



**WHAT MAKES YOU THINK
YOU CAN STOP A WAR?**

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20 concrete actions each of us can take to support peace and ceasefire in Ukraine and in Europe

War is usually considered the domain of presidents, kings and generals, fought for reasons of sovereignty, control of resources or territory, or in defence against external aggression. When leaders decide to wage war, they inevitably and strategically engage the citizens they are responsible for in their war efforts – whipping up support through communication, tailored narratives or propaganda, enlisting men and/or women to fight or serve the armed conflict through other means (production, civil service etc.).

While manifestations and the dynamics of conflict are widely publicized, the civic foundations of creating and maintaining peace are far less articulated or understood. When living in peace, we go about the rituals and workings of daily life, without the constant awareness that we are benefitting from and contributing to maintaining peace. The invitation to

participate in democratic life and discourse is rarely framed as a task to uphold peace. It's only now, in the stark contrast to an unfolding war that we can start perceiving them as such. Ukraine is now at war.

We, the colleagues of the [Civil Peace Service program](#), invite you today to contribute to peace – to support efforts of bringing ceasefire to Ukraine and to contribute, to voice your engagement for a life in peace across Europe and take action. There are things you can start doing today!

Further, you will find twenty recommendations for specific actions to support the current peace and relief efforts of those affected by the war in Ukraine, as well as long-term structural actions with a wider impact.



Support rapid response to initiatives in Ukraine

Every single day of war comes at an immense material, financial, and emotional cost. Here are opportunities to donate to different initiatives and organizations providing relief, rapid response, and help to those most in need.

- [Razom for Ukraine](#)
- [Support Ukraine Now](#) : Real ways you can help Ukraine as a foreigner
- [Ukrainian charities: a guide for international supporters](#)
- [Want to support Ukraine? Here's a list of charities by subject](#)

Despite the rise of internally displaced people and those fleeing the country, most citizens have remained in Ukraine and will likely continue to do so. Those that are retreating want to safely reorganize, mobilize support abroad and build strength in-country. Many Ukrainians are organizing and coordinating resistance from volunteer centres, fallout shelters and cellars. In 2014, Ukrainians already came together to support initiatives to strengthen the defence capacity of the state, demonstrating powerful democratic oversight over the state's key defence structures. They are doing it again this time. Help them out now!



2

Reach out to your political representatives

If you live in Europe, reach out to your national and EU representatives (and elsewhere) and urge them to encourage genuine dialogue, but also conditional asset freezing and sanctions, predicated on cessation of hostilities, withdrawal from occupied territories and (maybe) regime change in Russia. Any form of support to Ukraine should be unconditional and with no hidden agenda behind it.

Note that your representatives are legally bound to have public contact details (email, telephone number), general public hours, and many of them have social media accounts. Find their contact details [here](#).



3

Support local community initiatives

Look out for community initiatives in your country that are already supporting Ukrainians to find safe havens, shelters, and legal aid - in applying for refugee status and offering other forms of support. For example:

<https://www.europewelcomes.org/>

<https://www.refugees-welcome.net/#countries>

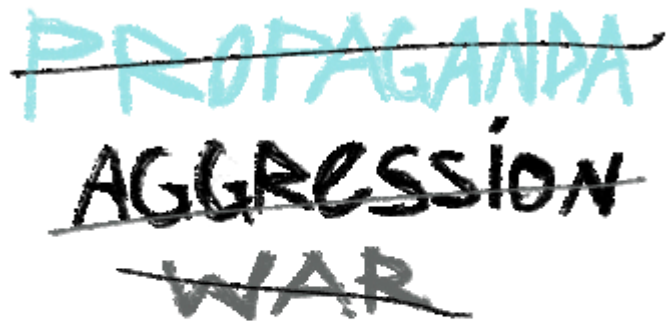
Also, look up local self-organized initiatives on social media. There are more than you think.

4

De-escalate the concept of the enemy

The overwhelming majority of the Russian people are not the enemy.

Lots of Russian citizens are getting organized and protesting peacefully across many cities and are [petitioning](#) their government online despite the incredible risk and personal threat to life that comes with taking action against the war. The citizens of Russia can be reframed from an enemy to an adversary, competitor, partner, teacher, and finally, your equal. Allies can come from the most unsuspecting places. Work on strategies that will shift the loyalty of the Russian people away from Putin while keeping all Ukrainians united.



~~PROPAGANDA~~
~~AGGRESSION~~
~~WAR~~

5

Inform yourself about nonviolent civilian-based defence

The Ukrainian Armed Forces have the right and need to defend themselves against the imminent threat to their lives and their country against aggression. There are many ways in which unarmed communities can also defend the things they value and care deeply about, be it their environment or their personal integrity, their basic rights and freedoms or particular social structures. There are alternatives to submission as well as to violent resistance. This is illustrated both in many day-to-day social struggles and by populations without weapons defying the might of the military. [Watch](#) how residents of Kryukiv community are forcing Russian tanks to retreat from the entrance to their town. In the long run that hostile attitudes will be taken as bullying and arouse renewed antagonism and escalation. Get involved in direct nonviolent actions. Great resources on theories, principles and tactics for nonviolent resistance can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). While it is important that we ward off an aggressor and defend democracy, we cannot afford to lose or weaken our democratic practices in the course of this conflict. Maintain them by treasuring nonviolent and dialogic action and discourse.





6

Practice informational hygiene

Disinformation is a central part of the Russian hybrid war against Ukraine. Look for reliable and fact-checked news sources. Informational aggression/warfare is in full swing, and we all are its often-unsuspecting victims. We need to learn to live with this. At school we were trained to look for the nearest bomb shelter and make bandages. We were not taught how to debunk fake news and practice informational hygiene. Critical thinking and emotional resilience might be some of the key competencies of our generation that adults need to learn and pass down to the younger generations. Ukrainians have started to do this well.

Examples include:

[Ukrainian Center for Strategic Communication](#)

[InfoRules Social Media Page /Oksanamoroz](#)

[StopFake](#)

[Bellingcat Spreadsheet of debunked Fakes](#)

[An article on DIY fact-checking images](#)



7

Diversify your media bubble

Actively seek out media that doesn't necessarily confirm or reinforce your opinions about the Russian-Ukrainian war. Try to resist the urge to focus on content instead of information. Social media platforms, even if used by well-meaning activists, are ultimately content machines that are always at risk of meme-fying and trivializing human suffering. We urgently need to improve the quality and quantity of media programming and production to counteract the trend of narrow and shallow coverage of the current war. Media ownership needs to be restructured, so that a more diverse media apparatus can deliver varying perspectives and

viewpoints. Minimize the monopoly of large media players; enforcing requirements for local programming and encouraging more public affairs programming; granting more licenses to community and non-profit stations; and the dismantling of the legislation and those policies, which lead to the establishment of monopolistic media. Convincing citizens worldwide of the importance of peace and justice requires peace activists to be media activists as well ([do the media work for them](#)). You can support well-researched and independent journalism by contributing to trustworthy publications via paywalls or contributions.



8

Watch your language. Use conflict-sensitive wording

Building powerful peace narratives requires using appropriate wording to avoid reinforcing or justifying those narratives that we are trying to counteract or devise alternatives to. Our choice of words can have a powerful impact on how we think about the war.

One basic illustration of this principle is the vital distinction between “the Russian people”, “the Russian regime” and “the Russian army”. Here is an example of [communication guidelines](#) developed by the UN Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme in Ukraine. Precision is key. Empathy is key. Sensitivity is key. And de-escalating language is key.



9

Take to the streets

There are many protests taking place in Russia, the EU and worldwide right now. Look for anti-war and/or peace actions in your localities or organise an action yourself. You will make more contacts through protests, deepen your networks and learn more about meaningful ways of supporting peace initiatives. Stay connected as people are (re)building a peace movement in Europe. Protesting in the street is rarely enough. Use the newly acquired contacts and channels of community organizing (local, national, international) and get involved in further coordination and assistance efforts.

[Here](#) is an aggregator of peaceful demonstrations happening worldwide against the Russian-Ukrainian war.

10

Share and support creative expressions of nonviolence and anti-war sentiments

(Slam) Poetry, diary entries, short essays infused with subtle ideology can speak to large groups of people in many ways. Art practice can reflect on many aspects and target areas for lobbying, organizing, and create conditions for paradigm shifts. The power of the story that we tell about ourselves, each other, and the world can unite us for a common purpose. Narrative (told through different mediums) is essential. The stories we tell allow people to make sense of their life, identity, and allies and understand what their role is in the wider global context.

Here is a collection of [illustrations against the current war](#), made by artists from around the world.



11

Reach out to understand the other side's values, both personal and cultural



The fog of war descends when two adversaries know nothing about one another. The result is a war based on projections and prejudice. And yet, despite being invisible in times of war, we are deeply connected as human beings, striving for similar things. The goal should be mutual acceptance (not the same as compliance) between people in Ukraine, both from government controlled and non-controlled areas, with citizens of the Russian Federation. This is already happening in various ways. Many Ukrainians are now pleading with parents in Russia and Belarus in Russian language to take their kids back home, to spread information to the soldiers cut off from the internet on how to get out of this bloody war.

There are information lines where parents can find out whether their children are among the dead or captured and how to bring them back home. The Russian speaking diaspora can follow their example.

There are many examples of organizations and individuals upgrading their tech-savviness and digital literacy skills, to reach out to each other, to others across conflict divides, to try to understand each other's positions, interests, needs and to engage in authentic dialogue with the other side. You can find some examples [here](#) and [here](#), including from Ukraine.

12

Volunteer and support organizations that are involved in peacebuilding



Stopping a war does not bring lasting peace. Whether done through community organizing, expressing dissent, teaching peace and nonviolence, or prioritizing more basic issues of gender equality and environmental protection, peacebuilding is now an urgent necessity. Solidarity and commitment are called for, and the challenge is to find real solutions to the ancient cycle of conflict and violence. Peace-loving citizens of all countries currently engaged in war

should come out and together bring the best ideas of humankind to halt the madness of war. This year, the Ukrainian National Center for Peacebuilding was launched. Ukraine has a growing [peacebuilding community](#) that constantly improves its capacities. Volunteer and support these organizations that implement projects and programs to prevent, analyse, and transform violent conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere. There are many more than you think.

13

Become less reliant on those who control the distribution of resources



Abandon the consumerist disposable lifestyle that has become an endemic trait of Western-style living — plastic packaging, rapid obsolescence of material goods, and an over-reliance on fossil fuels as sources of energy, which is a root cause of war and domination. Any social conflict today is also an environmental conflict, as we are linked with one another through our energy sources and trade and mobility routes. One way towards pacifism is to simplify one's lifestyle and seek out sustainable ways of living (often rooted in our history and traditions). Both Russian and Ukrainian histories have precedents of pacifism and civil disobedience, including tax divestment and channelling money from the military-industrial complex into environmental community-based projects instead. Self-governance and mutual aid are hard work that we need to (re)learn. Some examples throughout

history (not often taught in schools): [The Tolstoyan Movement, the Doukhobors, the Mennonites, conscientious objectors](#) in Russia.

Current examples include people from Munich involved in creative actions by gathering publicly to peacefully knit sweaters, scarves, and blankets to “increase independence from Russian energy sources/supplies.” This is of course not a sustainable solution, but a symbol of solidarity sending the message: “We are ready to sacrifice our comfort and convenience and are standing by your side”. What each of us can do instead is to get a wakeup call, inform others, and reach out to those who run the big companies who are ultimately also humans. Pressure must be put on parliaments, governments and companies producing goods.

14

Be prepared to encounter hostility from both sides of a conflict when working for and seeking peace

If you find yourself on the path of working for and seeking peace, you are mediating conflicting sides. People who gain their identity from being on “Team Good” in the war against “Team Evil” actually need “Team Evil”. They need the other side to validate its identity. It’s like a house of cards, where two cards prop each other up. When “evil” is taken away, there is a crisis, a kind of political vertigo, and a desperate rush to find a new adversary. Hence the flailing attempts after the defeat of the Soviet Union to reconstitute an enemy image in concepts like the “Axis of Evil,” “Islamic terror,” the “clash of civilizations,” “threat to democracy,” and more by

demonizing Russia, Syria, Iran, and China among others. By challenging the identity of both sides, pacifists often arouse more hostility than the enemy and might be despised on both sides of the conflict divide. We need to recognize that there is a perception of injustice on both sides – the art is to do this without relativizing injustices, unwittingly defending aggressor narratives or absolving aggressors of their responsibility or victim shaming. There are “third way narratives”, points of agreement where the conflicting sides can start to find and build common ground. We can uncover them through sincere dialogue.



15

Transform dehumanizing narratives



Here are some words that are agents of dehumanization. You hear them often in political discourse and daily conversations: *“How could they?”*, *“It’s totally unjustified!”*, *“What’s wrong with them?”*, *“They are crazy!”*

A war tactic is to accuse our opponents of some deficiency in their core humanness. *“They’re Nazis/fascists, they’re stupid, they’re ignorant, they’re immoral, they’re entitled, they’re greedy.”* In the context of an outbreak of armed conflict and other crises, it is normal to have emotions and express them, but we must do so in a way that leaves room for long-term peace. The phrases above are not very useful, necessary, or productive. These kinds of narratives are being weaponized

because the indignation they incite only provokes *“the other side”* to stir up war fever so that *“we can rise up and destroy the other.”*

Recognize that there is fear on both sides of the conflict divide. As hard as it seems, the most powerful action you can take is to channel that anger into the courage and discipline necessary to call out aggression, yet not deny the other side their basic humanity and seek dialogue. Don’t be afraid to express your anxieties with the other side and try to find out what they are afraid of.



16

We need to make the production of weapons not only illegal, but unprofitable

One concrete action idea for the current conflict: identify shareholders and investment partners of Russian oligarchs and put public pressure and scrutinize them to boycott and divest from the war economy.

Also, look out for general trends in militarization. Since the beginning of the war on Ukraine, many governments have increased their military budgets drastically (i.e. Germany renounced its post-WWII self-imposed pacifism and allocated an extra 100 billion Euros in 2022 alone, then more than 2% of the GDP/year). While it might, probably, be necessary to increase military spending right now, state leaders must be very clear on condemning and stopping the Russian aggression and not perpetuating an arms race. In the mid- and long-term perspective other actions will be more appropriate like ensuring that sudden increases in the defence budget don't lead to an increase in arms proliferation. It is important to monitor our governments so that the money allocated to defence is spent in a transparent manner, following an evidence-based policy, in line with objectively identified needs (and not based on cold war-like fears). We should ensure that ambiguity of narrative will be overcome and the trends in military expenditure will be reversed.

Put pressure on governments to create peace budgets instead of war budgets, to create peace infrastructures instead of war infrastructures. Infrastructures for peace are the institutions, instruments, resources, and competencies that create resilience, address root causes of conflict and contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in societies. Instead of tools of destruction, we can repurpose the weapons manufacturing industry to provide tools of construction — machines and products that help people live safer, healthier, sustainable, and more productive lives. We can recalibrate the global economy to produce goods, services, and technologies that help, not hurt, people. Our long-term goal should be to outlaw militarization and weaponization. We need to prevent governments and corporations from profiting from death and destruction. We need to make it economically, socially, and politically unsustainable. We need to start this now because after 75 years since the end of World War II we find ourselves on the verge of another large-scale war.



17

Rise up, coordinate, and organize to make war illegal

The Russian-Ukraine war has rattled us, showing that war, even world war, remains a major threat. It's currently perhaps the most visible place of war, but according to the Global Conflict Tracker, threats are ongoing across many parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, Western Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus. War becomes perpetual only if we choose to frame it as the only form of conflict. For those of you that wish to engage in peaceful action beyond stopping the current war in Ukraine, for those concerned with prevention in the long-term, we need to mobilize, to create a robust and diverse international peace infrastructure that pursues the vision of

making war obsolete. Nations cannot or will not stop war. As Garry Davis once shouted from the public balcony at the United Nations, "If the nation-states won't stop war, then they should step aside and let us, the people, create the institutions that will." One example in this sense is the Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures for Peace ([GAMIP](#)) is a worldwide community that works with countries that have established ministries and other infrastructures for peace to share best practices and support countries striving to develop a culture of peace.

18

Focus on the causes, not the symptoms



For the long-term peace effort, start reflecting, analysing, and digging deeper. Do not insist on being right and proving the other side wrong. Giving up the need to be right allows you to focus on what you actually want. The war on the other always mirrors a war on the self. An alternative to war emerges when we start seeing the so-called “enemies” the criminals, aggressors, calories, substance abuse, selfishness, laziness, invasive weeds and so forth – not as actual causes of evil, but as symptoms of a deeper condition.

In another vein, when we mistake the causes for symptoms, we end up asking questions like: *“Why do people abuse drugs?”* They are accused and punished for using drugs. Declaring a war on drugs won't heal their addiction and won't stop them from (ab)using them. Therefore, don't ask people *“Why the addiction?”* but rather *“Why the pain?”* By

digging deeper into the causes, we will find that addiction is rooted in trauma, abuse, and (self-)perpetuating cycles of violence (including emotional and psychological).

Focusing on the symptoms, waging war on the symptoms, allows the deeper causes to go unexamined and unchanged. Vladimir Putin is a manifestation of a corrupt, kleptocratic and oppressive system. If we only follow the narrow focus of removing him, the structures that have created Putin might however endure, or are not likely to go away any time soon. Finally, looking at war and asking, *“Why are they so greedy, threatened, anti-EU/NATO, anti - [insert ethnicity here]”* we should rather ask questions like *“What story informs their belief system and what state of being (co-)resonates with that story? What is their experience of life?”*



19

Make way for transformative justice

Second to last and perhaps the hardest of all. Be prepared to forgive and ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness means letting go of your desire for retribution and revenge. This is an act of true courage. Even if you believe that the other side doesn't deserve forgiveness, you deserve peace. The purpose is not to mess with their conscience with how much harm they've caused. That's another form of warfare. Instead, after the armed violence has stopped, I can present my story and trust

you to make the connections. It requires all sides to be vulnerable, feel safe to speak up and share genuinely. People have to sense that you're not trying to attack them and that you trust their basic humanity. Understand that forgiveness is a process, not a single action, and it will take entire generations to heal the trauma caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war. But we need to start somewhere.



20 Grow a pan-European peace movement from the grassroots

Although we are far from it at this point, we need to channel the bottled-up frustration and the feeling of helplessness regarding the situation in Ukraine and the looming nuclear apocalypse into something creative, beautiful and vibrant. The established political, religious, business, tech and science, art, academia, and activist communities (among many others) are building blocks for a consolidated peace movement in Europe. They might as well be the most constructive paths out of this war.

On the short term, the strategic pressure of these actors could help to put an end to the Russia-Ukraine war (depending on how quickly and efficiently we can organise).

The advantage of a peace movement is that it has strong intersectional potential and is trans-ideological. This means that attenuation of suffering and the flourishing of human potential that comes from a peaceful environment is in the interest of the left, right and centrist politics and thus transcends these limitations.

On the long term, mediate between and put direct pressure on government actors and (local) elected officials to institutionalise nonviolent conflict transformation structures, create and advocate for laws that make it increasingly harder for them to escape the serious judicial and economic consequences of justifying or sustaining any form of violence.

Please, spread this article through the networks you have. We wish/ we aim to reach as many people as possible including through media stations or news platforms. Feel free to translate, contextualize and remix this document and adapt it to the specific situation in your country, community or network. Add links and creative ideas of nonviolent resistance and peace work and examples that fit your context and audience.

In the end, it is the sum of the individual actions that leads to sustainable peace in societies. Whether you do just one thing or several things, each of your contributions counts. Thank you!

Sources and further reading:

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