



Oleksandra Matviichuks tale ved markering af fireårsdagen for krigen i Ukraine

Taler

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af Center for Civil Liberties

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Sted

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Omstændigheder

Talen blev holdt ved arrangementet "Ukrainske Stemmer – Historier om Frihed", der markerede fireåret for Ruslands fuldskalainvasion af Ukraine.

- 1 This is the fourth winter of the full-scale invasion. And it is very difficult.

- Russian missiles and drones are deliberately destroying the energy infrastructure on which the survival of civilians depends. In January and February,
5 temperatures drop to minus 25 degrees Celsius. Ukrainian cities are literally freezing. Millions of people have limited or no access to heating, water, and electricity.

- I remember in 2022, when the Russians first began striking the energy
10 infrastructure, a photograph appeared online of a Kyiv schoolteacher. She was wearing a red winter jacket and a warm hat, standing on tiptoe beside a metal pole on which she had placed her computer – right outside, somewhere near a shop where a power generator was running and there was internet access. And there, in the freezing cold, she was giving her students a lecture.

- 15 And I thought: the Russians came to take everything from us – our land, our freedom, our future, our children's education. And this Kyiv schoolteacher decided to give them nothing. Even something as simple as teaching a lesson became an act of resistance.

- 20 From my own experience, I know that when you cannot rely on the international system of peace and security, you can always rely on people. We are used to thinking in categories of states and intergovernmental organizations, but ordinary people have much more power than they even imagine.

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Four years ago, I was in Kyiv when Russian forces tried to encircle the city. No one believed we could withstand such a enormous military threat. We greeted each morning as a victory because we had survived another night. I remember
30 international humanitarian organizations evacuating their personnel. But ordinary people stayed – and began to resist. Ordinary people began doing extraordinary things.

One of those people was my friend, the Ukrainian writer Viktoriia Amelina. In
35 the first days of the full-scale invasion, she interrupted her trip and returned to Ukraine. Soon she joined efforts to document war crimes. And she did many other things at the same time.

I remember telling her: you are already doing so much, almost beyond
40 exhaustion – writing a book, documenting war crimes, traveling on field missions, volunteering. Why take on new projects?

She answered that she had a persistent feeling that she was not doing enough. And that she did not know how much time she had – or how much time any of
45 us had.

A month after that conversation, a Russian missile struck a café in Kramatorsk. At that moment, Vika was there with Colombian writers whom she was accompanying to the east. She was gravely wounded and fell into a coma.
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It may sound irrational, but I wrote to her every day in Messenger. I was convinced she would wake up and read it all. Even when our mutual friend, who was beside her in intensive care, told me we needed not only to prepare but to accept the inevitable, I answered that I would not lose hope.
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When I was preparing this speech, I opened that final conversation that Vika never read. And this is what I want to tell you.

First. I do not know what historians of the future will call this period.
60 **But the international order based on the UN Charter and international law has been broken.**

The UN system was created after the Second World War to protect people from war and mass violence. But even my phone has an expiration date. This

system was never reformed. And now it is stalling, performing ritual gestures. It is easy to predict that fires like wars will erupt more frequently in different parts of the world because the international wiring is faulty and sparking everywhere.

70 Ukraine has found itself at the epicenter of events that will determine the future development of the world. Because this is not simply a war between two states – it is a war between two systems: authoritarianism and democracy.

Putin seeks to prove that a country with powerful military capacity and nuclear
75 weapons can break the international order, dictate its rules to the global community, and even forcibly change internationally recognized borders.

Putin did not launch the full-scale invasion to capture another piece of Ukrainian land. It is naïve to think Russia has lost hundreds of thousands of
80 soldiers to occupy Avdiivka or Bakhmut. Putin launched this invasion to occupy and destroy all of Ukraine – and then move further.

His logic is historical. He dreams of restoring the Russian Empire. People in other European countries are safe only because Ukrainians continue to hold
85 back the Russian army.

Second. People begin to understand that war is happening only when bombs fall on their own heads. But war also has an informational dimension, and this struggle for reality has no state borders.

90 The way people see the world determines their decisions and actions. That is why authoritarian regimes attack truth.

We all spend more and more time on social media, flooded with fakes and
95 disinformation. People lose the ability to distinguish truth from lies. Now even residents of the same small community no longer have a shared picture of reality. Without a shared picture of reality, they cannot act together. And without collective action, how can we defend our freedom?

100 We live in what is called a “post-truth world.” But it seems to me it is a post-knowledge world. Knowledge is losing value. People prefer listening to Instagram bloggers rather than researchers or scientists. People demand simple solutions. Perhaps in peaceful times we could afford that. But no one lives in

105 peaceful times anymore. Therefore, instead of simplification, we must cultivate complexity.

We must also resist the normalization of cruelty. A few weeks ago, Russians killed an elderly couple who were trying to leave an occupied village in the
110 Sumy region. The husband was pulling his wife on a sled toward a point where rescuers were waiting. An FPV drone dropped explosives directly on the woman. The husband wept and would not leave her body. Then a second FPV drone struck him. Their bodies remained lying in the snow.

115 As I studied these materials, I remembered that the gas chambers in Auschwitz were built by professional German engineers. And that the collapse of the international system was preceded by the loss of humanity.

**And finally. Freedom is not a given – it is a condition for survival. For
120 three centuries Ukrainians lived in the shadow of the Russian Empire. We would never have survived as a nation if we had not persistently sought freedom throughout those centuries.**

I recorded the testimony of Ukrainian scholar and philosopher Ihor Kozlovskyi
125 after 700 days of Russian captivity. Before that, I had interviewed more than a hundred survivors. They had told me how they were beaten, tortured, raped, locked in wooden boxes, electrically shocked through their genitalia, and their fingers were cut, their nails were torn away, their knees were drilled, and they were compelled to write with their own blood. So, there was little that could
130 surprise me. But Ihor mentioned something seemingly insignificant for the evidence base – and it struck me deeply.

He described his days in solitary confinement. It was a basement cell that in Soviet times held death row prisoners. There were no windows. No sunlight.
135 No fresh air. It was hard to breathe. Sewage flowed across the dirty floor. Rats crowded out from the drain.

And this scholar, known across the country, told me how he gave philosophy lectures to these rats – simply to hear the sound of a human voice.

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Ihor Kozlovskyi was a victim in the legal sense: kidnapped, held in inhuman conditions, tortured so severely he had to relearn how to walk. But even this did

not become a reason for him to treat himself and to experience himself as a
145 victim. Because the foundation of our existence is dignity, not victimhood. And
dignity is action.

We are not hostages of circumstances. We are participants in this historical
process. Dignity gives strength to fight even in unbearable circumstances.

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We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. The murders of
Ukrainian intellectuals, the bloody repression of poets and artists, the artificial
famine of millions – none of this destroyed Ukrainian identity in Soviet times.
Because then, as now, there were always people who taught Ukrainian children.
155 People who wrote Ukrainian books. People who preserved memory.

We sow. We sow seeds. We sow even in winter, when everything is frozen. We
sow what is not afraid of the cold. We sow as an act of faith, knowing that
spring will inevitably come and everything we have planted will grow. Yes, this
160 is long work. But those who plan for the long term are the ones who win.

When I reread the messages Vika never read, I thought about how much she
managed to do in her short life. I thought about the love she generously shared
with me, with her family, with our friends. I looked again at the photographs in
165 her unfinished book about women in war — a book published after her death
and coming out in Denmark this year. Human life is fragile. But even so, it can
be filled with eternal meaning.

I now know many things about hope. Hope is not the belief that everything will
170 be fine. Hope is the deep understanding that all our efforts have meaning.

Kilde

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Kildetype

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