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Statement of Veronika Didusenko

My name is Veronika Didusenko. I am from the besieged city of Kyiv, from war torn Ukraine.

On February 24, my 7-year-old son and I were awakened by sirens and explosions. Kyiv, a city of more than three million people which was asleep, without any formal declaration of war, without any hope for its inhabitants to take shelter, was hit by an enemy bomb.

In-between raids, we, along with tens of thousands of other families, tried to get out of the city. Thousands of cars formed a traffic jam on the highway on the way out of Kyiv for many hours. Directly above my head, dozens of Russian helicopters with troops were bombing the Gostomel airfield in their effort to take it.

The airfield was formerly famous for being home to the largest aircraft in the world, the Ukrainian Mriya, but in this war by Putin against Ukraine the Russian military burned it down. Today, however, that airfield is famous because a handful of 18-19-year-old Ukrainian boys, conscripted soldiers, stopped the so-called “unstoppable” Russian special forces. As I was fleeing with my young son, I could see that there was a real air battle above our heads

On my many-day journey to the southwestern border of Ukraine there was no place where sirens would not sound, where rockets and bombs would not explode. In order to get to the safe place with my son at a home of friends who could help us, we had to travel through four countries: Moldova, Romania, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. I had hoped to fly to Los Angeles with my son for a temporary trip. I went to the U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg to apply for a Visa for my son. I had a Visa, which has been issued to me some time ago, but when I applied for a Visa last week for my son, the Visa for my son to travel with me to the United States was denied. Therefore, I had to leave my son with my friends in Geneva until I return at the end of this week. I was forced to choose between staying with my son in Switzerland or coming to Los Angeles. It was a difficult choice, but my son was safe with friends in

Geneva. Consequently, I went to Los Angeles to be with Ms. Allred, because a few months ago we planned to be together on International Women's Day to discuss women's rights around the world.

After I arrived, however, Ms. Allred and I decided that what was most important was to discuss what is happening to mothers and their children in Ukraine as they are forced to flee.

Right now, millions of Ukrainian children and their mothers are trembling at every sound in the subway stations and bomb shelters. Even more heartbreaking is that women are giving birth in such conditions in these shelters.

Right now, Russian aircraft, missiles, and multiple rocket launchers continue to strike at dozens of Ukrainian cities.

The Kremlin called the invasion of my country of 40 million people not a war, but rather a special operation against the Nazis. They invented that story, and it is nothing but Russian propaganda. It is Putin who behaves like a Nazi in every war crime he commits in Ukraine.

Putin said he would not bomb civilian targets, but then why did he bomb the maternity hospital of Zhytomyr city, the orphanage in the city of Vorzel in Ukraine, the kindergarten in the urban village of Stanytsia Luhanska in Ukraine, the school of the Ukrainian city Akhtyrka, the University in the city of Kharkiv and the hospital in the city of Chernihiv in Ukraine? I don't have the latest figures, but this past weekend 34 hospitals have either been fully destroyed or damaged to the point of having to shut down. Putin's military attacked the citizens of Mariupol or Irpin who were being shot at as they tried to evacuate using an agreed upon humanitarian corridor. Look at the museum of the Ukrainian artist Maria Pryimachenko burned down by the invaders in Ivankove.

Where the Russian soldier passes, there remains a strip of fires, looted shops, pharmacies and broken ATMs.

And of course the shooting of the largest European nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, the shelling of the experimental nuclear reactor in Kharkiv city, and the holding hostage of Chernobyl workers without letting them have access to the storage of nuclear waste there, puts not only Ukraine, but Europe

and the whole world into the danger of the threat of a new nuclear catastrophe.

And most importantly, Putin does not hide his goal, which is the eradication of everything Ukrainian, and of Ukraine itself. The leadership of Russia, the Russian president himself, has repeatedly called our country an historical mistake.

In 2014, eight years ago, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians came out to the Independence Square of Kyiv and said "No!" to President Yanukovich, who instead of the promised Association Agreement with the European Union, was preparing to give the country to Russia. Having paid with more than a hundred lives, we then won. Unfortunately though, we were not able to stop the occupation of Crimea and most of the Donbass.

However, for all these long eight years of war, students, managers, IT workers and all Ukrainians have been learning how to fight. Therefore, the new Russian invasion in 2022 was met by a completely different country. Ukrainians now have a steel will and courage which was strengthened because of Putin's actions against our country.

From the very first days of the Russian invasion, the myth about the invincibility of Russian weapons and about effectiveness of their military strategy was debunked.

Not only professional soldiers are fighting. In addition, hundreds of thousands of civilians, men and women, have signed up for the territorial defense. And where they don't have the organized territorial defense, the inhabitants of villages and cities, unarmed stand in the way of the tank columns of the invaders.

In the first week of the war alone, 2,000 civilians were killed. Over 50 children have been killed and more than eight hundred have been injured. As President Zelensky said today, the day before in the besieged Mariupol, where the Russians have been promising but not opening humanitarian passages for several days, the first child died of dehydration.

Also, among the fallen heroes who defended Ukraine there are women. I will name just a couple of names: The first Ukrainian fighter pilot Natalia Perakov and volunteer, veteran Irina Tsvila.

Over two million Ukrainians are forced to leave their homes. Besieged by the Russians, but stubbornly fighting, cities are on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe... but they're not giving up. In the occupied cities of Kherson, Melitopol, Nova Kahovka and other cities, people are going outside to protest daily despite bullets flying over their heads.

Ukrainians absolutely have the courage to defend their land and homes, but in order to stop the endless attack from the east and north, they are in desperate need of weapons and ammunition. We will fight for our freedom and yours. We will fight and win.

We appreciate and thank our allies and friends for their help, not only governments, but hundreds of thousands of regular people and celebrities. Everyone is helping however they can.

Those remaining in Ukraine need this help the most. Those who are under fire from the Russian fascist bombs are begging our allies to close the skies over Ukraine. Unfortunately, their pleas are falling on deaf ears in Washington and Europe, just like the warnings of Putin's madness over the past 8 years.

We are fighting for our land and our freedom. Glory Ukraine! Слава Україні!

Veronika Didusenko
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