



Some Reflections on a Just Peace in the Russian-Ukrainian War¹

Werner Wintersteiner

World peace through non-violent means is neither absurd nor unattainable. All other methods have failed. Thus we must begin anew. Non-violence is a good starting point. Those of us who believe in this method can be voices of reason, sanity and understanding amid the voices of violence, hatred and emotion. We can very well set a mood of peace out of which a system of peace can be built.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Dreams of Brighter Tomorrows", Ebony Magazine, March 1965

1. We – the participants of the Vienna Peace Summit – come from different parts of the world and have different experiences, agendas and positions, but we are united by the struggle for peace, democracy and social justice, for an ecological balance in a world without (neo-) colonialism, (neo-) nuclearism, patriarchal domination, racism and exploitation of human beings by human beings.

2. We are all deeply concerned by the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is by no means the only war currently being waged on our planet, and our compassion is with all victims of all wars and violent conflicts. However, as all of the major powers are involved, this war is especially dangerous and threatens to become a world war. This is the reason for the Peace Summit in Vienna: to strengthen the cooperation of the peace movements and to rouse world public opinion to help to end this war. The whole event is an urgent call for peace. What follows are some considerations and reflections on the main reasons of this war and on the ways to find back to peace.

CONDEMNATION OF THE AGGRESSION, SYMPATHY WITH ALL VICTIMS

3. The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine has to be condemned. No country has the right to attack another state, under whatever pretext; nor to conquer and to annex the neighbor's territory or part of it. This war, as any war, is a crime against humankind, but we must also explicitly condemn the war crimes committed in this war. Our compassion goes to the people of Ukraine victims of this attack. At the same time, we acknowledge the right of the people of Ukraine for self-defense, according to Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

4. With this act of aggression, this conflict, which has been smoldering since 2014, has reached a new quality. Putin's invocation of the "historical unity" of Russians and Ukrainians and the denial of his neighboring country's right to exist is an act of an imperial policy. Hand in hand with this goes the destruction of democracy in his own country, which the opponents of his regime and all those who are resisting the war are the first to feel.

¹ My thanks to all the members of the preparatory committee who helped to improve a first version of this text.

5. While there is no excuse or justification for the Russian aggression, it is, globally spoken, only one of many examples of violations of international law. In regard to the historical, political-economical and geopolitical contexts of this war, we must be aware of US' and NATO's co-responsibility for the non-resolution of the deeper conflicts regarding the European security architecture after 1989 and especially over NATO-enlargement, contributing to the escalation of this long-term conflict. The insight of this mistake and this wrong basic attitude is also a prerequisite for a lasting peace settlement.

6. The compassion and solidarity of the peace movement is with *all* victims of this war. Experts speak of about one hundred thousand of dead and injured people on each side. We deplore the injuries and deaths, we feel for all the millions of refugees, we empathize with women who are providing vital care, fighting for their livelihood and peace despite human right violations. We are deeply concerned that this war is destroying Ukraine's environment and infrastructure, causing material, economic, environmental and psychological disasters.

7. A special admiration and solidarity goes to all those who, according to their conscience, capacities and opportunities, have worked to prevent this war and who now oppose it, refuse to fight a war of aggression, counter the war propaganda, try to stop the war machine, resist the invasion by using non-violent resistance, often having to experience hostility and persecution for it, be it in Ukraine or Russia and also in Belarus.

8. This war also has devastating global effects. It is leading to rising food and energy prices and a shortage of cereal products, which is exacerbating poverty and triggering famines, especially in the Global South. The rising geopolitical tensions and the arms race in the wake of this war are destabilizing world politics and draining valuable resources that are desperately needed for food and health and the fight against ecological disasters.

LET'S CONSIDER THE WHOLE COMPLEXITY OF THIS PROTRACTED CONFLICT

9. We need to be aware of the long history of this conflict and of the complexity of this war. To put it simply, there are three wars in one: the continuation of the internal war between the Ukrainian government and the separatist provinces, supported and incited by Russia; the Russian invasion of Ukraine, followed by a total Russian war against the Ukrainian army and people with virtually no limit; and the international support of Ukraine by NATO and the EU, by humanitarian, cultural, psychological, economic and military means but with no direct intervention. The latter is perceived by Russia and also by many states in the Global South as a proxy war.

10. The deeper historical and geopolitical context of this war transcends Ukraine and Russia and includes the conflict between Russia and US over the control of Eastern Middle Europe. It is due to this complex constellation that the fighting is being waged with such bitterness, and that there is always the threat of uncontrollable escalation, to the point of a world war and even a nuclear war.

11. Regardless of the causes of this war, let us recall that Article 51 of the UN Charter not only states the right to self-defense, but also the obligation of the international community to resolve conflicts peacefully and to restore international peace and security.

12. What makes the war in Ukraine so extraordinarily dangerous is the fact that even in the second year of war, all the warring parties are only focused on winning while making no effort to achieve peace. So far, they believe this war can be decided on the battlefield. But leading experts are convinced that this war amounts to a stalemate. This means the risk of a permanent war of attrition with great uncertainty, which neither side can afford in the long run without harming themselves. Any continuation of the war only increases the risk of a world war, including nuclear options, with no winner on any side. The longer the war lasts, the more difficult it will be to end it, and at the same time the more urgent it will be. Sooner or later, both parties to the conflict will see negotiations as the only way out. The sooner this insight prevails, the more lives can be saved, the more suffering and destruction can be averted.

AN URGENT CALL FOR PEACE: CEASEFIRE AND NEGOTIATIONS

13. It is time for the weapons to fall silent and for diplomacy to begin to transform the conflict by peaceful means. A way out of the spiral of military escalation is needed. To this end, a ceasefire and peace negotiations are unavoidable. It is time to return to the international obligations as provided by the UN Charter.

14. War must not be considered as something inevitable: we must not get used to war! Let us counter the logic of war with the logic of peace! Let us accept the complexity of this war instead of following binary enemy-friend schemes. Let us acknowledge the right of people to peace and non-violence and the right of future generations to live in a sane world. What especially gives us hope in our search for peaceful solutions is the fact that there are also more and more voices from Russia and from Ukraine in favor of a peaceful conflict settlement.

15. As a prerequisite to achieve peace, we must bear in mind the basic principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly the following ones:

- The respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries
- The acknowledgement that all countries have the right to security
- The duty to search peaceful settlements of all inner-state and interstate conflicts
- The necessity to work on a sustainable peace system, in the spirit of mutual understanding, renouncement of threats, and restoring of trust
- The full recognition and implementation of the human right to conscientious objection to military service which is also a factor of peace-building

16. Negotiations could be started with the help of mediators to end the war, restore peace and resolve all disputes. Peace, not war is the pathway to justice! Conflict resolution experience shows that negotiations without preconditions may be more successful to get started and to get led to a constructive end.

17. A number of states have already articulated their willingness to help bring the warring parties to the negotiating table and to act as mediators. We as civil society also want to make our contribution. Peace is not only the prerogative of states and diplomats but nowadays more and more of the global civil society. Official negotiations must be pro-actively prepared and supported by dialogue with local civil society representatives between and within Ukraine and Russia, especially by inside mediators/facilitators, particularly women. We are working on a global peace movement as part of a global anti-war coalition to stop not only this war, but to develop a culture of peace and conflict transformation.

18. Full of respect for the invaded Ukrainian people and mindful of the lessons of peace research, we emphasize that we, as the international peace movement, have neither the right nor the competence to anticipate peace negotiations or to make concrete proposals for settling the conflict. This task falls solely to the parties to the conflict themselves. However, we want to encourage both sides to look for non-violent ways out of the dilemma of this devastating war.

19. In any case, it is important to keep in mind the lines of conflict as they have emerged so far. Their processing and constructive overcoming is the prerequisite for any conflict transformation. These conflict lines include, among others:

- The Ukrainian position of defending its freedom and the “values of the West” – the Russian position of defending the “multipolar world order”
- The demand for withdrawal of Russian troops on the part of Ukraine – the Russian position that these territories now belong to the Russian Federation
- The demand for security guarantees against a new Russian incursion on the part of Ukraine – the Russian demand that Ukraine not join NATO

20. Furthermore, any conflict transformation shall consider the various proven tools to deal with protracted and complex conflicts and wars: proposals for the stationing of UN troops in the disputed territories; the long-term search for solutions to disputed territorial issues via negotiations at all levels including civil society and with the support of mediators; the participation of the international community in collective security solutions; perhaps also new forms of transnational restorative justice in this particular case.

21. The international community and civil society must not only help to get this peace process underway, they must also promote it through a range of measures and create suitable framework conditions for it. Because ultimately, peace is indivisible. In first line:

- We need a new peace architecture for Europe. The European states in particular must work on a civil Pan-European peace order according to the Helsinki principle of collective security and mutual trust. The long term goal is “the common European house” (Gorbachev). This also includes security guarantees for Ukraine and a new relationship with a Russia.
- The reconstruction of devastated Ukraine must be the task of the international community, and Russia should bear some responsibility in this process.

- Russia, NATO and the U.S. – they all must stop pursuing world politics as power politics. Instead of constantly striving for dominance, they should realize that a multipolar peaceful world order is also in their own interest.
- Disarmament must be back on the international peace agenda. No solution of the global challenges without disarmament. All states should substantially reduce their military expenditures and invest the freed-up funds in instruments for civil conflict transformation, peace research and peace education.
- No country has the right to threaten to use nuclear weapons. All states should sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to make the world a safer place.
- All states and all people should work on a culture of peace; the media must not allow themselves to be harnessed for war propaganda, but must direct their efforts toward perspectives of peace; peace education must become a basic principle of education.

THE WHOLE WORLD NEEDS PEACE

22. This war is not only dividing Ukraine and Russia, but also people and social movements in neighboring countries and even worldwide. Our joint efforts for a just and sustainable peace may bring us closer together again.

22. War is a crisis accelerator, stopping the war and rearmament means saving human lives and allows to invest in health, education, the environment, common security, and prosperity for all. After all, our global priority number one is at stake: We all need to work together in order to save ourselves as humankind, avert an ecological and nuclear disaster and preserve the living conditions on the planet, our common “Homeland Earth” (Edgar Morin).

23. Thus, let us make the search for a peaceful resolution of this war a turning point in the history of humankind. The words of the famous *Russell-Einstein Manifesto* from 1955 remind us of our urgent task today:

“There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom. Shall we, instead, choose death, because we cannot forget our quarrels? We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death.”

Werner Wintersteiner, professor emeritus, was the founding director of the Centre of Peace Research and Peace Education at Klagenfurt University, Austria. He is a member of the preparatory committee of the Vienna Peace Summit.