

# I Was Asked to Speak at a Peace Conference

I received a last-minute invitation to give a speech at the Peace Justice Conference. Here is the script I made.



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Good morning,

It is nice to see that so many of you have decided to join this peace conference. These days, one might get a strange impression from an event like this.

In the current political climate, a conference about peace seems at best a dead man walking. It has now been a little over two months since Russia attacked Ukraine. Ever since even the smallest voices calling for peace seem to have all but disappeared.

In Russia, journalists risk extreme sanctions and even torture for calling for peace. In the western part of Europe, those kinds of repressions are not necessary. Our politicians and media creators have chosen to rally behind the war drums of their own accord.

This is a dangerous development for several reasons.

For one the risk of nuclear war increases exponentially. Never, since the end of the Cold War have tensions been this high in Europe.

In my classroom, I meet young people worrying about Nuclear War. A situation I only used to hear about from my parent's generation.

What is even more worrying is the wilful silencing of voices. I am talking about those few voices, who urge mutual understanding and diplomacy. Most of them are now placed outside any influence.

This is a recipe for disaster.

The second reason is, that we risk undermining much of the progress we have made. Particularly in the fields of social justice and climate change.

## War Undermines the Progress of Our Society. Peace Is the Only Way Forward

The military-industrial complex is among the biggest drivers of greenhouse gas emissions. Complex production and logistics chains demand enormous quantities of fossil fuels. And raw materials.

A side effect of war is also always widespread ecological destruction. Many battlefields from WWI are still heavily polluted. Nature has not recovered from the chemicals that were released more than a hundred years ago.

Landmines and unexploded munitions continue to pose a threat to humans and wildlife. For example in southeast Laos. A country that holds a tragic record as the most bombed country in the world.

In the U.S., more than 900 of the more than 1200 Superfund sites are linked to military activity. Even here in Denmark, poisonous forever chemicals are causing widespread contamination. Both in groundwater, crops, and livestock. Most of these chemicals are from military installations.

For the first time in three decades, poverty rates are once again going up. Food costs and energy prices are exploding. That is a direct consequence as a result of the war in Ukraine and its subsequent sanctions. And it is making it harder for people to stay above the poverty line every day.

And people in wealthy western countries are not free of the consequences

either. Price gouging by the capitalists and inflation continue to sow division among people. And it gets more and more difficult for ordinary people to make ends meet.

All the while, the arms dealers and producers are having a field day. Their stocks are going through the roof.

## We Subsidize the Arms Dealers

Rheinmetall, Germany's biggest arms producer nearly doubled its stock value. That happened when the German government made a bold announcement. They are going to provide an extra 100 billion Euros to buy weapons.

In perspective, it is worth noting something else. In the meantime, many public school buildings in Germany are in danger of collapse. I know, because I have seen it myself. While I was touring schools in search of a new teaching job in recent months.

Military spending seems to always take precedence over everything else.

The arms industry is on a quest for neverending capital growth. The U.S. alone accounts for 40% of the entire world's military expenditure.

To this end, ever more conflicts are being fueled and escalated. It is a dangerous game, which may cost us everything.

This is despite the fact that the pandemic should have taught us an important lesson. No amount of weapons can protect us from the fallout of the destruction of ecosystems. Nor can these weapons replace basic civic necessities such as healthcare.

There are a few uplifting stories in this sea of black. There are the Italian dock workers who go on strike, not because they demand higher salaries. But because they refuse to be part of shipping weapons disguised as humanitarian aid.

The impact of the military on the environment is finally starting to get recognition. Three years ago, I held my first presentation about this. It was at this very conference, in fact. Back then nobody knew about it. Now, even the Veterans for Peace in the U.S. are running campaigns about it.

## Veterans target US military's outsized impact on the climate crisis

There are still a few great analysts, journalists, bloggers, and other creators. They refuse to back down. People like Max Blumenthal, Oliver Stone, Noam Chomsky, and Jan Oberg.

### We Need to Keep Fighting for Peace

But we should be honest. The movement for peace is going through its most difficult period in a very long time. That should not stop us from putting up the fight. It is now, we need more voices of peace than ever before. A conference like this one has true merits. Seeing all of you fills me with hope. You prove that there are still people from all over who believe that a peaceful world is worth striving for.

I fear you expect me to give you some divine insights into how to turn this situation around.

You might get disappointed. I am as clueless as the rest of us.

But I do believe that it is worth doing something. Wherever we are. Jan Oberg, whom I admire very much always used to say that we need to be our own peace movements.

He is right. What we can do is sow the seeds. And these seeds may not come to fruition tomorrow, but the day after. Maybe we even need to accept that we ourselves may no longer be around when the seed grows into a plant. But we still need to plant them.

We can do that by raising our voices. By writing and singing about it. By teaching our children and educating our neighbors. We plant the seeds by sharing the good news, even when they are few and far between. We do it by researching and uncovering the many shades of gray. Shades that get eviscerated in the simple narratives our media likes to offer.

We do it by understanding the conflicts and the role of business and dirty politics in them.

And we do it by standing firm on the principles of peace by peaceful means.

This is why events like these matter. The workshops and activities you will take part in have immense value to this end. Today, all of you are part of a movement sowing some seeds, that will bloom. Even if that day is not today.

Thank you!