

MAKE THE WORLD SAFE AGAIN: VICTORY IN UKRAINE

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I am a human rights lawyer and for many years I have been applying the law to defend people and human dignity. Now I am in a time and place where the law does not work.

I find myself in a weird situation as a human rights lawyer. When someone asks me how to protect people from Russian aggression, I answer “Give Ukraine weapons”.

Russian troops are destroying residential buildings, churches, museums, schools, and hospitals. They are shooting at the evacuation corridors. They are torturing people in filtration camps. They are forcibly taking Ukrainian children to Russia. They ban the Ukrainian language and culture. They are abducting, robbing, raping and killing in the occupied territories. The entire UN architecture of international organizations and treaties cannot stop this.

“How will we, in the 21st century, defend human beings, their lives, their dignity and their freedom?”

I have one question. How will we, in the 21st century, defend human beings, their lives, their dignity and their freedom? Can we rely on the law - or does only brute force matter?

It is important to address this question not only for people in Ukraine, Syria, China, Iran or Sudan. The answer determines our common future.

If Russia succeeds, it will encourage authoritarian leaders in various parts of the world to do the same. The international system of peace and security will not work anymore. Democratic governments will be forced to invest money not in education, health care, culture or business development, nor in solving

global problems such as climate change or social inequality, but in weapons. We will witness an increase in the number of nuclear states, the emergence of robotic armies and new weapons of mass destruction. If Russia succeeds and this scenario comes true, we will find ourselves in a world that will be dangerous for everyone without exception.

Because this is not just a war between two states. This is a war between two systems – authoritarianism and democracy. Russia wants to convince the entire world that democracy, human rights and the rule of law are fake values. Because they do not protect anyone in the war. Russia wants to convince us that a state with a powerful military potential and nuclear weapons can break the world order, dictate its rules to the international community and even forcibly change internationally recognized borders.

When the full-scale invasion started, democratic countries said, “Let's help Ukraine not fail”. We must instead think about helping Ukraine to win fast because there is a significant difference between "let's help Ukraine not fail" and "let's help Ukraine win fast." Democracies have to win wars because only the spread of freedom makes our world safer.

And this is not about Ukraine laying down its arms. People in Ukraine want peace more than anyone else. But peace does not come when the country that was invaded stops fighting. That's not peace. That's occupation. And occupation is another form of war. Occupation is not about changing one state flag to another. Occupation means enforced disappearances, torture, deportations, forced adoptions of your children, denial of identity, filtration camps and mass graves.

I have talked to hundreds of people who survived Russian captivity. They have told how they were

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beaten, raped, packed into wooden boxes and electrically shocked through their genitalia. Their fingers were cut, their nails were torn away, their knees were drilled and they were compelled to write with their own blood. One woman told me how her eye was dug out with a spoon. There is no legitimate reason for doing this. There is also no military need for it. Russians did these horrific things only because they could.

Unpunished evil grows. Russian military committed terrible crimes in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Mali, Libya and other countries in the world. They have never been punished for these crimes. They believe they can do whatever they want.

For now, the law does not work. Although I trust that it is temporary.

We still look at the world through the lens of the Nuremberg Trials, where Nazi war criminals were tried only after the Nazi regime had collapsed. But we are living in a new century. Justice should not depend on how and when the war ends.

Justice must not wait. The global approach to war crimes justice needs to be changed. We must establish a special tribunal now and hold Putin, Lukashenko and other war criminals accountable.

Yes, this is a courageous step. We must do it because it is the right thing to do.

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