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THE
NOBEL
PEACE
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The Nobel Lecture

given by
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2022
Memorial

Delivered by
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PEACE, MEMORY, FREEDOM

Your Majesty, your royal highnesses, ladies and gentlemen! Dear friends!

Foremost, we would like to thank the Norwegian Nobel Committee for awarding the Nobel Peace Prize this year to “Memorial”.

We are particularly grateful to the Nobel Committee for sharing this great honour with the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Freedoms and with the brave Belorussian human rights defender, Ales Bialiatski. This decision of the Committee has great symbolic meaning for us: It underlines that state borders cannot and should not divide civil society. The fact that they are our co-laureates is an added reward.

“Memorial” has been in existence for 35 years. Today it has groups working in many regions of Russia, in Ukraine, and in several countries of Western Europe. The Nobel Peace Prize is a tribute to each of these organizations, to each of the thousands of people taking part in the activities of “Memorial” – their members, colleagues, volunteers, participants in public actions. This tribute is for them, and for those from “Memorial” who are no longer with us, in particular those people who did so much in the founding of “Memorial” and made it what it is today: Andrei Sakharov, Arseny Roginsky, Sergei Kovalyov, and many others. This prize is theirs as much as it is ours.

“Memorial” has two equally important main areas of work.

The first is the establishment of historical memory about the period in our history known as the time of the “Great Terror” carried out by the Soviet State against its people. We carry out archival research, we search for the places of executions and burials, we create our own archives, libraries and museum collections, we publish books, and we hold public memorials. We organize exhibitions, conferences and seminars, and we work with young people. We create data bases about the victims of the Great Terror and about those who carried it out. We promote public discussion about the persecution of dissidents, and the intellectual, civilian and political resistance to totalitarianism.

Second, “Memorial” fights for human rights in the countries formerly part of the Soviet Union. This includes the gathering, analysis and publication of information about violations of human rights in areas considered “hot spots” of conflict.

“Memorial” has carried out human rights reporting during the two wars in Chechnya and in the zone of the Ossetian-Ingushetia conflict in the Caucasus area of Russia. “Memorial” human rights defenders, since the early 1990s, have monitored and reported on violations in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the

conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a conflict that has recently flared up again. “Memorial” has reported on the situation in Transnistria in Moldova, as well as on conflicts in the countries of Central Asia, including in Tajikistan. And “Memorial” reported on human rights violations in the Donbass region of Ukraine in 2014-16.

“Memorial’s” human rights defence work has included the search for the missing, investigation of extrajudicial executions and reporting on forced disappearances. It has included years of help for refugees and the forcibly displaced due to these conflicts. “Memorial” has been carrying out the monitoring of political repression and legal assistance for political prisoners. Today, the number of political prisoners in Russia is more than the total number in all of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the period of perestroika in the 1980s. The struggle for freedom has continued since the Soviet regime. Here, the past and the present come together.

I would like now to address the following three issues:

The first question concerns the relationship between human rights defence and the work on historical memory in the activities of “Memorial”.

Two hundred years ago, the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin wrote that a “person's sovereignty” is anchored in his dignity, personal freedom, sense of belonging to the past, and love “for his native ashes” and “paternal coffins”. This indivisible link between memory and freedom is the foundation of “Memorial’s” work.

This work does not simply involve research and documentation of tragedies of the past and acute social conflicts of the present. We are investigating and documenting crimes; crimes against individual human beings and against humanity, already committed or currently being committed, by state power. What we see as the root cause of these crimes is the sanctification of the Russian State as the supreme value. This requires that the absolute priority of power is to serve the ‘interests of the state’, over the interests of individual human beings, and their freedom, dignity and rights. In this inverted system of values, people are merely expendable material to be used for resolving governmental tasks. This is the system that prevailed in the Soviet Union for seventy years and regrettably continues ‘til today.

One of the obvious effects of the sanctification of the State was the rise of imperial ambitions. Those ambitions grew into criminal aggression at the beginning of the

Second World War with the attacks on Poland and Finland, the seizure of the Baltic states, and the annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in Eastern Europe. The post-war diktat by the Soviet Union against the countries of Eastern Europe, the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the war in Afghanistan are all manifestations of those same ambitions that still thrive today.

Another consequence of this exaltation of the State was, and remains, impunity, not only for those who make criminal political decisions, but also for those who commit crimes in the execution of those decisions. Extra-judicial executions, the murder of civilians, torture and looting are neither investigated nor punished. We saw this in the hostilities in Chechnya, and we see it happening again today in the occupied territory of Ukraine. After the bombing of Grozny, the destruction of Mariupol, tragically, was not anything new.

This chain of unpunished crimes continues, and it will not stop on its own. Nor will compromise lead to any durable solution to this problem.

Regrettably, Russian society did not have the strength to break the tradition of state violence.

For seventy years, the Soviet state destroyed any solidarity among people, atomized society, eradicated any expression of civic solidarity, and thus turned society into docile and voiceless masses. Today's sad state of civil society in Russia is a direct consequence of its unresolved past.

For us, the highest priority is the individual human being: their life, freedoms and dignity. We reject the formula "man is nothing, the state is everything". Our focus is not on momentous historical events or on questions of "big politics" (although one must examine them in order to understand the context of human destinies). More important for us are the names and fates of the individuals who have become victims of criminal state policy, past and present. Their names and fates are the foundation, the level at which we work, what we document and reconstruct.

The second issue is the supra-national, universal nature of the problems that "Memorial" addresses.

Humanity has long realized that human rights and freedoms are not bound by national borders. The Nobel Committee's choice of co-laureates from different

countries clearly confirms this principle. The idea of the supremacy, universality and indivisibility of human rights has become one of the key touchstones of human co-existence, a guarantor of peace and progress in the world. Russian thought, from the 19th century Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov to Andrei Sakharov, Yuri Orlov and other Soviet dissidents, has made a notable contribution to this transformation.

The case of historical memory is more complicated. Every country and every society develop their own historical narratives, their own 'national images of the past', which often contradict those of their neighbours. The cause of disputes is usually not one fact or another, but different interpretations of the same events. Differences in the understanding and assessment of the same historical events by different peoples are inevitable, if only because their insights and assessments are born in the context of different national histories. We need to learn to recognize the reasons for these differences and to respect each people's right to their own understanding of the past.

It makes no sense to ignore the memory 'of the other', to pretend that it does not exist at all. Indiscriminately declaring false those interpretations of historical reality that stand behind the memory of others is not only senseless, but also extremely dangerous. And it is deadly to use history as a political tool, to unleash "memory wars".

In the Soviet empire, any attempts by peoples to fight for national independence or even simply manifest a national consciousness that did not fit the Soviet ideological dogma were declared to be 'bourgeois nationalism' and were brutally suppressed. After the collapse of the USSR, the states that formed on this territory had their own historical narratives that did not coincide with the official Soviet historical mythology. And soon after Vladimir Putin came to power, the new Russian leadership and his ideological servants began violent and aggressive "memory wars" against their neighbours – Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine - while fully using old Soviet stereotypes and labels. Of course, this was done for the sake not of "historical truth", but for their own political interests. The result was that the Russian propaganda against 'nationalism' -- and what Putin's regime called 'Bandera-ism' (after a far right-wing Ukrainian nationalist) -- became the ideological justification for the insane and criminal war of aggression against Ukraine.

One of the first victims of this madness was the historical memory of Russia itself. Indeed, in order to pass off aggression against a neighbouring country as "fighting

fascism," it was necessary to twist the minds of Russian citizens by swapping the concepts of "fascism" and "anti-fascism". Now, the Russian mass media refer to the unprovoked armed invasion of a neighbouring country, the annexation of territories, terror against civilians in the occupied areas, and war crimes as justified by the need to fight fascism.

Hatred is incited against Ukraine, its culture and language are publicly declared "inferior," and the Ukrainian people are deemed not to have a separate identity from Russians. Resistance to Russia is called "fascism". Such propaganda absolutely contradicts the historical experience of Russia and devalues and distorts the memory of the truly anti-fascist war of 1941-1945 and the Soviet soldiers who fought against Hitler. The words "Russian soldier" in the minds of many people will now be associated not with those who fought against Hitler, but with those who sow death and destruction on Ukrainian soil.

Finally, the last question, which I would like to address: the problem of guilt and responsibility.

The question that troubles us: did "Memorial" really deserve to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize?

Yes, we have tried to resist the erosion of historical memory and legal consciousness by documenting crimes of both the past and the present. Modesty aside, we have done a lot and accomplished more than a little. But did our work prevent the catastrophe of 24 February?

The monstrous burden that fell on our shoulders that day became heavier after we received the news that the prize had been awarded to us.

No, this is not a matter of "national guilt". It is not worth talking about "national" or any other collective guilt at all – the notion of collective guilt is abhorrent to fundamental human rights principles. The joint work of the participants of our movement is based on a completely different ideological basis – on the understanding of civic responsibility for the past and for the present.

The responsibility of a person for everything that happens to their country, and to the whole of humanity, is based, as Karl Jaspers also noted, on solidarity, civil and universal. The same applies to the sense of responsibility for the events of the past. It grows out of a person's sense of his connection with previous generations, from the ability to realize himself as a link in the chain of these generations – that is, from the awareness of his belonging to a community that did not arise yesterday and, hopefully, will not disappear tomorrow. Readiness for responsibility is an

exclusively personal quality: a person voluntarily assumes responsibility for what happened once or for something that is happening now, but in which he or she is not directly involved; no one else can put this burden on him. And most importantly, a sense of civic responsibility, unlike a sense of guilt, requires not "repentance", but work. Its vector is directed not to the past, but to the future.

“Memorial” is precisely a union of people who voluntarily assume civic responsibility for the past and present and work for the future. And maybe we should take this award not only as an assessment of what we have managed to do in thirty-five years, but also as a kind of advance on what we aim to do, because we are not giving up and we continue to work.

Thank you for your attention.