and an adopted daughter.

**Vladimir Putin:** Great.

**Lyubov Rubanik:** The eldest two sons, Dmitry and Daniil, have served in the Army and are now ready to be mobilised. Our middle son, Pantelei, went to the military enlistment office in June and joined the Army. In October, he signed a contract and is in training. Vladislav will also join his brother in the Army in December. The two youngest are 11 and 12 years old.

I would like to talk about patriotic upbringing. Our grandparents

survived the Siege. Our grandfather was deaf, but from the age of 14 he worked at Baltic Shipyard, then he reached Berlin; even though he was deaf, he fought. And a few years ago, when he was 92, he passed away. He devoted his whole life to the Navy, served in Murmansk. This is the grandfather of my children, so we had this upbringing, initially all the children are patriots, everyone knows what our Motherland is.

When we studied in school, we had early military training, we were proud that we were little Octobrists, then pioneers, and of course, everyone aspired to join the Komsomol.

I would like to tell you a little about our organisation. This is the Priliv charity foundation in St Petersburg, which is part of the Mothers of Russia national movement.

In connection with the latest events in the country, we certainly could not stand idle. We do our best to help forced migrants who have to go to St Petersburg, help pregnant women, and also support the families of those in the special military operation who find themselves in a difficult life situation.

Just the other day, a woman turned to our organisation. She is due to give birth to a baby, and the other kids are small, and she said: "There is no one to take me from the hospital, because our father is at war." And so our volunteers will pick her up at the hospital. This is what we do.

We would like to work together with the Healthcare Ministry and the Defence Ministry, on step-by-step support for military personnel – post-traumatic support for those men who are returning from military operations.

So that everyone can receive support while waiting for disability benefits, and the family can receive psychological assistance, which was just discussed. And these men should receive help,

because many become depressed. We also have a psychologist at the foundation who works with both the families of forced migrants and the families of those who have been mobilised.

**Vladimir Putin:** This problem of rehabilitation, which we already talked about, has several sides. In addition to medical help, we should also provide psychological and social assistance.

I already said that it is very important, I think, to help people gain additional skills, knowledge, some kind of additional education, and to help them with employment. This is a whole set of things to be done.

And I already noted, of course, this should be done.

And of course, Ms Rubanik, we will support everyone in every possible way with help from your foundations, public organisations.

**Lyubov Rubanik:** Yes. Only together we can win.

**Vladimir Putin:** I absolutely agree with you.

**Nadezhda Uzunova:** Republic of Khakassia, my name is Nadezhda. We all believe that a very important event for our entire country took place on September 30, and I was lucky to be on Red Square, to participate and be a part of this moment with our entire country. Now there are more children, more families in our country. What does this mean? This means responsibility, a huge responsibility for these people.

I have firsthand knowledge of Donbass, since 2017. As part of my beloved organisation, *Combat Brotherhood* led by Alexander Vekshin, head of the Khakassia branch, we evacuated seriously ill and wounded children from the territory of Donbass. And then, for the first time, I saw this pain in Shakhtyorsk, Donetsk, Gorlovka with my own eyes, when you pull children out of basements, when boys, girls...

Olesya is making a film about brave people, and back then I made short films, which we now show in schools, because peers understand peers better – we have developed this system. And we name each short film after a child.

My first film is called *Vovka*. The boy is ten years old, he leads me into the basement and says: you know, I can lie down, I can sit, I can stand on command, like a soldier, but I am afraid I will not survive this moment. Artyom, whose sister died in front of his eyes. How can one forgive it, how can one forget it? And someone pressed that button when it exploded. Vadim. I know everyone by name.

And I am a mother of many children, I will not surprise anyone here. We are all great. I also bring up adopted children by myself. It does not matter whether a kid is adopted or your own, they are all ours. And at that moment, I decided to help, I decided to go forward.

Recently I visited St Petersburg, but I could not mentally relax, because I changed, I was reshaped for a completely different task. And we visited our fighters at hospitals, and we visited them with our brotherly republic, the Republic of Tuva, because Khakassia and Tuva are brotherly republics, we are very close, closely connected.

**Vladimir Putin:** Neighbours.

**Nadezhda Uzunova:** And with women from the St Petersburg community of the Republic of Tuva, we visited our guys. You know, even here our unity is evident. In what? How to make the fighters happy, how to surprise them? We decided to cook a national dish. And of course, when you enter these wards with these buckets and talk to the fighters, you can hear something like, “How delicious, like at home.” Well, what else do you need?

When you understand that you are channeling the love of the mothers who cannot be with our guys today.

Of course, when the mobilisation began, all women in our country were extremely worried, that is for sure. At the same time, several hours later I wrote an appeal on the rallying of forces in our republic, consolidation and the power of women's energy. I wrote that we must not give up and that losing heart is the worst thing possible and must never happen.

And we started preparing the sons of Khakassia. I am sure that women in other regions did the same. We prepared everything, from their knapsacks to their destination point with prayer and food. All our women have united. It is such a powerful force and energy. And you see that this makes you stronger.

When our boys were leaving, we bade farewell to all of them, and there were 1,400 of them. I followed them to their training area, to the training camps. I accompanied them because it happened so quickly that some issues remained unsettled. We dealt with them on the go.

We will not stop, Mr President, never doubt this. We know for sure that we will do this.

Of course, there are bottlenecks, just as in any other new and complicated project. I can tell you for sure that everyone in Khakassia is working 24/7 anyway, including the regional and municipal authorities and the people of Khakassia, those who have really joined forces. All of us care.

As for the bottlenecks, I will tell you about them very briefly.

For example, I believe, judging from my experience because we keep working and the guys keep in touch. In the past, I used to ask my children, my sons, how their day was. But

my evenings have become longer now, because other sons call to tell me what is going on, what they need, how I can help them, what they need at the frontline now, because the list is changing: uniforms, scrambled phones, other things.

As for the situation with regional support and assistance back here, we must definitely take care of every family. Today it is our common task and the task of those who are working with the families; we are taking care of every family.

As of now, the budgetary hearings are open to the public, and I believe that the regional budget must not be approved without due regard for the mobilised soldiers' families. They can and must take part in the hearings, which will prevent problems.

As of now, I can assure you that we have resolved all issues. Next Tuesday, 29 families will receive regional allowances, which is good, because we had to cut through red tape. But once again, this is a new and complicated issue.

I would like to note one more aspect, that is, benefits.

The Government of the Republic of Khakassia has drafted a substantial package of additional measures to supplement financial payments. Any benefit should have a well-thought-out mechanism. This includes coal, for example. There are no problems with coal in our republic, I am referring to its amount. However, the coal distribution mechanism was not finalised. It turns out that they have started issuing coal under this regional system only now, but cold weather has already set in all over Siberia.

However, I would like to tell you that absolutely all families have received coal because we have partners and sponsors. Today, the heads of municipalities are addressing various local issues very quickly. Naturally, Khakassia is a small republic, and,

of course, we resolve all issues rather quickly.

I would like to note one more aspect. Understandably, everyone is trying hard, and this concerns all municipalities. We have 12 municipalities that have been affected by the mobilisation, and the head of each municipality is, naturally, trying to uphold its interests. Consequently, our municipalities receive different benefits. If there is a difference, it means someone gets less. Next week, we will discuss these aspects because the heads of municipalities always remain in touch and communicate directly. We believe that there should be no difference. These aspects are highly important.

As you know, Mr President, very strong women have gathered here today. Indeed, these women can show us how to live properly and how to raise our children because we probably follow the example of our grandmothers and grandfathers who, doubtless, brought Victory closer, while working on the home front. We therefore have a good example.

No matter how strong we may be, we need a strong shoulder to lean on – your shoulder, your support, including support for our committee. We, mothers, would like to thank you very much for receiving us today. We are moving forward with our families. These are the families of mobilised and enlisted men. By the way, there are very many of them in the republic. Yes, we have many such people, and we are proud of them.

Of course, I cannot help but convey best wishes from our soldiers to you because they are talking about this, and they know that I am here today. All soldiers, all men and volunteers from the Republic of Khakassia are sending you their best wishes. Please accept them.

**Vladimir Putin:** Thank you very much.

This seemingly routine issue, namely, benefits, their uniform application, the mechanism and the quick decision-making process, is rather important. To accomplish this task, we do not have to make any complicated budget process decisions. We simply need to stipulate everything in advance, and this process will develop automatically; there are no problems here. Nevertheless, I have made note of it all, and I will pay attention to it.

**Nadezhda Uzunova:** Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** As for associations, I can already see several of those associations that are created answering the call of the heart, as they say; their representatives are present. And yours too, of course.

Shall we finish?

Here is what I would like to say in conclusion. Ms Uzunova said that support was needed, on the one hand. On the other hand, there certainly will be support, as I have already said.

But here is what I would like to say: the main support is your stance and the way you – I will not refrain from strong words – have lived so far and the way you raised your children. This is the main foundation for the existence of Russia.

I am not talking only about you, about those present here, but in general about our mothers. This is the main foundation on which Russia stands. This is everything: this is our history, our culture, our traditions; this is confidence in the future of the country, confidence in our victories in the broadest sense of the word, not only within this special military operation.

As Marina Kostyuk said, and as far as I see, you were speaking about the future of Russia; that it should be different. In this

regard, if you noticed, we have not changed our plans for the development of the state, for the development of the country, for the development of the economy, its social sphere and national projects, despite all the issues related to the special military operation. We have huge, big plans, but they can be realised if we solve all the problems, all the issues that the country is facing in the same way: both in the course of this special operation and, as we used to say, in our daily toils.

Unity is the most important key to our success. The unity that Olesya Shigina spoke about here, about which Zharadat Aguyeva and Suna Nabiyeva spoke, and everyone from all regions: from our Cossack regions and the new regions, from those that have always believed they are the very heart and foundation of the Russian state. All of them together: the periphery, and the centre, and the south, north, east, west – this is all our huge country of Russia.

But Russia is not only a territory and not so much a territory but first of all people, their traditions, their culture and their history, which is passed down from generation to generation and taught to us as children by our mothers.

All thanks to you.

Thank you very much.