



International Peace Bureau

Disarmament for Development

Yurii Sheliashenko Ukrainian Pacifist Movement

Sean MacBride Individual and Organization Awardee's Message

Dear friends,

Greetings from Kyiv to all the IPB family. I love you. It's nice to be with you. Rudi, Alexia, Corazon, Sean, thank you for your kind words and support. It is an honor and pleasure for the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement and for me personally to accept the Sean MacBride Peace Prize.

My congratulations to fellow peace activists awarded today: Our House Belarus, the Russian Movement of Conscientious Objectors, Saša Belik, Olga Karach, and Asya Maruket. Well done and thank you for your nonviolent resistance to warmongering tyrants Putin and Lukashenko. When some people raise their voices against their oppressive militarist regimes, and when people on the other side of the frontline refuse to kill Ukrainians, it is your achievement. Good job.

I can't say we could celebrate this day, and you know why. Ukraine is under attack; Russian aggression devastates my country. Ukrainian cities are in flames and ruins, and people continue to die. Critical energy infrastructure was destroyed last night: the Dnipro hydroelectric power plant was hit eight times, and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is on the brink of a blackout. The Russian army claims these are revenge strikes, punishment for Ukrainian counterattacks in border regions. When will this madness end? When will Kharkiv, Belgorod, and all cities on both sides forget the sounds of explosions? When will the mass killers in uniforms stop taking innocent civilian lives and go away? When will armies step aside for diplomacy to come?

I mourn, not celebrate, this tragic day. However, I am still somehow encouraged. The figure of Sean MacBride, a great peacebuilder, human rights defender, and opponent of colonialism, inspires me. He was among the authors of the European Convention on Human Rights, and this instrument has worked for years to strengthen the interconnection of peace and justice. Recently, the European Court of Human Rights passed a historic judgment stating that the absence of legal recognition of conscientious objection in Turkey violates human rights. I'm happy for the applicant Murat Kanatli, a fellow member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection.



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Sean MacBride Individual and Organization Awardee's Message

Sean MacBride said in his Nobel lecture: "The right of an individual to refuse to kill, to torture, or to participate in the preparation for the nuclear destruction of humanity seems to me to be fundamental." But the human right to conscientious objection today is threatened in many countries: Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Israel, Turkey, Azerbaijan, South Korea, and others.

While the brutal and illegal aggression of Putin's regime increases the death toll and ruins Ukrainian cities, the government and army of the country increase the suffering of civilians. They attempt to turn all males into soldiers, punish and shame millions of civilian men as "draft dodgers," introduce a total travel ban, and prepare draft laws significantly increasing draconian punishments for evasion of military registration and military service. One of which was passed by the parliament in a first reading. If you choose to remain a civilian, your bank accounts could be frozen, your driver's license and freedom of movement suspended. Some of these measures could be withdrawn, like the initial scandalous draft law on civil death for us stubborn civilians was withdrawn, but it does not change; it just gradualizes the implementation of the delusional utopia of turning the whole population into soldiers by any means necessary and fighting the war endlessly until the erasure of Russia from the map.

There are no legal remedies to defend the human right to conscientious objection to military service: the army, officials, and courts refuse to recognize it. Alternative service of discriminatory nature existed before, though it was not compliant with the human rights obligations of Ukraine contrary to recommendations of the UN HRC and was suspended under martial law. Any attempts of civil society to raise the issue of conscientious objection during the war are rejected and suppressed by the army and Security Service of Ukraine. One of the last such attempts ended in secret consultations between officials on how to deny alternative service on a pretext of abuse of constitutional right. Closing a case of Andrii Vyshnevetsky about dismissal from military service on the grounds of conscience, the Grand Chamber of the Supreme Court found there is a gap in Ukrainian law regarding the right to conscientious objection, and the judiciary has no powers to remedy it.



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This judgment raises concerns about the possible outcome of pending Supreme Court cases of convicted conscientious objectors Dmytro Zelinsky and Mykhailo Yavorsky. Zelinsky was imprisoned for three years when the appellate court quashed a sentence of acquittal. Another appellate court in Ivano-Frankivsk refused to recognize the right to conscientious objection and upheld a guilty sentence for an objector Vitaliy Alexeienko. You know that I was placed under house arrest, my computer and smartphone seized, I could be further imprisoned up to five years for my advocacy of conscientious objection and pacifism. The appellate court here, in Kyiv, agreed with the Security Service of Ukraine, which falsely equates conscientious objection and draft evasion and on those grounds approved the seizure. Also, no judge dares to quash my formal suspicion based on preposterous allegations that an antiwar statement of a pacifist, which condemns Russian aggression, allegedly justifies it. Such attitudes of appellate courts raise doubts about whether, in a very rare exceptional case of acquittal of an objector by a court of first instance, this judgment will stay in the appellate court. The number of people convicted and imprisoned for draft evasion and unauthorized abandonment of military units in Ukraine is multiplying, and since the courts rarely document motives, it is impossible to say how many of hundreds of convicts are conscientious objectors. Any civilian male in Ukraine in everyday life faces bullying and discrimination as the so-called draft evader, which raises concerns regarding gender-based discrimination as well as discrimination based on religion or beliefs incompatible with military service.

Humiliated by military recruiters and border guards, some people attempt suicide or try to escape military service with risks to their lives. Military recruitment centers have a scandalous reputation of systemic extortion of bribes to avoid conscription, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, forced transportation to military units, and inhumane treatment, sometimes resulting in a coma and death. All these daily horrors of Ukrainian life and much more horrors like barbaric killing of any opposition under Putin's tyranny could hijack and haunt Europe tomorrow.

Because of geopolitical tensions, many countries prepare for a big war and universal conscription. Mainstream media and politics serve the war. A satanic hysteria in response to Pope Francis' call for negotiations was obscenely wrong.



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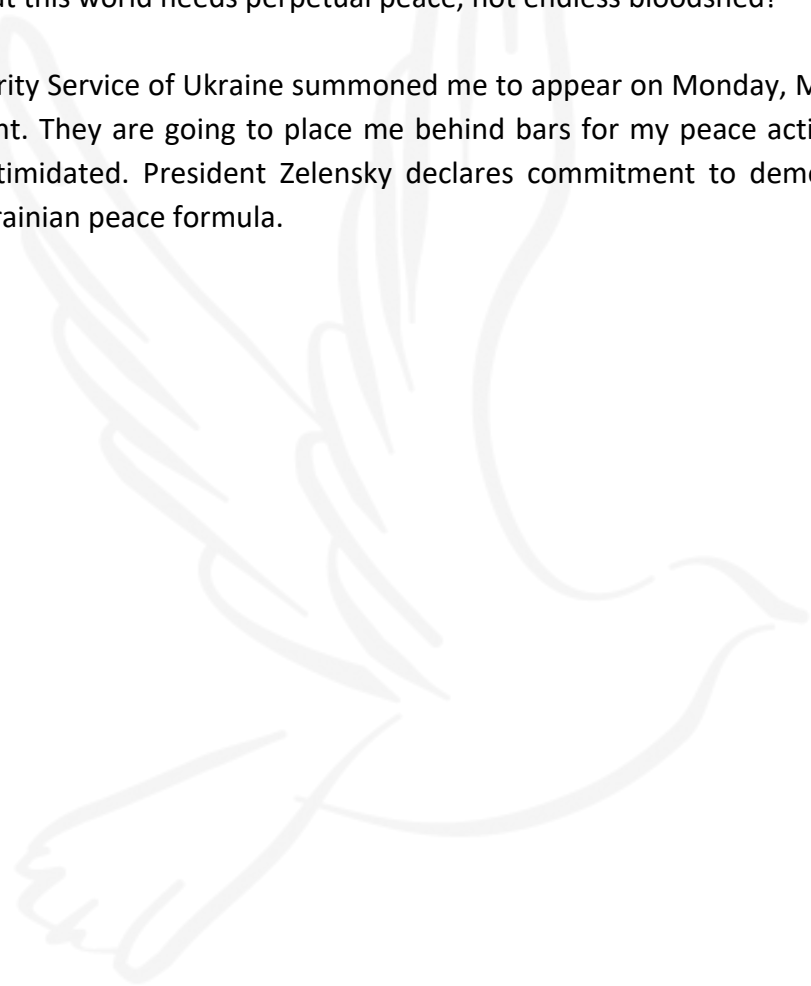
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This darkness should not consume the light of truth, love, and hope in our hearts. And we need to share this light, spread the light. Only in the darkness of fear and ignorance do people not see the results of doing harm in response to harm. We should not fear to do good in response to harm done to us, to break the cycle of escalation. Enough fears to say the truth that this world needs perpetual peace, not endless bloodshed!

Today, the Security Service of Ukraine summoned me to appear on Monday, March 25th, for an indictment. They are going to place me behind bars for my peace activism, but I refuse to be intimidated. President Zelensky declares commitment to democracy and justice in his Ukrainian peace formula.





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Esset Gagiyeva (Asya Maruket)

Sean MacBride Individual Awardee's Message

Dear colleagues,

Standing here today, I feel deeply honored and humbled to be the recipient of the Sean MacBride Peace Prize. This moment is not just about me; it's a tribute to all who dream of a peaceful world, who care of needs of others, who strive for justice, solidarity and collective well-being.

First of all, I would like to thank IPB and all who are involved in their work for your enormous efforts and activities aimed at building peaceful and just world.

I would like to dedicate this award to my aunt Ruket, my hero, from whom I learned about kindness, courage, and the importance of standing up for others. Her heart was a well of generosity and compassion, touching everyone around her. She passed away in 2019, but her spirit still guides me, reminding me that the real strength doesn't lie in the hands of those who has power to destroy but in the gentle hands of those who can build peace.

Peacebuilding for me is a synonym for the word healing. Because our global community is too often torn by conflicts that stem from unresolved, collective traumas. These deep-seated wounds become fertile ground for aggression and violence, perpetuating cycles that span generations.

Healing collective traumas requires a multifaceted approach. It involves creating spaces where individuals and communities can share their stories and experiences, fostering empathy and understanding among those with differing perspectives. This can be facilitated through dialogue, art, cultural exchanges, and community rituals, which collectively contribute to the healing process.

Peace isn't just about stopping fights. It's about understanding why they start. This nuanced approach acknowledges that conflicts are symptoms of deeper societal, economic, and psychosocial issues. In all these cases, achieving lasting peace necessitates more than the cessation of violence. It requires a comprehensive approach that seeks to understand and remedy the root causes of conflict.



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Sean MacBride Individual Awardee's Message

This approach involves dialogue, education, policy changes, and, crucially, the promotion of social justice and equity. It means building inclusive societies where everyone has access to resources, opportunities, and rights, ensuring that the seeds of future conflicts are not sown.

True peace, then, is a dynamic and proactive process. It's about creating environments where conflicts are less likely to arise because the underlying issues have been addressed. It involves ongoing efforts to understand the complex web of human needs, desires, and fears, and working tirelessly to create a world where these can be harmoniously balanced. In essence, peace is not the end goal but a journey toward a more just, equitable, and understanding world.

True peacemaking has different faces, levels and scales, be it UN concerns about conflicts, peace movements around the world, spontaneous actions of charity or just gentle smiles we sometimes give to strangers on the street. But what all peacemaking actions have in common is the peace - peace in the souls of their initiators. Peace in the world starts from the peace in our hearts. So concluding my speech I would like to wish to all of us to improve that peace in our souls, and get power to build this peace around us.





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Olga Karach

Sean MacBride Individual Awardee's Message

Sometimes you meet someone, and even if you don't realize it, the meeting is fateful and can change your life forever. In 2001 I met Bjorn Kunter from the peace organization BSV. At that time I was very depressed because I felt that something was wrong in Belarusian civil society. I talked a lot with Bjorn Kunter and we started to realize many ideas of non-violent resistance in Belarus. He put me in touch with other wonderful people from the BSV - Christine, Ute, Sine and others - and together we carried out many advocacy campaigns in Belarus. According to the results we achieved, there were situations where people came with guns to arrest us, but they backed off and we were not arrested. After that, I believed much more in the power of people from below than in weapons.

In 2020, there were mass protests in Belarus, and at that time, we organized a hotline for victims of repression. But at the same time, it was very important to me that the protests remained peaceful. It wasn't easy because we had many voices advocating for violence, saying that protests should be met with violence in response to police brutality. I spent many hours trying to convince people that we still needed peaceful protests. Our YouTube channel "Our House TV" had 40 million views. You have to imagine the audience at that moment. But at the same time I understood the huge responsibility of the world, of people, because it was an incredible power. I knew very well that if we called on people to go to the barricades, to kill policemen, they would do it. But of course we didn't. And of course it was a really big responsibility to ask people to continue peaceful actions and to understand that somebody could be arrested, somebody wouldn't go home, maybe somebody could be killed.

And of course, with that kind of pressure and responsibility, it was easy to lose your mind. BSV also helped me, and I spent many hours with them, working together on a non-violent strategy.

When the full-scale war started, our lives changed, of course, like many others in our region. We started our "No Means No" campaign to support Belarusian conscientious objectors, because we believe that this is the only thing we can do as Belarusian civil society - we can prevent the Belarusian army from taking part in the war in Ukraine. Again, it's not easy because even we didn't know exactly that the man had the right not to go to the army, not to kill, not to take part in the war, to be a conscientious objector



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Sean MacBride Individual Awardee's Message

Our second historic meeting was with the organisation Connection e.V. We met Rudi and other people from Connection e.V. and it was very serious support because we got a lot of advice on how to build our campaign and they gave us a lot of arguments about human rights and what we could do in the campaign. And after we started the campaign, it wasn't very easy because, as you can imagine, Lukashenko doesn't like our campaign perhaps even more than many of our previous campaigns.

And "No Means No" is quite a unique campaign for me, because it's the first time in my life that I'm defending men's rights, not women's rights or children's rights, but specifically men's rights. I used to complain a lot that when we campaign for women's rights we come up against so many gender stereotypes. But now I understand that even when you are defending men's rights, you also come across a lot of gender stereotypes. It's very connected.

We have started to be part of the big peace movement and we are very grateful to many peace organizations that I have met in these 2.5 years. This is War Resisters' International, this is the International Peace Bureau (IPB), this is EBCO, this is WILPF (a feminist peace organization), feminist Stiftung Umverteilen!, peacebuilders and pacifists from Germany, Italy, from France, from Finland, from many other countries. These people teach us and they give us a lot of strength and power to continue our advocacy campaign.

I would like to tell you a little about the challenges we are facing as we continue our campaign. For example, I have now been declared a terrorist in Belarus. And in Belarus terrorism is punishable by death. There is a risk of the death penalty in Belarus if the Belarusian regime is able to send me back. When we started the campaign, we got a Lithuanian lawyer, Mantas Danielius, to help us with the legal status of Belarusian conscientious objectors in Lithuania. After a few months the lawyer was arrested and is now in prison on suspicion of spying for the KGB. So the KGB hired a European citizen to spy on us, completely peaceful women.

A few days ago, the Belarusian Investigative Committee opened three new criminal cases against me, and according to these three new cases, I could be sentenced to a total of 22 years in prison.



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One charge, for example, is for discrediting Belarus, because they think that I can't speak about the situation in the Belarusian army, about the problems with conscientious objectors. Twenty-two years in prison for three new cases - that's what I'm facing now. But in reality, I don't know how many criminal cases I have, because I had some criminal cases for our participation in peaceful protests in 2020. The situation is not completely clear.

I also spent 17 days in a shelter in Lithuania under the protection of the Lithuanian police, because the Lithuanian police had received information that someone from Lukashenko's team wanted to kill me. With my family members, including my children, we had to move from town to town, staying in different rooms without the possibility to even go near the windows, due to the risk that somebody could shoot us.

Unfortunately, as we continued our campaign, we realized that conscientious objectors were not welcome anywhere. In Lithuania we also faced many threats, and unfortunately Lithuania declared that Belarusian conscientious objectors were a threat to national security. As Rudi mentioned earlier, my application for political asylum was rejected, as was my husband's. This has caused a lot of trouble. Nevertheless, we continue and I would like to share with you some of the lessons we have learned during these 2.5 years.

First of all, I've been thinking a lot about what peace means to me. For me, peace is not just an agreement between Zelensky and Putin. It's something deeper, because, as we see in our region, we have a lot of ultra-right movements and a lot of politicians who are starting to offer a dilemma: either you choose protection or you choose to defend human rights. And it is not only in Belarus or Russia. It's also in the Baltic countries and it's also in Ukraine. This is something we strongly disagree with. Also, when we talk about peace, it's not just the absence of war in space or time. Because in Belarus, for example, we don't have war, it's true, but at the same time we don't have peace. And of course our way to peace in our region will be very complicated because our families are deeply divided. This war is very unique for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, because each of us has relatives in the other countries. Now relatives can't communicate with each other, and very often they even hate each other. Of course, I understand very well that it will be very complicated to restore peace in our families.



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If we're talking about the Belarusian case, unfortunately I think it's very similar in Russia. We have many cases where relatives report their own family members to the KGB. And in a situation where you're imprisoned because your mother or another close relative reported you to the KGB or the FSB for your opposition activities, of course it's very difficult to communicate and talk with your mother, your brother or your children. Unfortunately, we need to rethink the new definition of what peace means to us. Peace is not just the ability to live, it's the ability to live in safety. Unfortunately, I haven't felt safe all my life in Belarus and Lithuania. And in my opinion, that's not peace either. We need protection, the defence of our human rights. It's a very important issue, because I think it's impossible to have peace only for some parts of society and no peace for other parts of society. For example, if there's a very strong anti-migrant movement in a country—no matter where—it's impossible to build peace for the citizens without also building peace for the migrants who are already in the country.

Another thing that is perhaps new to me is that peace is very much linked to social justice and poverty. If we look at who goes to war, I have to say, unfortunately, that 99% of them are poor men from very depressed regions. Rich men don't go to war. In Ukraine, in Russia, everywhere, poor men who don't have money to pay, who don't find any kind of protection, very often have to go to war because they don't see any solution to avoid participating. But also, when we talk about social justice, this is my opinion about Russia: very often, Russian young men, especially at the beginning of the war, started to participate because it was the only way for them to have some kind of social benefit - to exchange their willingness to use violence for the possibility of climbing the social hierarchy. And this is also a very important question for us: how can we increase the education, the opportunities for these young men, how can we fight poverty, how can we fight the social injustice that we have now in our countries?

And finally, my lesson from this situation over the last two and a half years is that peace is solidarity. In war, as a refugee, as a soldier, you are always alone; you have to survive and you have an incredibly difficult dilemma - either kill or be killed. In peace you don't have that dilemma and you don't have that choice. So I have received a lot of solidarity in the last 2.5 years. I always say that without your solidarity we wouldn't have been able to survive, we wouldn't have been able to continue without your support and protection. And thank you very much to the International Peace Bureau for nominating us for the Nobel Peace Prize; this is really a very important protection for us, for organizations working with conscientious objectors from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. And thank you very much for your attention and for this Award.