



25th March 2022

Minister of Justice Maris Lauri

I walk the silent, Christmas-snowy path,
that goes across the homeland in its suffering.
At each doorstep I would like to bend my knee:
there is no house without mourning.

These are lines from Marie Under's poem 'Christmas Greetings 1941'. This was eight years before the mass deportation on 25 March 1949. But people had already been killed, imprisoned, driven from their homes, and taken to a cold land. Europe was at war – a war in which the Estonian people lost their country and almost a fifth of its population.

There is war again in Europe. We ask, 'Why? What for?' Aggressors always talk about their ideas and ideologies, values, how they have been hurt, even about the people, defending and saving them.

Never has any dictator cared about any values or people. Throughout history, aggressors have talked about some sort of a mysterious, better world. However, the people, who should be of the utmost value, always gets caught in the cogs in this mad dash to reorganise the world. Always. In this situation, people become cannon fodder, collateral damage, and an inevitable loss – an unnamed grave somewhere, taken away, lost and often forgotten. At best, the names and memories of those people remain. Like those thousands here on this black wall.

It is as if the world has learned nothing from history. Those who fail to learn from it are doomed to repeat it. Many times since World War II, we have had to listen to speeches solemnly swearing 'Never again ...!'"

These are just words. I, too, have nothing to offer today but words.

War is not only fought on the streets, but also on people's minds. Today, many of our compatriots are lost or confused, many Russians live in ignorance or even in falsehood. Lies have always been the weapons of dictators. Lies can also be spread because falsehoods – however absurd – are easier to tolerate than the truth. It may be difficult to face ourselves in the mirror. But without facing the truth, we can never be absolved – we merely continue down our aggressive, malicious path.

We see and know today that our eastern neighbour has not faced itself. The chauvinist tyranny is trying to subjugate Ukraine. In the twenty-first century, people are being killed and deported in the heart of Europe. Ukrainians are fighting for their independence, sitting in basements, cold and hungry, dying in a pointless war fought in the name of the insane ambitions of another dictator who also wants to release free people – release them from freedom.

Let us reach out a helping hand and open our hearts to those Ukrainian war refugees who have reached our peaceful homeland. In the words of Lesya Ukrainka:

No, I want to smile through tears and weeping,
Sing my songs where evil holds its sway,
Hopeless, a steadfast hope forever keeping,
I want to live! You thoughts of grief, away.

Already during the Russian Tsarist state, this Ukrainian poet formulated that there is still faith in a better tomorrow against all expectations. Hopefully for all of us.

Again, I will end with Marie Under's poetry:
I always think of those who were torn from here ...
The heavens echo with the cries of their distress.
I think that we are all to blame
for what they lack – for we have food and bed.

Let us lower our heads to those who were deported from Estonia in 1949 and are resting in the often unnamed graves of Irkutsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, and Krasnoyarsk, and elsewhere in Russia. Let us take care of those who returned with severe losses and wounds. Be grateful that we have 'food and bed' and a peaceful sky. Let us say one more time, 'Never again!' And really mean it this time.