

**MONICA HAKIMI**

Thank you. Yanar, let me come to you. What is your perspective on the invasion, as someone who—and now I am quoting back to you the words that you said to me—“has been at the receiving end of war?” How do you see the Ukraine invasion relative to what has happened in your country, and how do you see its implications for international law and for the people on the ground?

**REMARKS BY YANAR MOHAMMED**

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Thank you, Monica, and I have to say that I have just come from Iraq. I am in North America now, in Toronto. The implication on the tens of millions of people is that their life is destroyed for many generations to come.

I remember when the United States started the war on Iraq—and we have had a couple of them, not just one. I was a civilian who was living in her home, had graduated from her education, and waiting for the right job to start working, when the bombs started to fall on our heads. We had two American wars forced on us, and the aggressor was a different administration, but the result was almost the same.

People whose lives were affected could not fix their difficulties in a decade or two. It takes more. When you are a civilian living in a country among tens of millions, while the whole world looks at that country with one single name, the name of the dictator, which was Saddam Hussein at the time. I feel a little bad for the people of Ukraine, or even for the people of Russia who have been reduced to the name of Vladimir Putin. It is not just one person in there, it is a whole country of people.

We know very well that once war breaks out between two countries, it will not restrict itself to one side. It will go across to the other side in one way or another. Millions of people’s lives will be ruined, and what can international law do? Is it true that it does not do enough? Of course, it is true, but is it worth working more on it, until it gains ground, and it can control the hand of the bullies not to press the button on the bombing of another country? Yes, of course it is worth it.

We in Iraq had our lives ruined, in 1990, when George Bush, the father, bombed us while meaning to punish Saddam Hussein. Then again, in 2003, when the pretext for the war was that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. And weapons of mass destruction were not found in Iraq in spite of having the UN team of inspectors look for them for years, and yet there was no procedure against the aggressor and no punishment for those whose decisions and acts resulted in the death of—the numbers may be disputed, but it is not less than hundreds of thousands of civilians.

When we heard of the war on Ukraine by the Russians, the responses in Iraq were different from those on this side of the world, because there is a history of Iraq being attacked repeatedly by members of NATO. The original position was that people should not side with the allies of NATO. But it was very confusing, because we know what a sudden massive military attack does to the lives of tens of millions of civilians, being bombed overnight; thus, leading to the death of thousands of people within weeks. Therefore, we in Iraq would definitely be against this war, but then again, the illiberal forces that decided such an—and I will use the word— imperialist war. The fact that Russia, which is the remnant of a socialist order, had started the war against Ukraine does not negate the fact that it is an imperialist war done for reasons of economy and for political hegemony. With the Ukrainians, we feel that we were sitting in their same places at two points of our history, when the American wars were launched against us for the same reasons of imperialist economy and political hegemony. We in Iraq were ruled by a dictator who had his own political dreams and adventures, trying to be the sole Arab nationalist hero within the region, eventually having us

lose our well-being. Tens of millions of people's lives were ruined following Saddam Hussein's political adventures.

Until this very day, we are still struggling to get the simplest human rights in Iraq, and we are unable to get them. The U.S. war was launched against Iraq in the name of achieving democracy, and similarly in Ukraine, the war was launched in the name of mission of peace, like a military mission can ever be of peace. The titles can be different, but the results are always the same, a major loss of the well-being of tens of millions in that part of the world for the political and economic gains of a small group of elite on the other side.

In general, the Iraqi left and the right do not take a hardline position against Vladimir Putin, because of the NATO war on Iraq that was not resolved. There has been no apology so far. There has been no reconciliation with the Iraqi people, and we were told that they brought us democracy, when they brought the most notorious extremist militant fighting groups on the ground, and made them rulers of the country. Therefore the Iraqi left mostly supported the Russian position, while the far-right wing ruling Islamist militias, have offered to go and fight with the Russians against the Ukrainians.

We are living in a moment of history where global peace has been disrupted. People in different parts of the world are confused about their political positions, and the people of Ukraine, just like us Iraqis, will have lost their well-being for generations to come. We really feel with their need to be supported by the world to end the war. The Russian war on Ukraine has to stop immediately.

There needs to be established international mechanisms that can address ending the war without further hurting the people of the country with more military conflict, which will eventually hurt the people in Russia also. The problem with the debates about wars is that most of them are addressed to the rulers, while disregarding that those who pay the price are on the ground, the people. This is what I have in mind at this point.

## **MONICA HAKIMI**

Thank you. Ganna, I will come to you. Harold and Yanar both spoke of the enormous devastation that is being imposed on the people of Ukraine. And one of the mechanisms that might be available to respond, or at least to hold Russian President Putin and others accountable for some of this devastation, are the mechanisms of the Council of Europe. But about three weeks ago, Russia ceased to be a member state of the Council of Europe, after twenty-six years of participating. I am curious to hear your views on what this means for the European legal space, and why the loss of this particular mechanism might matter.

## **REMARKS BY GANNA YUDKIVSKA**

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Thank you very much, Monica. Let me start with a side remark that four years ago, the General Assembly adopted the decision designating the seventh of April, today, as an International Day on Reflection of Genocide in Rwanda. And it was suggested that the day of reflection, again today, offered an opportunity to consider the factors that had led to mass atrocity. And to renew the collective pledge of "Never again." It is very symbolic. "Never again." But it is going on right now. Harold just referenced to Bucha. So let us renew our pledge.

We again reflect today, on this reflection day, on strikingly similar issues. We reflect, actually, on how our previous reflections were not sufficient. And what else can be done to stop the atrocities.