

**Statement of the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium  
(Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta)  
in response to escalation of attacks on scholars in Ukraine**

December 8, 2021

Each year in November, Ukrainians worldwide remember the victims of the Holodomor—the famine-genocide of 1932–33 in Soviet-ruled Ukraine. Commemorations this year, however, were marred by disputes in the wake of a [September 7 forum organized by the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide](#) in Kyiv (Holodomor Museum), during which it was claimed that 10.5 million Ukrainians died or were killed in 1932–33.

Estimates made before Ukraine’s independence of the number of famine deaths ranged for the most part from two to eight million. Although the figure of seven million became widely accepted by many in Ukrainian communities abroad, uncertainty on this question was reflected in the [“Findings” of the US Congress’s Commission on the Ukraine Famine Report to Congress](#), which states: “The victims of the Ukrainian Famine numbered in the millions.”

Discussion of the Famine of 1932–33 was forbidden in the Soviet Union until the eve of Ukraine’s independence. Afterward, newly opened archives triggered an avalanche of research on Holodomor-related topics. In 2015, demographers at the Ptoukha Institute of Demography and Social Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, together with Oleh Wolowyna, a demographer from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, published an article in a Canadian peer-reviewed scholarly journal containing their findings. Based on their analysis of archival and published data, employing recognized methodologies associated with their field, the demographers concluded that about 3.9 million people perished in 1932–34.

While many scholars, public figures, and wider circles in Ukraine and abroad have accepted the demographic findings, others have not. Disagreements among scholars are not uncommon, but those holding opposing views usually treat one another with civility. This was not the case in a June 2021 [article published in \*Ukraina Moloda\*](#), in which personal attacks and veiled threats were made against both the demographers and the scholars in Ukraine who accept their findings, calling for their prosecution under Ukrainian law. An abbreviated version of this article that does not contain the veiled threat was published in the [September 3 issue of the diaspora’s \*Svoboda\*](#).

The dispute escalated early this month, as revealed in two open letters that appeared in Ukraine. [The first letter](#) was written in reaction to the September 7 forum organized by the Holodomor Museum, and other activities of that institution.

The [second, posted on the website of the Holodomor Museum](#), was written in response to the first. In it, our colleague, Liudmyla Hrynevych, an accomplished scholar with the National Academy of Science's Institute of the History of Ukraine and head of the Holodomor Research and Education Centre (HREC) in Ukraine, was subjected to outrageous and slanderous accusations. Her activities were deemed to be "amoral, disinforming society and undermining the national interests of Ukraine in the humanitarian sphere." On the contrary, Dr. Hrynevych, who also serves as the Ukrainian representative of the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, [holodomor.ca](http://holodomor.ca)), is active in promoting public awareness of the Holodomor, particularly through initiatives in education. She has also published scholarly articles related to the Holodomor and has compiled volumes of materials on the period leading up to the Holodomor. It should be stressed that Liudmyla Hrynevych has on many occasions made clear her views on the Holodomor as genocide, including in her [innovative article applying theories of colonialism and empire to the Ukrainian case](#). In so doing, she has brought greater awareness of the genocidal nature of the Holodomor to international academic audiences interested in issues of empire and colonialism. The accusation, therefore, that her activities as director of HREC in Ukraine have been conducted to "distort the genocidal nature of the Holodomor" is not only false but absurd.

We at HREC, involved in research and promoting scholarship on the Holodomor since 2013, are deeply troubled by the impugning of reputations of our colleagues in Ukraine and threats made with the intention of intimidating scholars, and we are disturbed that the Holodomor Museum is involved at the institutional level. We understand that the topic of the Holodomor can stir emotions and also that it can thus be used to divide communities, both in Ukraine and abroad. To foster divisions at this time, when Ukraine is being threatened militarily by Russia, is simply reckless.

The exact number of those who died as a direct result of the Famine will never be known. However, we believe that the figure reached by the team of demographers of just under four million direct deaths during the years 1932–34 is the most accurate estimate to date. This does not mean that we think it is the final number, nor should it be. The field of Holodomor studies is young. New archival materials continue to be located and studied, and discoveries and contributions could still be made that cause views to change. We urge those scholars who believe that their findings disprove or seriously challenge the conclusions of the demographers to be transparent about their methodologies, reveal sources, and seek publication of their research in peer-reviewed academic journals. This approach would be the most constructive way to challenge the findings of the demographers and would contribute to greater understanding of the Holodomor-genocide.