



*Conference participants with hosts at the monument to Zemach Shabad, a highly respected Jewish doctor as he often helped the poor who did not have the money to go to the doctor.*

## **The Peace and Climate Justice conference in Vilnius 24-27 April 2025**

**A report from 4 days for peace on Earth and peace with Earth**

The Peace and Climate Justice Conference held in Vilnius 24-27 April 2025 moved the peace and environmental movement towards the East. A more balanced All-European perspective was achieved with a global migrants perspective added. The barrier between movements that often occurs in initiatives dominated by the West was opened to greater integration of the issues as well as of political and humanitarian aspects. The precarious situation in which the refugees from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in Lithuania live in makes it necessary to address immediate human concerns. This enables greater inclusiveness between personal, social, cultural and political realms.



*Above and below. The conference venue*

The organizers:

International Centre for Civil Initiatives “Our House”  
<https://news.house/>



**Nätverket  
FRED &  
KLIMAT-  
RÄTTVISA**

Nätverket fred och klimaträttvisa  
<https://www.artisterforfred.se/n%C3%A4tverket-fred-klimat>

The conference had no external funding. The costs were paid by the participants for accommodation and travel. Additional costs were covered by an activist in the Network Peace and Climate Justice.

Text unless other stated, layout, and most photos in this report: Tord Björk, [tord.bjork@gmail.com](mailto:tord.bjork@gmail.com)



## Content

Front page with introduction

Organizers and venue

Summary

The world needs peace, social and climate justice NOW!

Support Belarusian and Russian refugees in Lithuania

Create a Peace Corridor through Europe!

Building momentum for a Helsinki+50 civil society accords

Conference photos and activities

Manifestation commemorating the Chernobyl accident

Speech by Olga Karach

We will live in peace, Speech by Tord Björk

The peace movement is the root of the climate movement

Stop Astravets, speech by Roland Rittman

Go wild!

Use OSCE to bring peace to Europe, speech by Hans Hedrich

SMILE! Five Criteria for Lasting and Just Peace Agreements

Bike tour against nuclear power

Vilnius city walk

The Lithuanian Holocaust

Coming events

GDAMS 2025 Appeal - Global Days of Actions on Military Spending

Gifts: a necessity in Belarusian culture



## Summary of the Peace and Climate Justice conference in Vilnius 2025

The Peace and Climate Justice Conference held in Vilnius 24-27 April 2025 moved peace and environmental movement towards the East. A more balanced All-European perspective was achieved with a global migrants perspective added. The barrier between movements that often occurs in initiatives dominated by the West was opened to greater integration of the issues as well as of political and humanitarian aspects.

The precarious situation in which the refugees from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in Lithuania live in makes it necessary to address immediate human concerns. At the same time the collective effort channeled by the Belarusian organization Our house is more open-minded to integrate different issues without homogenizing them by demanding a common world view. This enables greater inclusiveness between personal, social, cultural and political realms.

This was expressed throughout the meeting and the manifestation in the city centre on Sunday co-organized with others. Central at the conference were the

conditions for the refugees. Several personal experiences were presented. They included torture and a wide range of other repressions in Belarus and Russia as well as hardships refugees face in Lithuania having many rights violated. This includes refusal to even cross the border to claim asylum rights to having no rights at all and being threatened to be deported back. Leo Gabriel, member of the international council of World Social Forum, presented similar problems facing migrants in middle America now getting worse when the US totally closed the border. The need to support all refugees from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in rest of Europe was stressed. To not use double standards was also seen as fundamental by opposing violations against human rights wherever they take place or whoever is the perpetrator.

Climate and environmental issues became a central part through the understanding of the need for a common approach to solve both the climate and environmental problems in the Baltic Sea region. Roland Rittman from Sweden presented the threat posed by nuclear power plants in Russia, Fin-

land, Sweden, and Belarus and plans for many new reactors in Poland while Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia do not have any. In Sweden the military oppose the construction of windmill parks at Sea that can replace 13 reactors. To avoid the risk that nuclear power pose while addressing the need for climate action a Baltic Sea region energy plan for a just transition towards a low energy society was proposed. The threat nuclear power is during war is highlighted by the Ukraine war and became evident with the Chernobyl accident. Less risky solutions is of importance for the future.

Peace was also adressed as a main concern for all movements. Without peace the cooperation needed to solve social welfare and a climate just transition cannot be strongly addressed in the Baltic Sea region or elsewhere. Here using OSCE and the 50 years anniversary of the Helsinki Accords was especially discussed. A Peace appeal was made and participation in the Helsinki+50 process started by Nordic Peace Alliance is central for the follow up of the conference. Especially promosing is also the StopRearm campaign bringing many different movements together.



The possibily for cooperation between movements in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the whole OSCE region was seen as important for making both peace and climate justice possible.

The original program was partly changed giving more room to personal stories of the repression people had fled from and the hardships many face also in the West. This made the conference rich on both information and emotions for the participants, both for the refugees and those living in Lithuania and participants from other countries. There was also much culture starting with a perfomance by the young Gleb fom Belarus living in Lithuania and the winner of the Close up most original contest in the World Championship of Magic who showed that it is possible to do the most unimaginable tricks. Musicians from Sweden used the guitars and performed



popular songs while the Belarusian former political prisoner Anatoli Khinevich was singing his own protests songs. Some met in a small group for an in-depth and personal conversation about peace. The conference ended with a ceremony at the Neris river nearby when participants filled a flower with their personal wishes and let it disappear down stream.

The day after international guests contributed to a manifestation commemorating the Chernobyl accident in 1986 and protesting against a nuclear reactor in Belarus placed 40 km from the Lithuanian capital. Belarusian and Lithuanian places of importance in Vilius were visited during a town walk ending in the old Jewish ghetto in a city that once was the cultural center of Jewish society in all of Eastern Europe.

## Suicides among refugees

For the human rights organization Our House, suicides among Belarusian activists and human rights defenders remain a deeply painful and sensitive issue.

According to Our House, suicides among Belarusian political activists and refugees reflect the systemic vulnerability of this group. The lack of stable international protection mechanisms, undefined legal status, threats of deportation to Belarusian prisons and torture, as well as stigmatization and political pressure — including being declared a “national security threat” — significantly increase the risk of psychological breakdown and suicide.

We could say that this disturbing pattern of suicides among Belarusian political refugees deserves greater attention from human rights institutions, EU bodies, and international protection mechanisms.

Read more: <https://news.house/64348>

# Appeal for joint regular international days of action

## The world needs peace, social and climate justice NOW!

In 2025 it will be 80 years since the Second World War ended, which killed around 60 million people and peace finally came. At that time, the main slogan and the obvious conclusion when the UN was formed was – Never again war!

But now we see how our rulers around the world are arming both nuclear weapons and conventional weapons like never before! The contradictions and threats against each other are escalating. Everyone is preparing for war at the same time as the social, ecological and climate crisis worsens every day. The threat of total annihilation in the form of nuclear war is also growing over us. For the first time in human history, we humans ourselves are risking our future on our entire common planet.

We cannot continue to kill each other when contradictions and conflicts of interest arise between states and people groups. We must resolve these through mutual respect, non-violence and negotiation.

We can only save the world and the future if we help each other in solidarity and cooperate internationally. We must equalize the glaring injustices that exist both within countries and between countries. At the same time, we need to radically change our societies in the way that the climate and nature require. Therefore, we need to defend the UN, OSCE, everyone's human rights and other international humanitarian, ecological and climate cooperation more than ever.

People's movements of all kinds and faiths share similar values such as the equal value of all people, the solidarity of caring for each other and all living things. We now need to take the responsibility that our economic and political rulers refuse to take.

Therefore, we now call on all people's movements, faithcommunities and people in the world to regular international days of action - where we manifest together for a positive culture of peace and a hopeful vision of the future!

Peace and solidarity are a prerequisite for saving the future of our children and grandchildren - let's show our rulers that we can and want to fight together!

Peace on Earth - Peace with the Earth!

We, the undersigned, have participated in the International Conference for Peace and Climate Justice in Vilnius/Lithuania on 24 – 27 April:

*Tord Björk*, Environmental and peace activist Sweden

*Emil Kvikant*, Student Finland

*Janne Cortobius*, Peace and climate activist Sweden

*Erik Lindqvist*, Artist for Peace Sweden

*Irmgard Ehrenberg*, Peaceactivist Austria

*Roland Rittman*, Opponent of Nuclear Power Sweden

*Åke Eriksson*, Peace activist Sweden

*Alexey Sakhnin*, Russian political refugee, France

*Hans Hedrich*, Peace-active Romania

*Astrid Ståhlberg*, Peace Active Sweden

*Olga Karatch*, Human Rights Activist, Belarus/Lithuania

*Natalia Zelewska*, Anti-racist activist Germany

*Roja Kirkeby*, Environmentally Active Sweden



## Create a Peace Corridor through Europe!

A proposal for discussion

A call to all European popular movements and faith communities

Europe stands at a historic crossroads. The war in Ukraine has shaken this part of Europe to its foundations, destabilizing societies, economies and human relations in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States, Poland and the states from the Arctic in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Waves of refugees, rising death tolls, growing xenophobia and eroded public trust. Militarization has replaced diplomacy and negotiations on common security. Fear and division have replaced siblings. In such a time, all popular movements and faith communities must stand up for human dignity, solidarity and peace.

Over the past five years, millions of people from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia have become refugees. The war in Ukraine is deeply destabilising societies across Eastern Europe, exacerbating collective and historical trauma as well as social injustices.

Redefining European Security - The Vision of the Peace Corridor through Europe

The proposed "Peace Corridor" offers an alternative: a proposed 100 km wide demilitarized zone through this part of Europe based on the principles of reconciliation, disarmament, non-violence and human dignity. It is a call to think about security, not in terms of weapons and deterrence, but through caring for the human being, restoring trust, and healing memories. The peace corridor is not a utopia - but would greatly reduce the risk of a 3rd world war and nuclear annihilation.

Popular movements and faith communities as architects of reconciliation

We popular movements and faith communities in Europe have a long history of fighting for people's equal value, solidarity and peace. We have a vital role today in driving forward and supporting this peace structure by:

1. Promote a culture of dignity: By countering dehumanizing rhetoric about the "enemy" and affirming the self-evident value of every human being, they can counteract polarization and social scapegoat mentality.

## Support Belarusian and Russian refugees in Lithuania

We international participants at the Peace and climatejustice Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania 24-27 of April 2025, call for international support for refugees from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

Refugees that now are faced with various degrees of hardship. Not only from the countries they came from but also in the EU-country Lithuania.

During the days in Vilnius we have listened to many cases of severe repression in Belarus and Russia. Some are now threatened by Lithuanian authorities to be deported back to Belarus..

It is a shame that any EU-country send people back to oppressive conditions in Belarus and Russia. We call upon citizens and organisations in all EU-member countries to ask the Lithuanian authorities to end all attempts to send Belarusian and Russian political refugees back to the countries.

International participants at the Peace and Climate Justice conference in Vilnius 24-27 April 2025



2. Offer safe spaces for dialogue: Popular movements and faith communities can hold conversations in the local community, facilitate interreligious and inter-ethnic understanding, and provide refuge to the persecuted and displaced.

3. Advocate non-violence and demilitarization: Through moral leadership, popular movements can call for peace and negotiations instead of rearmament and war, and recognize and support conscientious objectors who do not want to participate in the killings.

4. Healing collective trauma: Through pastoral care, care, and conversations and rituals of remembrance, popular movements and faith communities can offer spiritual and psychological resources to process grief, guilt, and generational trauma.

Three steps towards the Peace Corridor – popular movements and the role of religious communities

1. Demilitarization and abolition of nuclear weapons: There is a need for the complete withdrawal of nuclear weapons and foreign troops from the region, as well as the promotion of a "peace tax" – a reallocation of military spending to peacebuilding and ecological recovery.

2. Development of peace infrastructure: Initiatives are needed that promote a transition from revenge to reconciliation, from condemnation to dialogue, and from fear to shared responsibility. This includes training peacebuilders, supporting peace education, cross-border solidarity between popular movements, faith communities, and communities, and developing strong humanitarian initiatives. Today, millions of people live as "invisible" refugees in Eastern Europe – not only Ukrainians but also Belarusians and Russians who have fled persecution and war, often for their anti-militaristic beliefs. Many receive no help, are outside the law and society and are in urgent need of support. Popular movements and faith communities can play a crucial role in offering help, legal support, shelter and spiritual care for these marginalized groups.

3. Creation of permanent dialogue mechanisms: A new "Helsinki 2.0" is needed – a new global dialogue process with equal participation of civil society and governments. Inclusive peace processes are needed that represent the voices of refugees, conscientious objectors and war-torn communities.

Popular movements and faith communities as a beacon of hope

In a time of deepening division and violence, solidarity and humanity are needed more than ever. The peace corridor is not just a political proposal – it is a moral imperative.

In times of great suffering and uncertainty, belief in ourselves as human beings who wish each other well and human solidarity becomes a matter of survival. For all these countless people who have lost everything – their homes, their loved ones, their livelihoods and their sense of belonging. In the darkest moments, it is this faith, conviction and solidarity that gives these people hope instead of despair and hatred.

Now is the time to build a Peace Corridor and a peaceful Europe – with love, solidarity and determination!

The organizers of the Peace and Climate Justice Conference in Vilnius 24-27 April 2025

Network for Peace and Climate Justice Sweden

Our House Belarus/Lithuania





## Building momentum for a Helsinki+50 civil society accords

Lithuania conference material

We support the Nordic Peace Alliance initiative to make a common civil society statement for common security and civil rights at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki accords agreed upon August 1 1975. We ask all concerned to contribute to such a statement.

Many states and corporations take polarized positions against each other in the world today. We see the need for democratically organized movements in civil society to stand up for common demands beyond often equally undesirable standpoints.

Here the Helsinki accords from 1975 with all its parts are a safe platform for renewed efforts to solve security, social, economic, environmental and human rights concerns in the interest of all. As government and business interests fails to do so we call upon democratic membership organizations open to anyone sharing their goals to take up the torch from 1975 and use it once more in the interest of humanity.

To do this Finnish peace movement and NPA together with cooperations partners plans to make activities in Helsinki around August 1, the day of signing the Helsinki Accords on the Finlandia hall including independent indoor activities, presenting a civil society statement to guests at an event initiated by the government and hand it over to all OSCE member

state embassies in Helsinki

A key purpose now is to get as much legitimacy as possible behind the statement. This can be done by an online declaration process. Apart from a continuous discussion two webinars can be held to strengthen the momentum:

1. As soon as possible. H+50 and the world, why H+50 is of global importance with one general part and three geographically focused: H+50 and Asia& Pacific, H+50 and Europe and Africa and H+50 and North and Caribbean, Central and South America

2 Later in June: H+50 civic declaration general debate and breakup rooms for each region, maybe countries in some cases. Central Asia, Southern Caucasus etc.

To initiate a critical and useful process we call for addressing dilemmas facing anyone who wants to come with constructive solutions to the present multi-faceted crisis and escalation of tensions.

1. One dilemma is the choice between selective view of human rights or avoiding interference in internal affairs.. Here we suggest to include in a common statement that we as independent movement declare to all governments and corporations that we will interfere in internal affairs on the basis of equal value for indivisible human rights for all without double standards.

2. Another dilemma is a choice between Europe and the world. The Helsinki Final Act applies de jure only to the transatlantic area and countries of the former Soviet Union. At the same time the final act is de facto of global importance as it is as close we can get to a peace agreement after the Second World War. The allied victory in this war led to the formation of the UN and the adoption of indivisible human rights and the UN Charter which is the basis of international law. Regional agreements can be made but do not constitute a free pass to violate international law in other regions. As independent movement will not use double standards for what happens in Europe and the rest of the world and we do not place a one-sided emphasis on formal rules and actions in practice.

3. A third dilemma is the choice between what is called a "broader security concept" in relation to indivisible human rights and sovereignty. It is claimed by

those promoting a specific definition of a broad concept of security in OSCE networks that this includes only civil rights. Human rights are indivisible including both social and civil rights according to the UN. Promoting economic cooperation is included in the Helsinki Accords. The Helsinki spirit as expressed from the beginning and in the follow up process can also be interpreted as the right to unrestricted and equal sovereignty for all participating states including both economic, security, cultural and other aspects. In the choice between the "broad concept of security" and including material power relations within and between countries, it becomes important for independent popular movements to take both values and material conditions into account. Exemplary internal democracy in a country cannot be separated from the unequal financial, technological, military, resource control and cultural factors on which this rely upon.

4. A fourth dilemma is the choice between legitimization of the prevailing policy and marginalization. The Finnish policy for the celebration of Helsinki+50 is to remove all public funding of peace organizations while supporting a large event with 1000 guests from civil society and other actors. Which criteria will be used and who will be invited is still unclear although there are hopes that Finnish peace organizations representing NPA will be able to be present and present a common democratic civil society statement. Instead of seizing the historical moment and taking half a century of development into account, it is a narrow perspective that civil society should participate in OSCE activities. The coordination of civil society will be made by the executive director for Demo Finland, an organization for all parliamentarian parties in Finland. Parties can be seen as part of civil society. But they also strive for state power. Popular movements are a democratic function in society where anyone who wants to join an association's aims and statutes can do so. This makes them having a uniquely democratic role. in civil society. States are less willing to take up the broad historic mission from 1975 expressed by Finland abandoning its earlier role asking Austria with its neutral status to be host to a statelevel meeting. Current politicians are no longer wishing to carry the historical mission in the Helsinki accords and follow up documents regarding both security, human rights, economic, environmental, social and other issues forward other in polarized ways. Finland also arrange the civil society participation in officially organized events in selective ways. Yet we should take advantage of an invitation to convey

our message if asked at the same time as we organize our own process and goes directly in Helsinki to all OSCE countries embassies and to spread our message in many countries to make our voice heard addressing the needs of mankind for cooperation.

5. A fifth dilemma is the choice between nostalgia and being relevant today. Our movements have to face that we do not live any longer in earlier times when the peace and other popular movements could mobilize masses of people. At the same time time perspectives have become more focused on what is happening here and now without historic or future dimensions. Here popular movements have to be better at addressing the daily needs of each and everyone living in rural or urban areas while at the same time keeping a long term perspective. Here international democratically organized movements are of special help to widen the horizon beyond local and national horizons. Here a common effort to address in a broad sense the legacy of the Helsinki accords evaluating 50 years development with the coming 50 years in mind can be helpful.

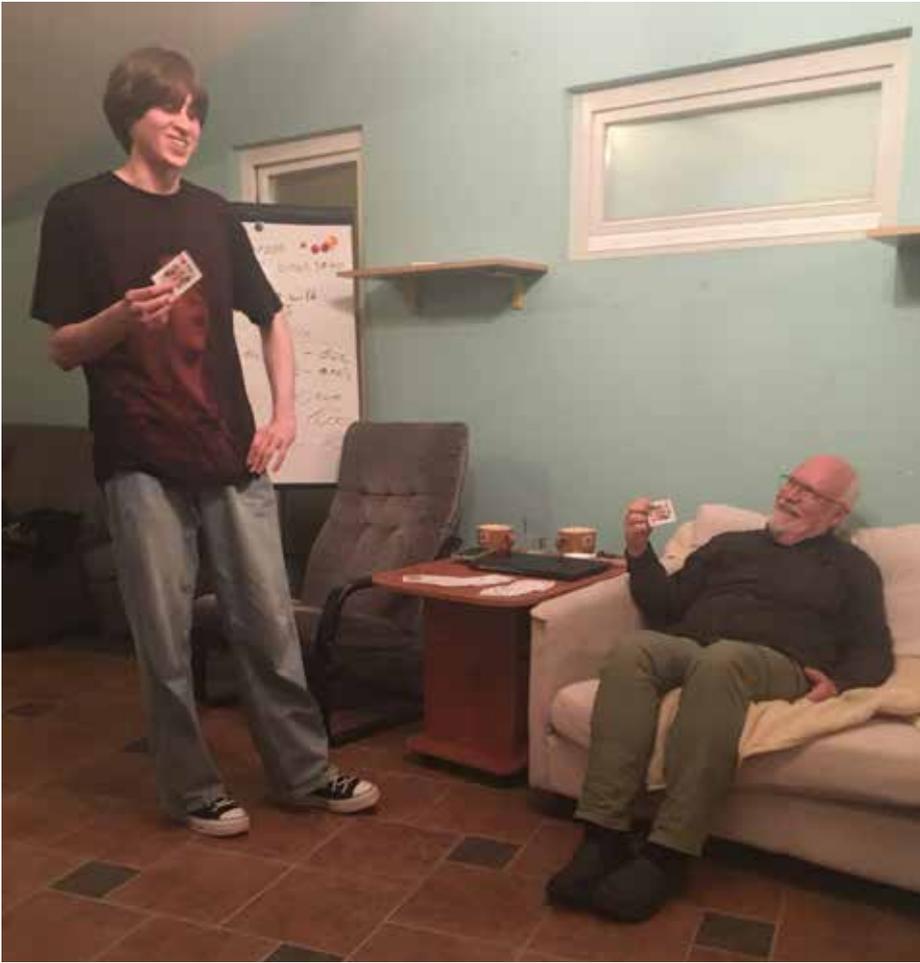
-----

The Helsinki Accords included four groupings or baskets. In the first basket, the "Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States" enumerated the following 10 points:

1. Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty
2. Refraining from the threat or use of force
3. Inviolability of frontiers
4. Territorial integrity of states
5. Peaceful settlement of disputes
6. Non-intervention in internal affairs
7. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief
8. Equal rights and self-determination of peoples
9. Co-operation among States
10. Fulfillment in good faith of obligations under international law

The four "baskets" were:

- (1) questions of European security,
- (2) cooperation in economics, science and technology, and the environment,
- (3) humanitarian and cultural cooperation
- (4) follow-up to the conference.



*Above: Food all the time seems to be central in Belarusian culture. It certainly played a central role at the conference.*



*Above: The World Champion of original close up Magic gave the conference a start making all believe that the impossible is possible.*

*To the left: Pets play an important role for the refugees. They give comfort in a hard life. Here a dog in the sofa while the first persons arriving discuss with the host.*



*Above: War resisters from Paris and Stockholm talk to each other.*

*To the left: The old talk to the young*

*Below. The young talks to the young*



*To the right: Roland Rittman with a book about the new Nordic cuisine with a picture of himself as forager.*

Roland Rittman has become popular in China and other parts of the world as the interest in local plants in our food is growing. At a large gathering in Copenhagen he ended his speech by saying:

Our gastronomic, culinary, cultural and revolutionary movement needs a rite of passage, an initiation ceremony, some ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another.

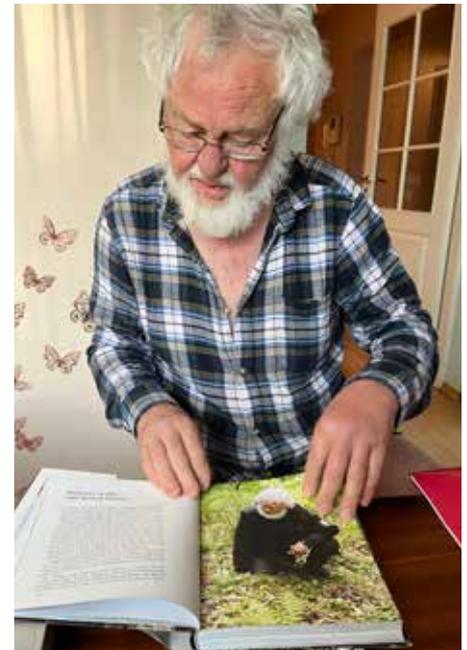
Go to the beach or to the woods or to some part of nature, that you

have made your own. Kneel on the ground. Humbly bend your head. Take a bite from a rooted plant. Graze as the animal you are – and contemplate, with universal empathy – our critical impact on this wild symphony of existence.

Thank the Sun for giving us energy, green plants, animals and life! Infuse your identity with The Earth.

BE WILD!

Join the revolution!



Some of us met in a small group for an in-depth and personal conversation about PEACE.

With the help of black and white photos, we were able to "sound down" the concept of PEACE in our lives and talk for a while. Peace touches us deeply and needs to be expressed in words and conversation.

It felt liberating and empowering.

*Below: Ending the conference with Flowers and leaves loaded with individual intentions for peace and freedom sent down the river Neris (Vilija) towards the Baltic sea.*



*Above: Gandhi (Hans Hedrich) from Romania at the meeting, the trick is to buy the right kind of glasses.*

*To the left and below: Natalia Zelewska from United for intercultural action catching the attention.*





Yuliya Prasanova is an artisan teaching people to make things with their hands. She has an Instagram page with 20000 followers. During the protests against the elections in Belarus she showed thousands of people how to make protest symbols and inspired them to carry them. This was not liked by the authorities so she had to flee from the country to Lithuania. She organized with a happy smile an artisan workshop during the conference.



The participants also smiled happily with scissors and glue sticks in their hands while trying to follow the instructions. This was not so easy as the dove that was cut out of a piece of cloth had detailed feather contours. Luckily the minimal red heart that was glued to the breast of the peace dove was pre-made. Finally people had made their peace dove with a pin to stick on to their clothes. So now you can go to Yuliyas Instagram and find more artisan



things to do, with the help with the help of google or other automatic translation the Belarusian language should not be so much of a problem.

*Above: People are looking at their results.*

*To the right: The final dinner*

*Below: Olga Karach with her dove on her breast in red and white colours, a combination forbidden to wear in Belarus*







*The banners at the Chernobyl remembrance manifestation in Vilnius April 27*

## Stop the nuclear threat!

SPEECH in Vilnius by Olga Karach

Dear friends,  
My name is Olga Karach. I am the director of the International Centre for Civil Initiatives "Our House," a Belarusian organization in exile. Our organization was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize — in 2024 and 2025.

On October 11, 2024, "Our House" officially became a partner of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) — a coalition awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, working for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. This partnership carries deep symbolic meaning, as on the very same day, the Nobel Peace Prize was also awarded to the Japanese organization Nihon Hidankyo, which unites survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This double recognition highlights the importance of ICAN's mission and the special role of "Our House" in promoting nuclear disarmament ideas in Belarus. We are very proud of our partnership with ICAN and to be a member of this global network.

But I must honestly say: for me personally, this pride is mixed with sadness. I never thought that Belarusians, "Our House," or I myself would ever have to deal with the issues of nuclear disarmament.



Unfortunately, at the beginning of 2023, a terrible event occurred: Belarus received nuclear weapons from Russia. This caused a significant public outcry, and we, as a civil human rights organization, could not remain silent.

By joining ICAN — a network uniting over 600 organizations in more than 100 countries — "Our House" strengthened its fight and voice against the presence of nuclear weapons in Belarus. The symbolism of our partnership with ICAN cannot be overstated.

The formalization of our relations took place on the day when Japan's Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) received the Nobel Peace Prize — as recognition of their decades-long struggle to ensure that the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki never happen again. This connection is especially important for "Our House" because, in August 2024, we, together with other Belarusian organizations, organized a commemorative event in honor of the victims of the atomic bombings in Japan. Along with hundreds of organizations worldwide, we reminded our region of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war and our collective responsibility to prevent such tragedies.

Why is Russian nuclear weaponry in Belarus dangerous? For the first time in the history of our region, there is a real risk of nuclear war. And unfortunately, we must honestly acknowledge: Belarus has become the country that brought these nuclear risks. If today nuclear weapons are used somewhere in the region, there is a high probability that they will be launched from the territory of Belarus against our neighbors. It is an extremely heavy realization: Belarus has become a source of nuclear threat for the first time.

The presence of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus turns the country into a target for preemptive strikes. It endangers the lives of millions of people — not only in Belarus but also in Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Ukraine, and across the entire region. Any escalation, any technical malfunction could lead to an irreversible catastrophe.

### Historical memory: Chernobyl

Belarus already knows what nuclear disasters mean. The Chernobyl tragedy of 1986 especially devastated Belarus: over 70% of the radioactive fallout landed on our territory. According to official data, about two million people were affected in Belarus, including

more than half a million children. Chernobyl took thousands of lives and left deep scars on the fate of entire generations. We still feel the consequences of that terrible tragedy today.

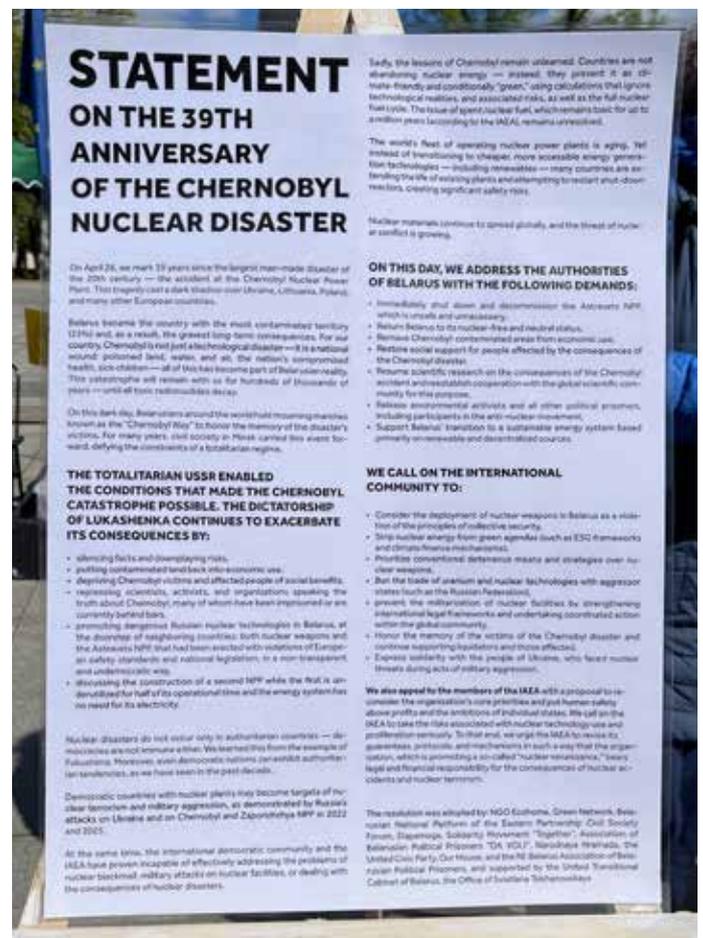
### Current threat: Astravyets NPP

Today, we also face a threat from the unsafe Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant, built dangerously close to Vilnius. This plant, constructed with gross violations of international safety standards, represents yet another potential catastrophe — this time under the guise of "peaceful atom" — for the whole of Eastern Europe.

### Our call

We, the civil activists of Belarus, firmly demand the immediate withdrawal of Russian nuclear weapons from the territory of Belarus! We call on the international community not to ignore this threat and to stand together with us in the fight for the restoration of Belarus' non-nuclear status. We believe that Belarus has the right to be a land of peace, not a platform for nuclear blackmail. Our mission is to stop the nuclear threat, to protect the future of all our peoples, and to restore Belarus as a peaceful country.

Thank you!



# We will live in peace!

SPEECH in Vilnius

by Tord Björk

Dear participants in this peace manifestation and commemoration of the Chernobyl accident in 1986

I am a member of the council of International Peace Bureau established in 1891. This organization and its leaders have received the Nobel peace prize 12 times.

Nuclear power which we are protesting against today are indivisibly linked to nuclear weapon. I say we cannot eat weapons! Sooner or later we have to lay down our weapons and plant potatoes.

I strongly believe we need both peace on Earth and peace with Earth. There is no future for mankind or for Lithuania or Sweden where I come from without that we as people in common stand up for the right of everyone on this planet to a livelihood in dignity leaving the biosphere with its air, flora and fauna in a shape for coming generations to live well.

Can we do that? We live today in a world of rich men's casinos. That is not a happy life. Rich men compete with each other. To be able to lay down our weapons and do what we want to do we need to tear down the casinos.

In each village, in each town and city we have to build social and economic relations of mutual help. No one should be left behind! Do not let the rich men split us apart.

There are those in power who want to create enemy images and say to us that other countries are eternal enemies. Countries which some claim we never can have a common understanding with helped by diplomacy between governments or people in common. The only way forward is total victory.

I say when those in power wants to destroy any contacts with another people they end up saying that the most immediate enemy is within. If you make an enemy of other nations you soon say that your own citizens or any foreigner are enemies and you tear the society apart.

Instead we need peace on Earth and peace with Earth



*The speaker in yellow hat on his way to the podium*

Tord Björk has a long term commitment to link environment and peace issues since 1971, primarily by being active in Friends of the Earth but since 2008 also in the social forum and peace movement. He is one of the founders of the Network Peace and Climate Justice that organized the conference in Vilnius. At the Alliance for a Just Climate Transition conference in 2023 peace became an issue for the climate movement. Peaceful coexistence, common security and long-term disarmament were unanimously adopted in the consensus document. The idea of a joint call for peace and climate justice was launched by activists in Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society in Stockholm at the Peace Fair in the Solidarity house in Stockholm later in 2023. Since then the work for peace and climate justice has taken great strides forward and many more are involved in the collaboration, including several faith communities, cultural practitioners, local groups in Fridays for future, ABF and others. In total, the appeal that formed the basis for the action week and a newly launched newspaper now has 22 organizations as signatories in Sweden and internationally. The appeal gained further momentum during People and Peace in January 2024, and with the help of a summer camp at the Lindsberg course center that engaged many people for activities in various locations during the first global action week for peace and climate justice in September 2024. During a gathering of 400 climate activists in April 2025 peace also became a main issue with the help of the bishop in Stockholm.

to save mankind and all living in our countries and on our planet. We have to say we cannot eat weapons! We have to say we cannot eat money! We have to say goodbye to the rich men's casinos in the West and the East and resist those who want to create enemies within or with any foreigner. Above all we have to build a society not exploiting each other and nature.

We are not victims. The local rural or urban community where we live, the nation we live in and mankind have to take the destiny in our own hands.

We should not be afraid of those in power who want to split us apart. We can stand together! Small nations like Sweden where I come from or Lithuania are not better than big nations. We all have to contribute to build a better world. We all have to sing a new song for the future of our children and mankind:

The song: We shall overcome, We are not afraid,  
We walk hand in hand, We will live in peace!

## The peace movement is the root of the climate movement

In the article *The history of the climate movement* Tord Björk describes how the anti nuclear weapons movement is the first to successfully show how emissions in the biosphere causes severe health effects. This together with Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* some year later in 1962 created the concept environment linking processes in nature with effects on our bodies.

In 1972 it was the peace movement that radicalized the environmental movement. During the alternative conferences at the UN Conference on environment the connection between nuclear weapons and nuclear power became evident to many. Mass protests focused on the connection between war and environment understanding the need for global solidarity. It became clear that protecting the environment is not only a choice between different technologies but also choosing a path to a society using less energy and saving our resources.

This understanding became central and the breeding ground for the first international climate action days in 1991 and has today developed into the climate justice movement.

You can find the article here:  
<http://folkrorelser.org/bjork-history-climate-movement.pdf>

At the same website you can also find other texts as the global history of popular movements since 2500 years:  
<http://folkrorelser.org/demokratins/carriers-book-2019.pdf>

## Timeline

**1958**

- The first Aldermaston March in the UK together with mass protests in Japan against atomic bombs inspires international mobilization and popular understanding of a global threat against humanity.

- The Baby Tooth Survey was initiated and coordinated by Louise Reiss together with Barry Commoner and others in the Greater St. Louis Citizens' Committee for Nuclear Information as a means of determining the effects of nuclear fallout in the human anatomy by examining the levels of radioactive material absorbed into the deciduous teeth of children. The findings helped convince US to sign the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the UK and Soviet Union in 1993, which ended the above-ground testing of nuclear weapons.

**1962**

- Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* published in the US merges the concern for public health and conservation into the new concept environment.

**1968**

- Club of Rome was founded as a still active environmental organization. The aim was to plan for resource depletion and limits to growth.

**1972**

- The first Summit protests is organized during UN conference on environment in Stockholm opposing the US ecocide in Vietnam by using Agent Orange when spraying the forests as tool of warfare causing severe damage on nature and human beings. A global environmental movement emerge out of the protest and several alternative conferences with strong participation from the Global South.

**1978**

- The antinuclear power movement in Denmark and Sweden makes detailed studies how their countries can change into low energy societies not in need of nuclear power and in Sweden reducing fossil fuel usage with 50 percent.

- The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists run a cover story on climate change.

**1991**

- First International Climate Action Day is coordinated by Environmental Federation (today Friends of the Earth Sweden) and Finnish solidarity organizations. Actions takes place on all continents in 70 countries at 500 places.

**1995**

- First Climate Summit, COP1, in Berlin with protests and alternative conference. Since the first Climate Summit no reduction of green house gases has been achieved, on the contrary they have been increased.

**2009**

- the International Day of Climate Action in 2009 is manifested at 6000 places globally demanding action and a binding treaty from the world leaders.

- System change not climate change became a common call in both direct actions, in much of the mass demonstration with 100,000 participants, mass meetings and the Klimaforum09 with 50,000 participants at COP15 in Copenhagen. The demand for a binding treaty did not succeed.

**2018**

- Greta Thunberg starts her solitary school strike at the door steps of the Swedish parliament which soon spread rapidly.

# Stop Astravets!

SPEECH in Vilnius

by Roland Rittman

ASTRAVETS nuclear power station in Belarus is a threat, if an accident happens there like those in FUKUSHIMA and in TJERNOBYL. Water from the Neris upper watersystem will be needed to cool down the reactors and pollution will pass Vilnius capital of Lithuania, continue to Kaunas and reach the Baltic sea by the border of Kaliningrad.

After the referendum in Lithuania a majority (63%) doesn't want a plant built by a western company in Visagonas near the closed reactors of Ignalina and they probably not want the Russian reactors in ASTRAVETS 40 km from Vilnius.

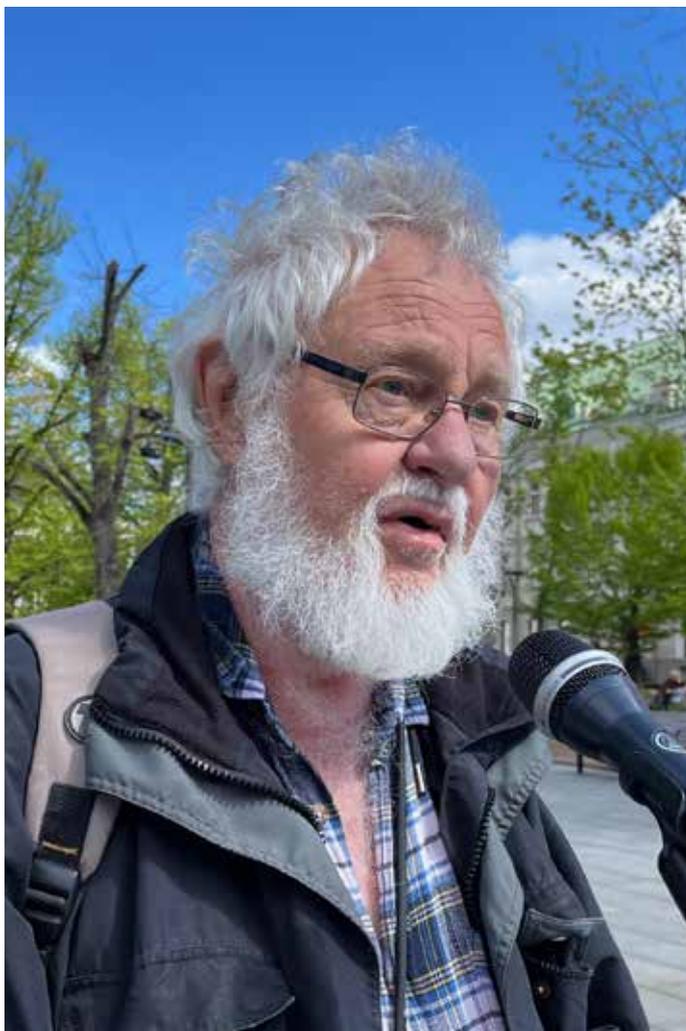
So how to closedown the reactors. In Sweden we succeeded in stopping the two reactors in BARSEBAECK 20 km from Copenhagen - the capital of Denmark. It was difficult because they - like seven others- were constructed in Sweden by the swedish company ASEA ATOM. Many Swedes were proud of the technical skills and were not knowing anything about the problems the reactors had. In total Sweden built nine of twelve reactors and two in Finland.

In one way it was easier to stop Barsebaeck, than it will be to stop Astravets because we have democracy and the parties in power have to listen to the people. Lukachenka not.

I myself started my struggle against Barsebaeck 1974 and 25 years later the first reactor closed down 1999 and six years thereafter 2005 the second and last one. But the authorities had bought ground for building six reactors like the six in a row at Zaporizjzja in Ukraine!!! And they should lie in the middle of the planned megalopolis Oerestad that now is being built part by part. They want 5-7 million people to form new Hamburg in the Nordic region! You easily can see the reactors from Copenhagen but now they are being pulled down. The reactors had then for decades threatened all parts of the small country of Denmark. A similar situation to ASTRAVETS and all parts of the small country of Lithuania.

So impossibly projects doesn't exist.

Two things made it possible. In Denmark the very



*Above Roland Rittman furing his speech*

Roland Rittman is a campaigner against nuclear power in Sweden. After his successful struggle against the Barsebaeck power plant he became a forager and central person in the New Nordic Cousine moemeent. At the end of his speech at one of the mass events in Copenhagen he said:

## Go Wild!

"We must, in different ways, find paths to wilderness, to natural living, to get to know some plot of the earth, a place to connect with and to protect during our short lives. We need to find a place where we can sit down and let our souls catch up with us.

---

So, what's on the menu? A return to nature does not mean a return to what used to be, but something completely new. Leave towns and cities for the countryside. Decentralize and recolonize now abandoned, but previously flourishing agrarian areas. It is all very easy: Do we want to be cybernetic robots or emotional human beings? What's better: gathering in the supermarkets or in the wilderness? What are your goals with life? You have to go wild.

We need a mental and a geographical domain, a home range, a territory to defend, with your life if necessary. I grew up in a town but got an interest for nature. I spent a lot of time biking in the vicinity of the town as a teenager. Through a feeling of identity with nature, I stood up for my home and

skillful Organisation to Enlightenment of Atomic Power (OOA) was successful in stopping all plans for nuclear energy in Denmark and forced their government to ask the Swedish government to close down Barsebaeck.

I suggested a Nordic March to Barsebaeck one year ahead. A weeklong Nordic gathering for environment before the march on the island of Hven/Ven in the middle of the strait of Oeresund were needed for planning.

One year after 5500-7000 people joined on Hiroshima day 1976 by the plant. I then suggested a new march a month later that occurred in Malmö with 1500-2000 Danes and Swedes. Both marches came just before the election in Sweden and we got a new Prime Minister and a new government. The Prime Minister promised to stop the planned start of the second reactor but didn't succeed in that ambition.

The following year a lot of organizations wanted to join a march. We became 30 000 at Barsebaeck 1977! Many Danes saw the possibility to get rid of the monster. One third of the Danish population lives in their capital.

Good Luck in stopping your neighbor MONSTER.

The struggle against ASTRAVETS must also be a fight together with people all around the region against all nuclear plants in Sweden, Finland and the Russian reactors in Sosnovyj Bor by St Petersburg, where sister reactors to ASTRAVETS are being built to replace the Ignalina type reactors there.

The fight also is a fight for democracy and against the right wing try to build more reactors in Sweden.

In Polen there is a try to replace coal with nuclear and a plan for six big reactors and 24 small ones... This is also a big threat to the Lithuanian people, to the Russians living in Kaliningrad especially but a threat for all people in the Nordic and Baltic region.

So together we must fight and unite for coming generations. The grown up generations must stand by the side of Greta Thunberg and her 14 million supporters to give them back hope for the future as Friday For Future say.

We have the opportunity now. The German and Danish people have said no to nuclear.

The sun and wind and deep geothermal heat are free and flowing and also cheaper to use than other sources that use hidden energy that should be kept in the ground or elsewhere. Hidden energy are fossil energy, peat, uranium and even fusion with hydrogen. The planet can't stand extra energy not flowing from the sun and stored especially in streaming water on land or streaming in the oceans. carbon dioxide/CO2 must eliminate from the air. The planet is heating up like a Finnish sauna, a bastu, and we can't get out. And we are firing it up ourselves.

The solution to get rid of our anxiety and solve all problems is to unite in a PEOPLE MOVEMENT discussing all topics in democratic groups and in consensus decide what to do to get power for a change. Time is running out.

Welcome in the human family of groups of citizens taking responsibility!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JaW9tFXkwo>

*Above: Roland Rittman during his Go Wild speech in Copenhagen, listen to the full speech using the link above.*

*Below the Go wild speech continues:*

for myself when politicians wanted to exploit it irresponsibly. I did it with guts, I knew nothing about.

The wild revolution did not start here in Copenhagen. The gathering heritage of indigenous people has survived scattered across the world.

Weeds, mushrooms and berries from Scania, the southernmost part of Sweden, have been delivered to regional restaurants ever since the creation of my company. I was foraging to survive! I had no idea at that time that my little enterprise would become part of this expanding movement: THE New Nordic Cuisine – and a new thinking of local, ecological identity with nature. A quality-raising agenda permeates the kitchens. Awareness, social responsibility, sustainability. The concept is spreading globally at the speed of thought! Illuminating minds and helping us to stay human. We go wild to rescue the planet, and humanity with it.



# Use OSCE to bring peace to Europe!

SPEECH in Vilnius

by Hans Hedrich

We need to use the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to address the present wars and conflicts. To revitalize the process that started in Helsinki 1975 is more necessary than ever. Now is the moment for movements and all of civil society to come together at the occasion of the 50 year anniversary on August 1 in Helsinki.

## SMILE! Five Criteria for Lasting and Just Peace Agreements

A look at the most important peace negotiations and treaties in Europe over the past centuries (1648, 1815, 1919, 1975, etc.) shows that the most enduring peace agreements followed a set of criteria or principles, referred to here as the SMILE criteria. What are the SMILE criteria?

- S stands for STRUCTURED / SERIAL. This means that negotiations took place within a structured institutional framework and were conducted repeatedly (serially).
- M stands for MULTILATERAL. Multiple states participated in the negotiations, not just the directly involved warring parties.
- I stands for INCLUSIVE. All warring parties took part in the negotiations; none were excluded.
- L stands for LEGAL / LEGITIMATE. The negotiations and the resulting peace agreement adhered to the prevailing rules of international law and were generally considered just.
- E stands for EMANCIPATORY or EMPOWERING.

The peace negotiations and their outcome incorporated (at least to a certain degree) the interests of the affected populations. Realistically, these criteria have rarely been fully applied. However, the more of these principles were respected, the more lasting the peace was. Conversely, the fewer of these principles were applied, the less stable or accepted the peace agreements were.

CONCLUSION: As a logical and lasting solution to

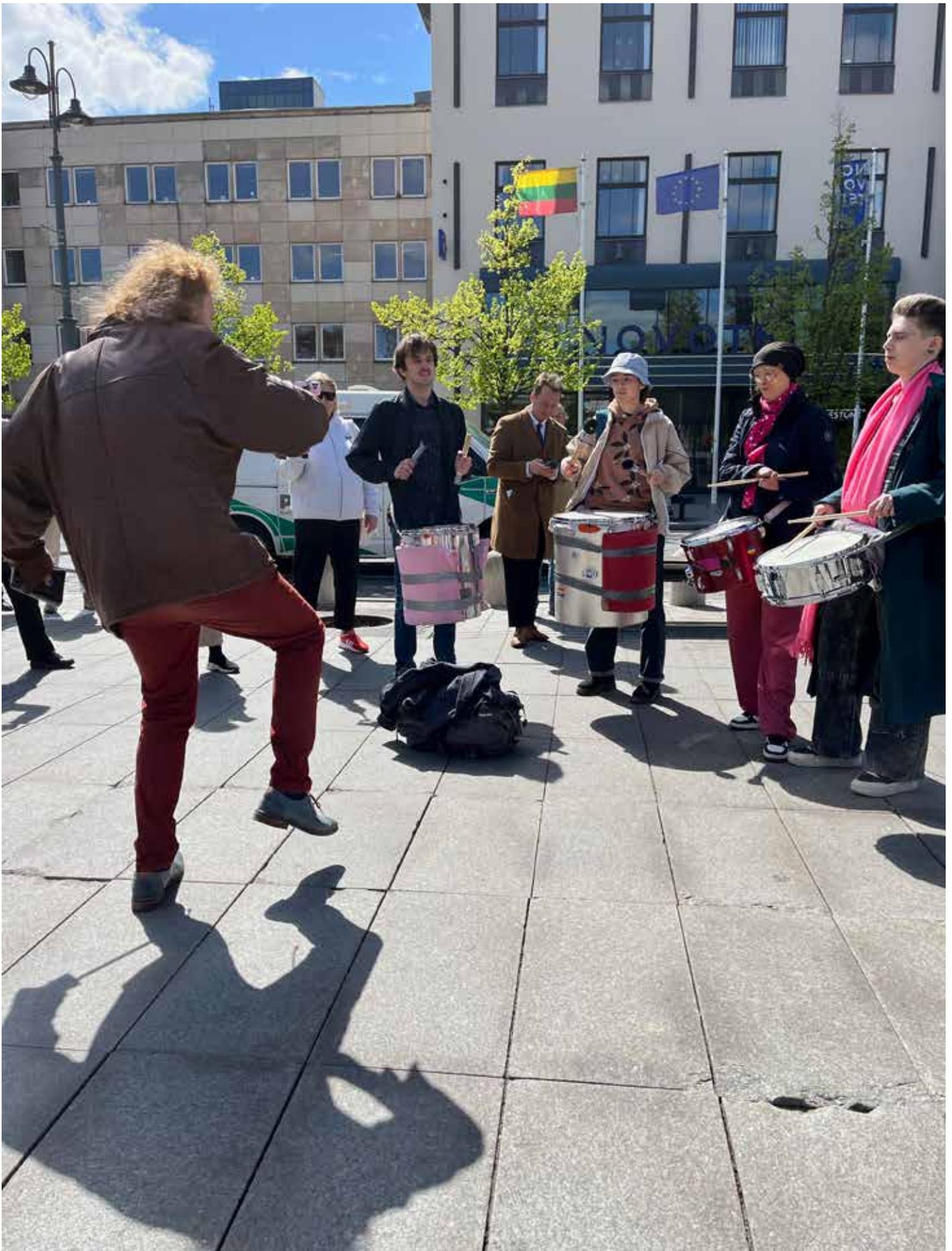
Hans Hedrich (53) is a political scientist, environmental activist, and civil rights advocate from the multiethnic region of Transylvania, Romania, and a member of World Beyond War – Chapter Romania. With a regional German-Hungarian family background, he views politics and society from a typical minority perspective: constructively, yet critically, self-reflective, and with the awareness that a good life and peaceful coexistence depend on mutual reliance. Historically, minorities are often the first and hardest hit by hegemonic ambitions and conflicts. At the same time, all peoples, religions, and cultures worldwide are, in essence, minorities among minorities—meaning that we are all interdependent in our pursuit of a good life and peaceful coexistence across borders. SMILE! Five Criteria for Lasting and Just Peace Agreements

Presentation at the conference to the right by Hans Hedrich (World beyond War - Chapter Romania)  
Further reading: Hans Hedrich: A Peace Congress for the Healing of the Old Continent; LINK: <https://neutralitystudies.com/2024/03/a-peace-congress-for-the-healing-of-the-old-continent/>



the war in Ukraine, the author advocates—based on the arguments presented so far—for a Europe-wide peace congress, such as an OSCE peace summit, followed by open-end referendums under international observation in the disputed / occupied / annexed territories of Ukraine—referendums that, according to international law, Ukraine must NOT be forced to hold but will hopefully be convinced to do so without coercion. This would follow in the footsteps of past summits of heads of state and government within the framework of the CSCE in Helsinki (1975), Paris (1990), and the resulting OSCE meetings in Budapest (1994), Istanbul (1999), and Astana (2010).

The symbolically significant year 2025 presents an ideal opportunity to launch this process—fifty years after the founding of the CSCE, and eighty years after the end of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations. This initiative should proceed both "top-down," led by states and governments, and "bottom-up," driven by civil society and the people at large. Peace is too important to be left solely in the hands of the powerful! The 15-minute presentation was an unconventional approach using a 3D model with cardboard blocks to break down the SMILE criteria and provide a tangible representation of Europe's security architecture.



*Above on this and next page: A drum orchestra makes the start of the bike march against nuclear power something worth celebrating. With a keffiyeh around his neck the energetic leader of the group shows that Palestinian solidarity have also reached Vilnius*

*To the right: The anti-nuclear bike march leaves the square.*

# Bike tour against Nuclear power

After the closing of the Ignalina nuclear plant constructed by Soviet Union and the referendum with a majority vote against building a new nuclear plant in Visaginas the anti-nuclear protests use a clear nationalist character. Here many white-red-white oppositional Belarusian flags forbidden in Belarus together with a Lithuanian flag are used in the bike march against the nuclear plant in Astravets in Belarus 40 km from Vilnius. Warning for radioactivity with Lukashenko or Putin in the middle was also a popular banner.





Vilnius became a multicultural city from the very start when Jews and Germans were invited to settle there. Also under imperial Russian rule, Vilnius had a number of cultural revivals during the 19th and early 20th centuries by Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, and Belarusians. The result is that many central places of worship for Belarusians and Poles is situated in the city along side with Jewish and Lithuanian sites.

*Above on the way to the Gate of Dawn where the Swedes were defeated in 1702.*

*Below a plaque commemorating a Belarusian personality.*

*To the right: The chapel in the Gate of Dawn contains an icon of The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, said to have miraculous powers.*

*Below: A Polish Catholic Easter ceremony.*





*Above. Olga Karach guiding the remaining international guests through the old city center.*

## Vilnius

Vilnius is mentioned in written documents for the first time in 1323. It was established as a capital in what was then the last pagan state in Europe soon reaching the whole way from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea including all of what today is Belarus, parts of Western Russia and almost all of Ukraine. Lithuanians became the last Baltic people to withstand the German Teutonic knights and became experienced warriors. They were able to control what became the biggest state in Europe by being tolerant to local religious and other customs, a tolerance that persisted also after the Lithuanians were christianized. In 1795 when Lithuania with Vilnius as a multicultural capital had a union with Poland the two countries were partitioned between Russia, Austria and Prussia. After World War I, the city experienced conflict between Poles and Lithuanians which led to its occupation by Poland before its annexation by the Soviet Union during World War II. After that war, Vilnius became the capital of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and of Lithuania in 1990.

*Below. Sharing a last meal at The Third man, an old restaurant with a name referring to the custom to never drink alone and thus inviting an unknown third person when going out to eat and drink.*



## The Lithuanian Holocaust

Lithuania emerged as a Grand Duchy in the 13th century. Here Jews were granted invitation to stay for ever. The Capital Vilnius became the Yiddish Jerusalem of Eastern Europe. Lithuania joined voluntarily with Poland in an union that was wiped out as a country between Russia and Germany. There was a justified struggle of the Lithuanian national movement for the revival of the Lithuanian language, a the rebirth of the nation in the 1870s. Until that time Lithuanian had been spoken mainly by the rural population. The historian Vygantas Vareikis dates the onset of antisemitism in the country to the same period. A prominent leader of Lithuanian rebirth promoted the idea of a nation united by one single language seeing only those speaking Lithuanian as valuable for society. Lithuanians were encouraged to dominant also crafts and trade were before Jews had been specialized sin early times. The older image of “the Jew – an eternal enemy of the Christians.” had also a role together with a more modern idea of the Jew as eternally an exploiter despite assimilation.

*Above: A statue commemorating the popular doctor Zemach Shabad with a girl and a cat in her arms.*

*Below: Youth in the former Jewish ghetto in Vilnius*

When Lithuania became independent after World War I the attitude towards the Jews were in general positive. In the war of Independence in the Vilnius area pogroms were carried out by Polish units against Jews. The Jews were more active than other national minorities in supporting the Lithuanian independence. In the Lithuanian Home Guard Union the detachment from the city of Kaunas included more Jews than Lithuanians. In 1919 the government of Lithuania published a proclamation on the equality and the rights of the Jews to autonomy. No other Jewish community in the world had been granted national autonomy and such broad rights as these. Similar rights to autonomy were granted the other minorities in Lithuania, the Poles and the Belarussians.

Soon enough this period ended and in 1924 the Ministry for Jewish Affairs and the Jewish “national council.” were abolished while the Jewish educational system could continue with governmental support. In 1926 a right-wing revolution by the nationalists, the Tautininkai, was carried out, and autocratic rule was instituted. Among the Jews the Zionist movement was the strongest which was seen as positive among the Tautininkai as a way to encourage emigration of Jews to Palestine. In general there was a more hostile attitude towards national minorities. More than 500 Jews at its peak entered the underground Communist party constituting a third of the 1500 to 2000



members. This caused Antisemitic slogans and the accusations that “the Jews are bringing Bolshevism to Lithuania”. Economic competition between Jews and a rising number of Lithuanians in the crafts and trade paved the way for increased antisemitism. “Lithuania for the Lithuanians” was the slogan heard more and more. A Union of Lithuanian Tradesmen, Industrialist and Craftsmen was created in 1930 exclusively for Lithuanians with the aim “to liberate us from the slavery imposed by alien merchants.” The word alien of course referring to Jews. In 1934 The Lithuanian Labor Federation changed its name to the Lithuanian Christian Workers Federation in order to emphasize its aim: “to launch the fight against those Jewish parasites, who grew rich from our bloody work, and who are exploiting us and have no shame no conscience... Brother Lithuanian workers! It is time we stopped toiling under the Jewish yoke. Let us drive those annoying and dangerous lodges away from our cities and our land.” Thus during the thirties, antisemitism took root and increased not only among Lithuanian merchants, industrialists and workers, but also among university students and among farmers and members of the middle class. There were calls for the boycotting of Jewish businesses. Priests in their sermons in church would frequently characterize Jews as supporters of Communism and harbingers of revolution.

Antisemitism escalated during the rising power of Hitler in Germany with the help of fascist organizations as Iron Wolf (*Geležinis vilkas*) and the Union of Lithuanian Sharpshooters (*Šiaulių sąjunga*). There was an increase in antisemitic incidents such as desecration of cemeteries and the smashing of window panes of businesses and synagogues. But in spite of the rise in antisemitism in Lithuania, in contrast to Poland, Hungary and Romania, racist laws against the Jews were not legislated. Between the end of October 1939 and June 1940 the former Polish Vilna region were transferred from Soviet Union to Lithuania in exchange for bases for the Red Army.

Lithuanian collaboration in the holocaust cannot solely be attributed to the antisemitism of the inter-war period. More important may be the development of World War II. In the early summer of 1940 the Germans conquered the Western European Atlantic continental coast. The days when the Baltic states could resist either a Soviet or a German occupation seemed counted, especially in light of both the secret pact between Germany and Soviet to divide Eastern Europe giving the Baltic states to Soviet Union and

the long term goals of Nazi Germany to colonize all of the Slavic countries. In the threatening situation many Jews rather hoped for Soviet Union and Lithuanians for Germany.

These tensions became strongly emphasised when de facto Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army in June 1940 followed by mass deportations and mass arrests. During the June 1941 deportation campaign, some 12,600 people (mostly former military officers, policemen, political figures, intelligentsia and their families) were deported, under the policy of elimination of national elites, to Gulags in Siberia, where many perished due to inhumane conditions; 3,600 were imprisoned and over 1,000 killed.

As the deportations was directed against parts of the population that had made economic progress Jews were somewhat over represented in the mass deportations. Among the thousands of people whom the Soviets labeled “anti-Soviet elements” and who were deported from Lithuania on 14 June 1941, Jews comprised 13.5%. Micheal Burleigh points out “The Soviet occupation of Lithuania in June 1940 affected Jews disproportionately, while paradoxically intensifying the feeling among Lithuanian nationalists that Jews were uniquely responsible for it. Jews owned 57% of plant and 83% of businesses nationalised by the Soviet socialists”.

The deportations ended in hardships and death to many but maybe as many as half of the deported survived and thus it was for the Jews paradoxically one of the few ways of escaping the coming holocaust with the highest rate of survival. Jews were also to a somewhat larger degree by being imprisoned and persecuted by the Soviet regime in Lithuania, Jews comprised 8.9%, while their percentage in the population was 7% of the arrested.

In the minds of many it was the other way around, Lithuanians were the victims and disproportionately persecuted by Jews. By avoiding facts about Jewish victims of the Soviet occupation and instead solely point at individual Jews in the Soviet ruling order a misconception was spread which still is aggressively promoted in today's Lithuania.

The image of the ever present Jew in Communist leadership is highly exaggerated. But on the level of visibility Soviet occupation allowed Jews to enter lower administration levels from which they had been banned before in the municipalities and government,

police and security forces. Statistics demonstrate that Jews were somewhat overrepresented in the Soviet government of Lithuania in numbers higher than their percentage of the population, but primarily on lower levels. The explanation for this is that Jews, as opposed to the majority of Lithuanians, preferred the Soviet regime to the alternative, the Germans, and were willing to assume the government staff positions which now were opened to them. Liudas Truska, summarized the situation in a paper titled "The Crisis in Lithuanian-Jewish Relations (June 1940 – June 1941):":

"Alongside the former image of the Jews as murderers of Christ, exploiters of Lithuanians, new, politically-motivated images appeared depicting the Jews as "gravediggers" of Lithuanian independence, zealous collaborators of the occupiers, informants, cruel NKVD interrogators... Many Lithuanians identified the Jews with the hateful Communists... The myth of a special role played by the Jews in the establishment of the Soviet regime in the country, took root not only in the consciousness of ordinary Lithuanians but also in the minds of politicians, prominent intellectuals, and the leaders of the Church."

One factor more was decisive in making a strong Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust possible, a well organized Antisemitic and anticommunist organization – The Lithuanian Action Front, LAF. This underground organization established by right and center parties in Berlin who had fled Lithuania disseminated much antisemitic propaganda. Underground cells in Lithuania were populated from the ranks of organizations that were outlawed in Soviet Lithuania as The "Union of Lithuanian Sharpshooters" and "Iron Wolf", student organizations and more.

The proclamation of the LAF in the spring 1941, included:

"...the hour of the liberation of Lithuania is at hand. When the campaign from the west begins you will be notified immediately by radio or by other means. At that moment local uprisings must break out... and you have to take power. You have to imprison immediately all the local communists and all the other traitors of Lithuania. (Traitors will be forgiven only if they prove clearly that they have killed at least one Jew) ... You must inform the Jews that their fate has been sealed. All who

can must leave Lithuania immediately to prevent unnecessary casualties. At that decisive moment seize their property so that nothing is lost..."

The sentence in parenthesis did not appear in the original proclamation written by the LAF, but was inserted by people of the underground who duplicated the proclamation within Lithuania which indicate even stronger antisemitism at the local level.

In these and additional proclamations of the LAF, the call is the same as in Nazi Germany. Jewish-Bolshevism is to blame for all suffering and must be thrown out of the country and get their belongings confiscated. Nazi Germany had not yet embarked on the total physical annihilation of the Jews, and furthermore, there was no decision to do so at that time. The physical annihilation was to begin with the German invasion of the Soviet Union where Lithuania and LAF would be given a pioneer role.

### **The Testing Ground Zero of the Final Solution**

When the attack on the Soviet Union finally came on 22 June 1941 everything was in practice ready for the final solution. Now was the time for it to happen. The great "vernichtungskrieg", the war of annihilation in the East to conquer land and subordinate workers and at the same time kill all European Jews. The plans to force all Jews to emigrate were put aside, there were few interested in allowing them to come. Western democracies had all closed their doors to the Jews with the exceptions of a very tiny number. The problems for Germany started to become acute. It was time to do something about it.

The solution was there already in an order issued by the high command of the German army. Kill all Communist functionary, anyone making resistance and all Jews was stated in the same order. Contrary to the belief that the Holocaust was carried out by only the SS and other organizations entrenched by Nazi ideology it started as mass annihilation by the German army consisting of a normal segment of the German male population. Selected groups of the army together with the army in general when there was the need carried out the executions with the infamous police battalions as a key group. They were spearheaded by German security police the so called *insatzgruppen* as the most advanced Jew killers.

Thus when the German army invaded Lithuania the

mass killing of Jews started from the first day. Village by village and in the towns the Jews were gathered and gunned down after having their property stolen. The German conquest brought also to Lithuania imprisonment and summary executions of members of the Communist Party, members of the Communist Youth League and members of the Soviet ruling authorities, including Lithuanians, Russians, Poles and Jews who were unable to flee with the retreating Red Army.

The mass murder of Lithuanian Jewry was carried out primarily in the period between the German invasion and the end of 1941. During this period there were two stages, the first being the wave of pogroms and the murder of thousands of Jews during the first two weeks of the German occupation, from 23 June until 8-10 July, whose initiators and perpetrators were as a rule Lithuanians. Following upon those pogroms came the organized murder that continued until November-December of 1941. This murder was carried out in accordance with a schedule of objectives by the German security police (Einsatzgruppe A), but the actual perpetrators were mainly thousands of Lithuanians who volunteered to serve the Germans.

The role of Lithuanians in the killings of Jews were thus substantial. The pogroms and the murder of the Jews that took place starting in the last week of June 1941 occurred precisely when the Provisional Government had control over Lithuanian elements, mainly in the cities Kaunas (Kovno), Vilnius (Vilna), Šiauliai (Shavl), Panevėžys (Pónevezh) and dozens of additional towns, who were perpetrating the pogroms and mass murder. It is appropriate to note here that the main hub where the largest pogroms were carried out was Kaunas, the very seat of residence of the Provisional Government. Its control over what happened in the city and its environs was



*Women in Kaunas on their way to get killed*

vastly greater than over what was happening in other regions of Lithuania during those days.

## **90-97 percent of all Jews killed**

The end of the Lithuanian holocaust was as terrifying as the beginning. After the first period of pogroms when some 5% of the Lithuanians Jews were killed a second period started with more systematic killing of Jews under German leadership with Lithuanians as collaborators. An estimated 80% of Lithuanian Jews were killed before 1942. The surviving 43,000 Jews were concentrated in the Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and Švenčionys ghettos and forced to work for the benefit of German military industry. On June 21, 1943, Heinrich Himmler issued order to liquidate all ghettos and transfer remaining Jews to concentration camps. Vilnius Ghetto was liquidated, while Kaunas and Šiauliai were turned into concentration camps and existed until July 1944. Remaining Jews were sent to camps in Stutthof, Dachau and Auschwitz. Only about 2,000–3,000 Lithuanian Jews were liberated from these camps. More survived by withdrawing into the interior of Russia before the war broke out or by escaping the ghettos and joining the Jewish partisans. There are different figures especially on how many Jews actually lived in Lithuania before the war. The genocide rate of Jews in Lithuania, figure given in the range of 90% up to 95–97%, was one of the highest in Europe. In total more than 190 000 Jews were killed out of 210 000 or more before the Holocaust in Lithuania. Tens of thousands of foreign Jews were also killed in Lithuania and at the hands of Lithuanian police battalions in Belarus, Latvia and Ukraine.

## **Making Jew killers into national heroes and Jewish partisans into genocidal killers**

Today several of the leaders of the provisional government responsible for the killing of Jews and LAF activists on their own initiative are hailed as national heroes. At the same time Jewish survivors of the Holocaust that were able to escape from the ghetto in Vilnius and became Jewish partisans have been investigated for being genocidal killers.

You can find more on the website Defending History both concerning recent attempts to glorify Lithuanian Jew killers and on the accusations against the Jewish partisans.

<https://defendinghistory.com/>

# FIVE CRITERIA FOR LASTING AND JUST PEACE AGREEMENTS



WORLD BEYOND WAR.org

ZOOM WEBINAR • EUROPE DAY, MAY 9 • 19:00 CEST



Hans Hedrich  
Co-Coordinator,  
WBW Romania Chapter



Yurii Sheliashenko  
Executive Secretary,  
Ukrainian Pacifist Movement



Olga Karach  
Director,  
Our House

## Coming events

- May 2-4 Nordic WILPF meeting in Copenhagen
- May 7 "Rearm Europe · The Myth of a European Defence for Peace" Webinar ENAAT
- May 8-11 Never more war celebrations and action
- May 9 Online webinar on OSCE, Hans Hedrich, WBW Romania, Olga Karach and Yuri Sheliashenko
- May 9 Ending of Global Days of Actions on Military Spending (GDAMS)
- May 15 Nakba day
- June 5 World Environment Day
- June 20 World Refugee Day
- June 21-22: The Hague, Netherlands: counter-summit to NATO's meeting in The Hague.
- June 23-24: Brussels, Belgium: European conference for peace and anti-war organizations.
- June 24-27 18th Conference of the Society for Ecological Economics and 11th International Degrowth Conference, University of Oslo, Norway
- June 26-27: Geneva, Switzerland: Neutrality Colloquium in Geneva
- June 27-28: Peace camp and demonstration at the Ramstein U.S. military base
- June 28-29+ OSCE parliamentary conference in Lisbon
- July 4-6 Peace and Climate Justice summer camp, Lindsberg, Sweden
- July 25-27 3rd Nordic Peace Alliance (NPA) Conference, Höör, Sweden with Reiner Braun, IPB as speaker about Helsinki+50
- July 30- August 1, Political economy conference Helsinki
- July 31-August 1, OSCE civil society and parliamentarians meeting, Helsinki

- August 1+, Helsinki+50, NPA initiated civil society conference and activities
- August 6 Hiroshima Day
- August 9 Nagasaki Day
- September 2 End of WWII 80 years ago
- September 2nd Peace and Climate Justice global action week
- October 24 UN+80, possible state-level OSCE conference and civil society activities, Vienna
- November-December COP30, Belem

## 2026

- January, People and Peace, Sälen, Sweden
- February, World Social Forum, Benin
- 3rd World Peace Congress, Phillipines



# GDAMS 2025 Appeal

## Global Days of Actions on Military Spending

Over the past year, the world has witnessed an alarming escalation of violence: the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the civil war in Sudan, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and more than 30 other armed conflicts in the Global South (half of them in Africa) have led to millions of people being killed, injured, losing their livelihood or being forcibly displaced. Still further violent conflicts loom on the horizon as global tensions escalate and competition between nations grows while international law and conflict mediation and resolution bodies like the United Nations are sidelined or ignored.

Militarism is clearly fuelling all these wars and violence, but despite calls to move away from weapons and violence to peace negotiations and disarmament, governments are doubling down on a recipe for disaster by significantly increasing their military budgets. Instead of seeking paths toward peace by investing in diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and conflict resolution, they've decided to hand out more and more money to the arms industry. History has repeatedly shown that militarization brings neither peace nor security; it perpetuates cycles of destruction, suffering, and injustice and fuels climate breakdown. Militarization is therefore not a solution, but a part of the problem. How is more of the same going to give any result other than more war, violence and injustice?

All this violence is also being fuelled by increasingly aggressive and openly supremacist discourses and policies from a rising far right and a rightwards shifting center, which exacerbate a climate of fear and present further militarisation and securitisation of our societies as the only path forward, thus closing off any public debate.

Spending money in war and rearmament means diverting valuable resources away from our wellbeing. Every cent spent on arms is a cent not spent on essential public services, where it would truly improve lives, provide genuine security and build sustainable peace. At a time of climate and environmental crises that put the planet and the lives of current and future generations at risk, it is essential to reduce military budgets and use these resources to save people and the planet. Prioritizing war-related expenditures over fundamental societal needs exacerbates suffering, deepens economic insecurity and widens social inequality. Further militarization and military spending increases will necessarily entail more austerity and cuts in essential public services, while fueling repression and the loss of rights and freedoms, both home and abroad. It is also paramount to debunk the myth of the positive impacts that military investments have on national economies. Increasing military spending, in addition to reinforcing a status quo based on violence and injustice, diverts resources from more productive civil sectors, which yield higher

benefits, both short and long-term, including job creation.

We demand an end to this reckless arms race. The world does not need more weapons, but rather more dialogue, cooperation, global democratic institutions, and a commitment to justice and human dignity.

We urgently call on governments to reduce military spending and instead address through cooperation and diplomacy the global challenges of our time requiring all available resources.

We call for real efforts aimed at global disarmament, stopping the arms trade and ceasing arms shipments to countries in conflict, involved in regional instability or systematically violating human rights and international law. We call on governments and companies to prioritise peace and justice over profits derived from arms manufacturing and trading.

We call on governments (especially those of the U.S. and EU countries) to cease supplying arms to and buying arms from Israel, and use all existing means, including by taking sanctions against the Israeli government, to push for a real ceasefire and an end to the genocide in Gaza.

We call for a sincere and active discussion on new and responsive international and regional security architectures based on the shared ideas of common security, disarmament and global justice. We call on governments to abide by international law and international disarmament treaties, to support the international conflict resolution framework of the United Nations, implement the commitments made in the UN Pact for the Future, and to actively prepare a fourth Special Session on Disarmament in the UNGA.

We call on governments to address the climate crisis now. Global militaries are responsible for 5.5% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This means that if global militaries were a country, they would be the fourth largest emitter. Increased military spending means increased GHG emissions. If millions of dollars can be made available for buying arms, there is no reason why they should not be available for climate finance to address the biggest challenge ever faced by humanity.

We call on civil society across local, national, regional, and international levels to join together in the GCOMS campaign to combat the rising trend of military spending, to strengthen the global movement for peace and justice, and to challenge decision-makers who seek to justify a never-ending militarism in the name of security.

Open for organization's endorsement.

<https://forms.komun.org/gdams-appeal>

# Gifts: a necessity in Belarusian culture

Basic gestures of mutual understanding is of importance when people meet. So presents to all international participants was a well-prepared part of the program including a bag to put it in. The guests were not as well prepared.



## The Owl

Symbol of wisdom and vigilance: The owl has traditionally symbolized wisdom, vigilance, and silent resistance. In Belarus, it has been used by activists as a discreet but powerful sign of resistance. In protest art and social media: During the 2020 protests, the

owl began to appear in street art, murals, graffiti, memes, and on social media as a symbol of those who observe and do not forget the regime's abuses, but who may not be able to protest openly.

Artists such as Rufina Bazlova have integrated traditional Belarusian embroidery patterns with modern protest motifs, where the

owl sometimes appears as a symbol of resistance and survival. Her works, which are often distributed via social media, combine folkloric elements with current political messages.

All international participants were given an owl made of wood and bernstein as a memory of the conference.

## The Hat

The Sweish delegation not understanding the importance of gifts. Not even the obvious broken rifle symbol used by the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society. So what to do?

One of the people helping the conference was Sergey. He had been sent to Afghanistan and then to

Chernobyl without proper safety equipment to clean up after the accident in 1986. This made him critical to the government who sent him to prison where he was tortured so badly that his body still is harmed. He liked the yellow hat used by one of the Swedes. So the hat was given to him as gift as a symbolic gesture of fratitute to all refugees from Russia and Belarus



## The Hand

Anatoli Khinevich present a gift to Network for Peace and Climate Justce, the Swedish co-organizer of the conference from the Association of Belarusian political prisoners. The gift was a handprint in red of one of the prisoners who has been able to escape to Lithuania after hard treatment.