

Speech for the 2022 World Conference against A and H Bombs

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Dear friends, greetings from Kyiv, capital of Ukraine.

Some people could say that I live in wrong place to advocate abolition of atomic and hydrogen bombs. In the world of reckless arms race you can frequently hear that line of argument: Ukraine got rid of nukes and was attacked, therefore, giving up the nuclear weapons was a mistake. I don't think so, because ownership of nuclear weapons causes high risk to be engaged in nuclear war.

When Russia invaded to Ukraine, their missiles flired with horrible roar near my house and exploded in a distance of several kilometers; I am still alive during conventional war, being more lucky than thousands of compatriots; but I doubt I could survive atomic bombing of my city. As you know, it burns human flesh into dust in a moment at ground zero and makes a large area around uninhabitable for a century.

Even supposing, contrary to reality, that Ukraine after dissolution of Soviet Union could keep and maintain local nuclear arsenal, despite systems of control were in Russia, nevertheless that Ukrainian economy was unable to bear the huge burden of nuclear program, all efforts and sacrifices in pursuit of our very own doomsday machine could be in vain, because mere fact of having nuclear weapons does not prevent war, as we see on example of India and Pakistan.

That's why a goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament is universally recognized norm of international law under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and that's why abolition of Ukrainian nuclear arsenal, third of largest in the world after Russia and United States, was globally celebrated in 1994 as a historical contribution to the world peace and security.

Great nuclear powers too after the end of the Cold War have done their homework for nuclear disarmament. In the 1980s the total stockpile of nukes threatening our planet with Armageddon was five times bigger than now.

Cynical nihilists may call international treaties mere pieces of paper, but Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I, was palpably effective and resulted in the removal of about 80% of all strategic nuclear weapons in the world.

It was a miracle, like the humankind has removed a rock of uranium from its neck and changed its mind about throwing itself into the abyss.

But now we see that our hopes for historical change were premature. Great powers and their ambitions to rule the world threatening humankind with weapons of mass destruction remain the same. Instead of full elimination of nuclear arsenals, they launched so-called modernization investing in the extinction of humankind insane amounts of public funds desperately needed to sustain declining welfare and deal with climate change.

New arms race began when Russia perceived as a threat deployment of U.S. missile defense systems and NATO expansion in Europe, responding with production of hypersonic missiles able to penetrate the missile defense. The world again moved towards catastrophe accelerated by despicable and irresponsible greed for power and wealth among elites.

In rival radioactive empires, politicians gave in to temptation of cheap glory of superheroes mounting nuclear warheads, and military production complexes with their pocket lobbyists, think-tanks and media sailed the ocean of inflated money.

Militarized patriotism intoxicated societies preventing people from large protests like those of the Cold War epoch. But people are not stupid, they felt insanity of situation, people knew they are robbed. So, demonized images of the enemy were created on both sides to redirect popular anger: that's why the East is usually portrayed as empire of autocracy, and the West is portrayed as empire of lies. These fictional images of the enemy distort perception of reality on both sides creating wrong feeling that negotiations and mutually beneficial agreements with so-called enemy are allegedly impossible, shifting decision-making towards fear and threats instead of hope and encouragement, sacrifices and destruction instead of preservation and development.

During thirty years after the end of Cold War the global conflict between the East and West escalated from economic to military fight for spheres of influence between the United States and Russia.

My country was torn apart in this great power struggle, when society was divided to pro-Western and pro-Russian camps during Orange Revolution in 2004 and ten years later, when United States supported Revolution of Dignity and Russia instigated Russian Spring, both were violent seizures of power by militant nationalists with foreign backing in Center and Western Ukraine, on the one side, and in Donbas and Crimea, on another side. Donbas war started in 2014, took near 15 000 of lives; Minsk II accords approved by UN Security Council in 2015 were not led to reconciliation because of all-or-nothing militarist policies and permanent ceasefire violations on both sides during eight years.

Threatening military maneuvers and drills with nuclear component by Russian and NATO forces in 2021-2022 as well as Ukrainian threat to reconsider non-proliferation commitment because of Russian aggression preceded lethal intensification of ceasefire violations on both sides of the frontline in Donbas (reported by OSCE) and subsequent Russian invasion of Ukraine with internationally condemned announcement of decision to increase the readiness of Russian nuclear forces. If these mad threats will be carried out, millions of people could die.

Even conventional war between Russia and Ukraine already took more than 50 000 lives, more than 8 000 of them civilians, and when the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recently revealed inconvenient truth about war crimes on both sides, the belligerents in chorus protested against such lack of respect to their supposedly heroic crusades.

It is a fact that any war violates human rights, for that reason peaceful resolution of international disputes is prescribed by the United Nations Charter.

Nuclear weapons and mutually assured destruction doctrine represent the utter absurdity of militarism wrongly justifying the war as a supposedly legitimate instrument of conflict management even if such an instrument is intended to turn whole cities into graveyards, as the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shows, which is obvious war crime.

While the nuclear warheads threaten to kill all life on our planet, nobody could feel safe, therefore, common security of humankind demands complete removal of this threat to our survival. All sane people in the world should support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which came into force in 2021, but instead we hear from the Nuclear Five states that they refuse to recognize the new norm of international law.

Russian officials say that national security is more important than humanitarian concerns, and U.S. officials basically say that prohibition of nuclear weapons obstructs their enterprise of gathering all free-market nations under U.S. nuclear umbrella, in exchange for great profits of U.S. corporations on these free markets, of course.

I believe it is obvious that such sort of arguments are immoral and nonsensical. No nation, alliance or corporation could benefit from self-destruction of humankind in nuclear war, but irresponsible politicians and merchants of death could easily benefit from deceptive nuclear blackmail if the people allow to intimidate them and turn into slaves of the war machine.

We should not succumb to the tyranny of nukes, it would be disgrace for humanity and disrespect for sufferings of Hibakusha.

Human life is universally valued higher than power and profits, the goal of full disarmament is envisaged by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, so the law and morality is on our side of nuclear abolitionism, as well as realist thinking, because intensive post-Cold-War nuclear disarmament shows that nuclear zero is possible.

Peoples of the world are committed to nuclear disarmament, and Ukraine too committed to nuclear disarmament in the 1990 declaration of sovereignty, so our leaders should respect these commitments instead of undermining them, and if the leaders could not deliver, civil society should raise millions of voices and took the streets to save our lives from provocations of nuclear war.

But make no mistake, we could not get rid of nukes and wars without big changes in our societies. It is impossible to hoard nukes without eventually exploding them, and it is impossible to hoard armies and weapons without bloodshed.

We used to tolerate violent governance and militarized borders that divide us, but one day we must change this attitude, in other case the war system will remain and will always threaten to cause nuclear war. Big historical changes for worse are already happening in the world, so we need to advocate big historical changes for better to reverse this tendency and to prevent it from happening again.

After all, these big changes for better are already happening, there is invisible worldwide shift from archaic cultural violence towards progressive nonviolent culture of peace. People learn nonviolent conflict resolution from educators, media and practitioners, activists and journalists all the time ask belligerent leaders when they will try seriously to end their barbaric wars, and officers under pressure of international humanitarian law command soldiers to avoid targeting civilians, at least publicly, and it works to some degree, numbers of civilian casualties in Russo-Ukrainian war is lesser than number of military casualties. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is also a big change for a better world. We need to support and develop such big changes.

We need to advocate universal ceasefire in all tens of current wars throughout the world, including the war in Ukraine.

We need serious and comprehensive peace talks to achieve reconciliation not only between Russia and Ukraine but also between the East and West, because with economic rear of United States and European Union on Ukrainian side, with rear of China and Eurasian Economic Union on Russian side belligerents could prolong the

bloodshed in Ukraine forever which is horrible scenario for my country and my people. It should not happen.

We need powerful advocacy of peace in civil society and serious peace talks among national leaders to ensure big changes for nonviolent society, more just and peaceful planetary social contract based on abolition of nuclear weapons and full respect for the sacred value of human life.

Omnipresent human rights movements and peace movements done a great job together in 1980s-1990s successfully pressing governments for peace talks and nuclear disarmament, and now when the war machine went out of democratic control almost everywhere, when it tortures common sense and tramples human rights with disgusting and nonsensical apologetics of nuclear war, with helpless complicity of political leaders, it is on us peace-loving people of the world lies a great responsibility to stop this madness.

We should stop the war machine. We should act now, telling the truth loudly, shifting blame from deceptive enemy images to the political and economic system of nuclear militarism, educating people for basics of peace and nonviolent action, upholding our right to refuse to kill, resisting wars with wide variety of well-known peaceful methods, stopping all wars and building peace.

Now it is time for new solidarity of civilian humankind and collective action in the name of life and hope for future generations.

Let's abolish nukes and build peace on Earth together!