

Statement on Ukraine
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On February 24, 2022, Ukraine was invaded by Russia, in an act of unprovoked, unjustified military aggression against a sovereign nation of 44 million people. On the orders of President Putin, Russian soldiers have been shelling Ukrainian cities, destroying Ukraine's infrastructure and murdering civilians. The initial plan to capture Ukraine in two days failed as Putin misjudged the Ukrainian people's determination to defend their homeland from the invaders. Having failed on the battlefield, the Russians switched to terrorist tactics-- bombing residential buildings, hospitals, schools, theaters, railway stations, attacking nuclear power plants, killing people waiting in line for food or trying to flee to safety--all designed to demoralize and terrify the population into capitulating. For 7 weeks now, Putin and his army have been committing war crimes, punishing the nation that dared to resist the dictator.

We are witnessing the biggest humanitarian crisis since World War II. In less than two months, over 11 million Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes. That is 1/4 of the country's population. About 7 million have moved to other parts of Ukraine, while 4.5 million Ukrainians have left the country and are now refugees. To some, these may just be statistics. To me, these are personal tragedies that are happening to my family and friends.

Eight members of my family are now refugees in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany—and are very grateful for the warm welcome they have received. My SIL, cousins, nephews, and nieces did not want to leave Ukraine and their homes, but they had no choice after Russian missiles hit their houses and Russian tanks rolled onto the streets of their cities. Like many Ukrainian refugees, they have endured a traumatic journey across the country fleeing west. Some left early on, others stayed longer, hiding in the bomb shelters, subway stations, and basements, hoping the war would stop. But it was no longer safe and women had to save their children. The Ukrainian men stayed behind to defend their homeland.

Five members of my immediate family are among the internally displaced Ukrainians, including my brother and elderly parents who finally evacuated from Kyiv after weeks of daily shelling on the apartment buildings. During those weeks, saying good-bye to my parents every day, not knowing if we would speak again, was terrifying. My parents did not want to go anywhere due to their age and health issues, not knowing if they could survive the journey. And my dad insisted that they stay put and let the women and children escape, because they are the future of Ukraine. So, we just hoped that

my parents would live to see the next day. And if not, my parents said that they loved us, that they had lived happy lives, grateful that they got to see their grandchildren.

Although some of family are in relative safety now, there many others who are risking their lives: my nephew is defending his country on the front line, with Ukraine's Armed Forces. His father recently got called for another tour of duty – remember, the war in Ukraine has been going on since 2014, after Russia annexed Crimea and created separatist areas in Donetsk and Luhansk. My cousin is taking care of his pediatric patients in a Kyiv hospital. Countless friends and family members do everything they can to defend their country: volunteering for the territorial defense, preparing meals, delivering supplies, making camouflage nets, mixing Molotov cocktails.

Despite the hardships, they are lucky, compared to what we have recently learned happened to the Ukrainians who were under Russian occupation. After Bucha, Irpin, and other cities around Kyiv were liberated by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, shocking atrocities committed by Russian soldiers were revealed. The world has seen images we wish to un-see. Dead bodies on the streets, many with their hands tied; victims buried in mass graves or stacked up in basements; highways littered with burned out cars and charred human remains; horrific reports of sexual violence again women and children, executions, torture. Among these victims are close friends that my parents and I have known, from three different families. All of these atrocities are war crimes committed on the occupied territories by the Russian soldiers against innocent Ukrainian civilians.

In the age of social media and 24/7 news coverage, we can see the horrors unfold in real time, with photo and video evidence of Russian bombardment of Kharkiv and Mariupol. Mariupol is now 90% destroyed, at least 10,000 civilians killed—and this time, Russians are using mobile crematoriums--attempting to hide some of their crimes. We can no longer say, that it is Putin's war, or that Russian people do not support it. Clearly, they do. Just listen to the many intercepted conversations between Russian soldiers and their wives back home, pleased with the violence inflicted on Ukrainian civilians, excited at how much their husbands have looted from the homes of Ukrainians: appliances, personal items, clothes, toys—all with blood on them. We can watch the videos of Russian soldiers shipping looted items to their families through the post-offices in Belarus, laughing, happy. For anyone claiming that ordinary Russians bear no responsibility for this war or who is feeling “sorry” for the impact of the sanctions, -- please remember the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine and the fact they are being cheered on by their families in Russia.

We know that there are *some* Russian citizens standing up to the dictator who has been in power for 22 years now—these are brave people. Sadly, however, the vast majority of Russians are rallying behind Putin and his genocidal destruction of Ukraine and its people.

Personal connections to Ukraine aside, this is a war that affects all of us. Ukraine is only the front line of Putin's larger war against democracy and freedom. As we watch Russian brutality and violence against innocent civilians, war criminal Putin is issuing nuclear threats, blackmailing and terrorizing the whole world. His soldiers also attacked Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, risking radioactive contamination that can spread beyond the borders of Ukraine, posing profound danger to people and the environment in Europe and beyond. What can the universities do, as we are witnessing Russian barbarism and the biggest refugee crisis since the end of World War II? Educational institutions have a responsibility to speak up against injustice and genocide. Educators have a responsibility to expand students' worldviews and to improve humanity. This includes countering Russian disinformation and state-sponsored propaganda used as lethal weapons in this war. Words matter. Silence matters too. As we all know, "*The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.*" I want to ask students to be critical consumers of information, to recognize false narratives spread by Putin and parroted by some in our campus community: that Ukraine is not a legitimate state, that Ukrainians are Nazis and fascists. All false! Ukraine is a sovereign nation with its own language, identity, and cultural traditions that are separate from Russia. Ukraine is a democratic country that has a right to exist and its citizens have a right to determine their future--and their alliances. Ukrainian people are hard-working, generous, and peaceful. Ukrainians are like the bees. Bees work hard and won't sting you unless you threaten them. After the Russian invasion, the whole country of Ukraine turned into the beehive—organized, united, fighting for their survival, and prepared to die for the sake of the hive.

The courageous resistance and bravery of Ukrainian military and civilians against the invaders deserve more support—humanitarian, informational, and military support. If Russia stops fighting, there will be no more war. If Ukraine stops fighting, there will be no more Ukraine.

We also have to remember that Ukrainians are defending not only their homeland; they are fighting for freedom, democracy, territorial integrity and peace globally.

I will end with a quote from a historian Yuval Noah Harari, who wrote just a few days after the invasion: "*The war in Ukraine will shape the future of the entire world. If tyranny and aggression are*

allowed to win, we will all suffer the consequences. There is no point to remain just observers. It's time to stand up and be counted."

Stand with Ukraine! Glory to Ukraine! Slava Ukraini!