

Speech by Yurii Sheliazhenko

Dear friends, greetings from Kyiv, and thank you for holding antiwar rally on this sad occasion of the second anniversary of Putin's criminal assault against Ukraine.

It is a rare event today where people gathered to protest against the war, not against the enemy. It is clear that the war is planned and budgeted for many years. People are told that the fight for survival will require sacrifices and being prepared for the worst scenarios. But people also have a right to peace, and people have a right to move towards peace breaking the ice of fears, lies, and hatred. Peace movement is a part of human nature; it is indispensable, incorruptible, and omnipresent; it starts from listening to the voice of conscience in every sane mind.

At the Munich Security Conference, President Zelensky said: do not ask Ukraine, when the war will end, ask yourself why is Putin still able to continue it. He also talked about his invention, the Ukrainian peace formula, which assumes that all sorts of security, from national and environmental to food and nuclear, should be ensured by a united war effort of the whole democratic world to provide Ukraine weapons and defeat Russia. Of course, we in the peace movement have a peace formula of our own: "peace is not equal to war" (Peace≠war).

Zelensky's commitment to democracy declared in his 'peace formula' is commendable, and blame towards Russia for aggression, the demands to withdraw troops and compensate for horrible wrongs are justified. But his formula is a bit incomplete because any war, or any other sort of systemic violence, is incompatible with real democracy, the political power of inclusive peaceful dialog, decision-making and nonviolent life.

It is a dangerous utopia to turn the whole nation into soldiers and wipe all the enemy nation out from the planet, and the fact that the enemy nation attacked you first don't make this delusion legitimate. Putin is still able to continue aggression because of militarist utopia entrenched in popular superstitions worldwide, not only among his subjects and fellow dictators but also among his rivals; I remind you that the European Court for Human Rights in 2020 allowed Putin to conscript people contrary to their conscientious objections in the case Dyagilev v. Russia, and it was a sad day of moral failure for European democracy and rule of law. Putin is able to attack Ukraine because his sovereign right to oppress and conscript his subjects is not challenged, denied or prohibited by international law, because he is allowed to play by the rules of militarist playbook which is on the table everywhere today, because nationalism, militarism and great power ambitions to control their spheres of influence became normal in international affairs. The East, notably Russia and China, and the West, including Ukraine as its part, can't achieve real security by forcing their people to fight and ignoring credible security concerns of each other and refusing to have fair and principled discussion.

Peace movements are needed in democratic society precisely to remind that real peace means that people are talking instead of killing, when the people are united not to fight against the common enemy but to work for common good, that peace means not killing all enemies making even more enemies to yourself in the process until they kill you, but peace in reality means turning enemies into friends or, at least, good neighbors, as it happened many times in history and as it must happen again. But you should be cautious when talking about peace and common sense to haters.

I am already prosecuted, my home raided with seizure of computer and smartphone for advocating peace and conscientious objection to military service, criticizing demonized enemy image and suggesting that tragic mistakes were made on both sides. My pacifism was considered a thoughtcrime, there is an ideologically biased forensic linguistic conclusion which among ignorant attacks on a pacifist worldview nonsensically claims that an antiwar statement clearly condemning Russian aggression and any other war as a crime, supposedly, justifies the war. Despite two independent experts found no justification of Russian aggression in my words, I still could be charged in this crime punishable by 5 years of prison. These political repressions under laughable pretext have obvious ulterior purpose to shut down peace and human rights activism of Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, because the militarists hate when we talk about nonviolent resistance, when we helped a prisoner of conscience Vitaliy Alexeyenko to complain and get release through the Supreme Court, when our member Andrii Vyshnevetsky sues President Zelensky demanding discharge from army on the grounds of conscience, when our "Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World" becomes a nonviolent alternative to Zelensky's peace formula.

But despite all the hate and repressions, I am determined to remind the militarists that censoring pro-peace speech is not "defense of democracy" but an authoritarian tendency, that abducting people on the streets, ignoring their objections not only based on conscience but even based on health, and treating

them inhumanely in military training camps, like they did in recent scandalous case of Serhii Grishyn, conscripted despite serious illness and denied of proper medical examination, who was forced to declare hunger strike and now is in coma because of violent attempts to make him a soldier, – all of this are minuses to the component of democracy in Zelensky's peace formula, and recent bill aimed at total military registration under threat of civil death, without exceptions to objectors, with particular purpose to force Ukrainians abroad to return and fight or else they will be deprived of property and consular services, also is not a democratic move.

On the other hand, we welcome readiness of President Zelensky to consider diverse responses to Russian aggression, we still hope for serious consideration of nonviolent responses, and we are ready to participate in implementation of his peace formula by nonviolent means, especially talking about such components of this formula as democracy, peace and justice.

Nonviolent resistance to Russian aggression could mean many individual and collective activities, from simplest like hiding in shelter or donating to help victims, to more complicated like truth-telling, spreading hope, conscientious objection or human rights defense. But I am convinced also that resistance to authoritarian tendencies in Ukraine as instinctive retaliatory mirroring by militarists of the aggressor state's brutal modus operandi could be an important part of resistance to Russian aggression itself; to say plainly, we must resist the temptation of turning into our attackers.

When I say about commitment to peace by peaceful means, I don't call for surrender to bloody tyrants and merchants of death. Our commitment should be to just peace, to justice without violence. Pacifism is not defeatism or naivety but a vigorous, realistic and successful nonviolent way of life. We must prove it every day to ourselves and to others by word and action, this is the only way to be heard. And governments must hear peace movements too. Various pacifist identities, religious and secular, should be recognized as an important part of a diverse democratic society.

European governments, including the German government, must preserve and develop a culture of peace, institutional commitments to nonviolence, democratic and constitutional safeguards against systemic violence such as rule of law and human rights. It could be hard in an unsafe world where politics and economy is hijacked by the military and national security strategies, but it is necessary to preserve peaceful civilization not falling down to the dystopian barbarism of endless war, or even worse, to the nuclear apocalypse.

As hard as it could be to European governments amidst preparations to a big war, they should respect beliefs and rights of those who advocate peace and refuse to kill, because any repressions against such people would mean death of democracy, killing of best hopes of whole society, kept and tirelessly reiterated by those who consistently stick to these hopes, especially if such people do maximum they can to resist evils and mitigate pains of wars nonviolently. Absolute human right to conscientious objection to military service should be fully protected.

Since Ukraine wants to join the EU family, European governments, including the German government, must insist on proper legal recognition of human right to conscientious objection to military service in Ukraine. They must also provide asylum and protection for all those who can't return home because of credible threat of repressions for advocacy of peace and the right to refuse to kill, and this threat is obviously credible in Russia, Belarus, and, sadly, even in Ukraine. Since governments are reluctant to comply with their human rights obligations, the Object War Campaign was launched and it needs support of civil society.

When whole world prepares for war, pacifists prepare for peace, as we always do. Someone need to do it seriously! Instead of self-fulfilling fear of big war, we bear in hearts and minds a self-fulfilling hope for a big changes in politics and economies minimizing to a near-zero level manifestations of violence in social life and governance, abolishing all wars, armies, weapons and arms industries.

Don't ask us how to defeat the enemy; ask yourself, are you prepared to work for better future without enemies, where the word "enemy" will be forgotten.