Ukraine urges international fashion industry to boycott Russia

By Triana Alonso  March 2, 2022

The Tsum Kyiv department store launched an appeal this week after war broke out in its home country last Thursday (February 24). The objective? To call for international solidarity in the fashion industry through a global initiative to support Ukraine and to "stop Russian aggression".

"The fashion industry is always on edge on what’s happening on planet Earth. It has a powerful voice that allows to speak up, influence and drive real changes. During these tough and dark times for Ukraine and the global community, we ask you to use this voice now to support Ukraine, protect humanity and help us stop the war," the statement said. It was signed by Marusya Koval, head of marketing for the department store located since 1939 on Kyiv’s main shopping boulevard, Khreshchatyk Street.

In a matter of days, Tsum Kyiv had undergone a tragic transformation. It was the fashion epicenter of the capital, in charge of introducing the latest creations by local designers and offering products from major luxury brands, with its buyers finalising plans for their trip to Paris Fashion Week. Then it was shutting down in the face of Russian troop advances towards the city followed by attacks and bombings. As of today, the department store intends to convert its two-level underground parking garage into an emergency hospital.

For this reason, Tsum Kyiv launched an appeal to the fashion industry’s various branches, asking the media to spread awareness about the situation in Ukraine, as well as to stop “any relationship with Russian brands, retailers and media.” As for retailers, the Ukrainian multibrand player called for a ban on the sale of Russian brands on online and offline platforms, while asking companies to suspend shipments to Russia. "No international brand should be offered or sold in Russia," they added, requesting a stop to any business relations with the country led by Vladimir Putin.

Department stores and e-commerce platforms in the face of war
FashionNetwork.com contacted some of the main European industry players throughout the last few hours to comment on the boycott that requires action from the international fashion industry. The IADS (International Association of Department Stores), which has stayed in close contact with Tsum Kyiv, specified that, for the moment, no global agreement has been reached between the members of the association over the stance they should or should not adopt.

French multibrand retailer, Printemps, which does not have any Russian brands in its portfolio, indicated that it's currently thinking about how to organise a solidarity initiative as soon as possible. The department store El Corte Inglés, which has a strong presence in the Iberian Peninsula, has stated that no official actions or communication strategies have been planned in connection with the war in Ukraine. Galeries Lafayette, Le Bon Marché, 24S and La Samaritaine have not yet responded to FashionNetwork.com's request for comment. An industry source noted that while brands are beginning to react to the situation, they're doing so discreetly to avoid upsetting their Russian clientele or jeopardising their local operations in Moscow.
Luxury e-tailer Yoox Net-a-Porter was among the first to take action in response to the conflict, stopped shipments to Russia from all its e-commerce platforms (Yoox, The Outnet, Net-a-Porter and Mr Porter) at the beginning of this week, as confirmed by FashionNetwork.com: "Due to the current situation, we are unable to complete any orders in your country. All order fulfillment has been suspended until further notice," read a brief message posted on the group's several Russian websites' landing pages. For the time being, other e-commerce platforms such as Farfetch, MatchesFashion and MyTheresa have not announced a halt to their operations in Russia.

Fashion Weeks and Federations react

After Milan Fashion Week concluded by treading lightly around the news about Ukraine, apart from Giorgio Armani’s silent fashion show, Paris Fashion Week took up the baton on Monday, February 28, with a declaration of solidarity from the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode. In the words of its president, Ralph Toledano, the event defended the emancipatory role of fashion in society, suggesting that fashion shows be celebrated with the solemnity befitting this dark period. Only one Russian name appears on the Parisian calendar: Valentin Yudashkin, who will present his latest collection exclusively in digital format.

During the second day of Paris Fashion Week, Botter unveiled a jacket displaying the message "No War" as well as footwear in collaboration with Adidas sporting the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Meanwhile, Christelle Kocher, founder of Koché, wore a brooch with a blue and a yellow flower while walking out at the end of her show. Likewise, the Hungarian firm Nanushka showed its commitment through a statement that accompanied the collection, in which it declared its solidarity with Ukraine as well as its contribution in providing shelter, food, and transportation to those seeking refuge after having fled their country. In addition, the brand confirmed the severance of any commercial ties with Russia and the suspension of deliveries to its customers.
The Fédération Française du Prêt à Porter expressed its "unconditional" support for the measures taken by the French government and the European Union through a statement released this Tuesday, March 1. "The tragedy of the war will have a profound lasting impact on the commercial relations of French companies with Ukraine and Russia." They mourned the "human tragedy that is being experienced in Europe," and expressed their solidarity "with the members affected by this crisis, particularly those present in Ukraine, their Ukrainian and Russian partners, victims of decisions that go beyond them."

**Fashion magazines call for Russia blockade**

As for Ukrainian fashion magazines, their opinion was delivered bluntly. "Vogue UA demands embargo," read a black-backgrounded post published Tuesday on the Instagram profile of the American magazine's licensed edition in Ukraine, in which the publication encouraged blocking the export of fashion and luxury goods to Russia. "In the wake of the unprecedented military aggression from the Russian Federation and the growing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, Vogue UA urges all international fashion and luxury conglomerates and companies to cease any collaborations in the aggressor's market effective immediately," they detailed, making a "particular appeal to the major players and partners" of the publication, tagging the social media profiles of LVMH, Kering, Richemont, Prada Group, Swatch Group, Chanel, Hermès, Dolce & Gabbana, Max Mara, Burberry, Versace, Valentino, Hugo Boss, Calzedonia, Puig group and Shiseido. "Showing your conscience and choosing humanity over monetary gain is the only reasonable stand one can take in confronting the violent behavior of Russia," they added. Just a few hours later, L'Officiel Ukraine and Elle Ukraine joined the initiative under the same petition to block exports. The vindictive movement from the Ukrainian fashion media outlets initiated the same evening that Putin's troops shelled the Kyiv TV tower, leaving five people wounded and five others dead.

Other voices that have come forward have done so through the signing of an open letter promoted by the publishing platform 1 Grannary, founded by Ukrainian Olya Kuryshchuk. "We also ask the fashion community and influential fashion houses, in particular, to not be silent, to use their platforms and offer hands-on help," advocated the missive. At the time of publication of this article, the letter had already 400 signatories, including renowned industry luminaries such as photographer Nick Knight, designers Christopher and Tammy Kane, Marta Marques (Marques Almeida), Richard Malone, Browns buying director Ida Peterssson, Dover Street Market buyer Olga Kaminska, as well as a handful of artists and fashion editors from publications such as I-D, Vogue Italia, and Dazed.

Practical help so far has included UK footwear and bags specialist Kurt Geiger saying on Monday that it donated its store profits from last week — £50,000 — to support the British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal. And the European arm of US footwear firm Keen has pledged to donate €50,000 in cash to the Red Cross and Global Giving "to provide immediate support to local organisations”. It has additionally teamed up with local distributors in Poland and the Czech Republic, to support Ukrainian refugees at the Polish, Slovakian and Hungarian borders, providing footwear and other essentials.

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