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THE
NOBEL
PEACE
PRIZE

Speech given by

Chair of The Norwegian
Nobel Committee
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Nobel Peace Prize 2022

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At this very moment in Stockholm, Nobel Prizes are being presented to this year's Nobel laureates in physiology or medicine, physics, chemistry and literature. Under the provisions of Alfred Nobel's will, all the Nobel Prizes, including the Peace Prize, are interconnected. The vision of Alfred Nobel was one of progress through science and the search for truth and ever greater knowledge. It was also a vision of profound literature enlightening and feeding the spirit, and of peace, which is so essential for safety and prosperity. Alfred Nobel's support of science, literature and peace reflected his conviction that those pursuits were the keys to a better world. At the core of his vision was the belief that talented and committed individuals can make a difference.

I have the immense pleasure this year of recognizing Ales Bialiatski, the organization Memorial and the Center for Civil Liberties as the "champions of peace" who – by different means, but for a common goal – have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind. For this, each is being awarded a one-third share of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2022. When announcing our decision in October, the Norwegian Nobel Committee emphasized that the three laureates have promoted the right to criticize power and protect the fundamental rights of citizens. They have made an outstanding effort to document war crimes, human rights abuses and abuses of power. Together, they demonstrate the significance of civil society for peace and democracy.

A democratic government needs not only the support of its people, but also criticism, new ideas and new perspectives. Its ultimate source of authority is the people. History teaches us that even suppressed people will at some point defy their oppressor. Somebody will form a movement and speak up for more freedom, justice, democracy and rule of law. These rights and values are the framework that guarantees every citizen the right to hold an opinion and enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of organization.

Our three laureates share this conviction. They have a common approach to exposing oppressors and perpetrators of war crimes. Their method is to systematically collect evidence of past and current human rights violations and war crimes. The purpose is to hold perpetrators accountable, to honour the victims and to prevent the repetition of atrocities. Reliable evidence is of vital importance not only for a legal process, but also for historical documentation and moral restoration of the victims' perspective.

This brings me to the first of our three laureates, Ales Bialiatski. The Belarusian government has for years tried to silence him. He has been harassed. He has been arrested and jailed. He has been deprived of employment. Mr Bialiatski is by profession a scholar of literature, and words have been his

weapon ever since he was one of the initiators of the democracy and human rights movement in Belarus in the 1980s. He is the founder of Viasna, an organization that initially documented government abuse against protesters but soon developed into a human rights organization.

For more than 20 years, Viasna has documented abuse and torture against activists and political opponents of the dictatorship in Belarus. The organization identifies victims, keeps track of where they are serving their sentences and monitors their treatment. Viasna wants to ensure that disappearing victims are not forgotten.

In July 2021, all of Viasna's offices were searched and its leaders were arrested. At this moment, our thoughts are with all prisoners of conscience in Belarus. Most particularly, we think of Ales Bialiatski in his dark and isolated prison cell in Minsk: You are not alone; we stand with you. We thank your wife, Natallia Pinchuk, who will soon receive the gold medal and diploma on your behalf.

Mr Bialiatski insists that he is not a politician. His role is to promote human rights, democracy and rule of law – a dangerous task in a dictatorship. He is now facing a possible sentence of seven to 12 years in prison.

The novelist Milan Kundera once wrote: “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

The organization Memorial is dedicated to exactly that: memory. It was established in the late 1980s in the former Soviet Union by, among others, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov and the tireless human rights advocate Elena Zhemkóva, who is present here today. So please rise, Elena!

Initially, the purpose of Memorial was to document the oppression and atrocities under communist rule, so that these crimes would always be remembered. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organization broadened its scope, also documenting human rights abuses as they occurred in Russia. Even though Memorial itself was temporarily tolerated by the government, its members repeatedly suffered repercussions and assaults. As we all remember, Natalia Estemirova, who oversaw the Memorial office in Chechnya, was brutally murdered in 2009 while documenting war crimes committed by Russian and pro-Russian forces in the Second Chechen War.

By classifying legitimate and normal civil society efforts as activities of “foreign agents,” Russian authorities have given themselves a legal grip on activities not to the government's liking. As a legal entity, Memorial is now history. It was closed

down by a court ruling in April 2022. However, the network of former staff members and supporters of the liquidated organization is still active.

It is now of paramount importance that Memorial's unique archives of past and current state crimes are preserved for the future. We must also make sure that the main lesson of Memorial's 35-year-long struggle for truth is never forgotten: By recording the dark chapters of our history, we allow ourselves to learn from the past and prevent mistakes from being repeated. Memorial was determined to tell the true history of abuse, oppression and war crimes. Such truths, I am sorry to say, are seen as an enemy of the state in present-day Russia.

We are honoured to have the Chair of Memorial's Board of Directors with us here today, Jan Rachinsky. His slogan is: "Nobody plans to give up!"

I turn, finally, to the Center for Civil Liberties in Ukraine, represented on stage by the Chair of its Board of Directors, Oleksandra Matviichuk. The Center for Civil Liberties has declared that it wants to "reinforce the principle of human dignity." Indeed, a bold goal. More specifically, it wants to encourage civic activism in support of democracy, human rights and rule of law.

Back in 2007, when the Center for Civil Liberties was established, democracy and rule of law were not fully embedded in Ukraine. The years of newly won independence, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, had seen both gains and setbacks in this respect.

When the pro-Russian and increasingly authoritarian regime of former President Viktor Yanukovich cracked down on the peaceful pro-democracy protestors in Kyiv's Independence Square in 2013, the Center for Civil Liberties launched its Euromaidan SOS initiative. The initiative had a double aim: documenting the government's human rights violations and providing legal assistance to the victims. The center also began to monitor the conduct of various government agencies, such as the police and security services, in order to hold them accountable for their actions and encourage institutional reforms. Last, but not least, Euromaidan SOS developed interactive maps which made it possible to track enforced disappearances of human rights activists, democracy advocates and investigative journalists.

After Viktor Yanukovich was removed from office in February 2014 and Russia carried out its illegal annexation of Crimea, the Center for Civil Liberties turned its attention to the human rights situation there and in the contested Donbas region. As the first human rights group to send mobile monitoring teams into Crimea and Donbas, the Center for Civil Liberties compiled lists of political prisoners and

human rights violations that were later exchanged with, and supplemented by, other national and international human rights watchdogs.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these mobile monitoring teams were given a new and daunting task: to identify and document war crimes committed by Russian and pro-Russian forces on Ukrainian soil. The Center for Civil Liberties has advocated that Ukraine become affiliated with the International Criminal Court. It has collaborated with international partners to collect evidence of Russian human rights violations and war crimes, thereby paving the ground for future legal processes against the war criminals. Through its work today, the Center for Civic Liberties is preparing for the peace and justice of tomorrow.

One day, when hostilities have ceased, Ukraine will continue its efforts to develop democracy and rule of law. The Center for Civic Liberties intends to be at the forefront of that process.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee firmly believes that this year's three Peace Prize laureates represent the vital role played by civil society in achieving and maintaining peace.

In Oslo and Stockholm, we meet today to celebrate all the Nobel Prizes. We meet at a time when democracy and freedom are in decline globally, and when there is a brutal war of aggression in Europe with disruptive global effects.

In the face of this multitude of crises and challenges, the world needs dedicated scientists and people who relentlessly seek the truth and push the boundaries of our knowledge. And the world needs those admirable individuals and groups of people who at great personal sacrifice challenge repressive authorities and stand up against aggression in pursuit of democracy, human rights and peace.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee is proud to honour Ales Bialiatski, Memorial and the Center for Civil Liberties for their contributions to peace and human dignity in these very troubling times.