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**Do we need a humanistic revolution in order to counter the ongoing militarization of the north?**

Dear friends,

I am happy to greet you from the Norwegian Arctic, but unhappy not to be with you in beautiful St. Petersburg. Congratulations and thanks to Oleg Bodrov and partners and to the Global Women for Peace United against NATO, not least Ulla Klotzer, for initiating this important people to people conference in the midst of a very scary polarization between Russia and Nato – a polarization that is broadly used to legitimize the ongoing heavy militarization.

I see this conference as a continuation and broadening of the Nordic Peace and cultural trip we organized to Russia in 2018 under the heading *Neighbours as friends, not enemies*. The following meetings in Oslo reinforced and inspired Russian-Nordic civil society cooperation. The statements made and the long lists of suggested common projects are still of full relevance today, just waiting for better possibilities for implementation. Insisting on the importance of learning to know each other better, of sharing concerns and aspirations and finding areas for fruitful cooperation was vital then, and even more urgently so to day.

Faced with this tremendous and dangerous militarization, risking a full nuclear and/or environmental devastation, we must sharpen our strategic tools. But what tools can break through the militarized armours of central politicians? Is it “we, the people” who are the real force for peace and cooperation; is it the UN, the UN Charter, a reformed and more democratic Security Council with less privileges to the big powers; is it the new UN Pact for the Future, is it international law as opposed to the neoliberal “rules bases world order” only profiting the big countries and multinational corporations; or is a cultivation of our humanism, our creativity and the arts? Probably all of the above.

When the war propaganda is so heavy and to a large degree blocks people’s access to the truth, even militarizing people’s minds, it is obvious that we need to put peace at the very top of our agenda – even above being right. But we are up against very strong forces, fighting for economic, military, political, technical, even cultural dominance – on land, in and on the sea, in the air and in space. The hawks both in the east and the west have been allowed to take over the narratives – they scrupulously explain reality in military terms day after day - and facilitated by an obedient mainstream media - make people accept the enemy images of “the other” – and make war and war logic seem normal and inevitable. They pretend knowing what the other side is up to and are not willing to seek neither alternatives nor compromise.

The Arctic is presently attracting huge international interest, since the dramatic warming of the region and the melting of the ice open up for more fisheries, more drilling of oil and gas and extractions of minerals from the sea bed, and allows for new and efficient transportation routes, notably in the North-East passage.

The situation in the Arctic has become dramatically worse with Sweden and Finland leaving their neutral, or semi-neutral situation, and becoming full-fledged members of NATO. At the same time we witness an enormous expansion of US military bases or so-called “joint areas” in the Nordic countries, with 47 bases as of now, making the area a potential arena for a possible confrontation between superpowers. We are unfortunately moving fast in the opposite direction of what president Mikhail Gorbachev expressed as important goals in his wonderful Murmansk speech in 1988. Read it, get inspired and see his suggestion for a nuclear free zoon in the north and Europe as a common home, not a battle ground.

Norway has for many years been considered the “eyes and ears of NATO in the north”. The US military bases come in addition to the sophisticated American and NATO military installations of surveillance and spy-facilities that Norwegian governments have already allowed for years. These installations have to a very limited degree been known to the public, perhaps not even to the majority of Parliamentarians. Succeeding governments have also allowed allied nuclear submarines into two Norwegian harbours, in Bergen and Tromsø. NATO and US military exercises are much more frequent, bigger and closer to the Russian border than ever before. The war-games interrupt and threaten also local and indigenous food security.

The militarization happens in parallel to an almost total nullification of previous good diplomatic and business relations with Russia. Norway now participates almost fully in US and EU sanctions, except, to a limited degree, in relation to fisheries and safety at sea. A new Iron Curtain is established with detrimental effects, including even on cultural exchange and cooperation between the different indigenous groups.

Also the co-operation with Russia in the important Arctic Council was frozen after 22. February 2022. The Arctic Council, established in 1996, is the central forum for handling Arctic question. It consists of eight countries: the five Nordic countries, Canada, Russia and the USA. In addition, six indigenous groups have permanent representation. It is important to keep the dialogue going in the Council. Recent contact with the permanent secretariat in Tromsø, reveals some good news. The scientific work in the six working groups has restarted between all member states some months back – but only digitally so far. Now we have to push for direct and political contact to reassume.

It is obviously a need for a humanistic revolution – a new paradigm - a new way of thinking – new insights - new attitudes. We must not allow the militarization of our heads. Young people must not be falsely nourished neither by enemy images nor hero status – they must learn how to tackle anger and differences without the use of violence. Peace education and education for global citizenship is needed at all levels of the school system and in corporations. We must effectively challenge ignorance and suspicion of the other and dare seek knowledge, cooperation and friendship across borders. We have neither time nor resources to waste.

I trust that our peace and environment friends in Russia will continue to seek the best ways to accomplish peace – on earth and with the earth. We in the West have to look closely at Western involvement and contributions to wars e.g. in Ukraine and in Gaza and look at the glaring double standards and prioritization of warfare over welfare to the detriment of the many and the benefit of the very few. We must refuse the militaristic definition of security! NATO must never replace the UN! Instead of the old patriarchal model of economic growth, militarism, competition and confrontation, we acutely need to strengthen peace- and disarmament processes.

There are many important agreements to guide our strategic, forward-looking and solution oriented thinking. Let me only draw your attention to the UN program on a culture of peace. I was fortunate to be part of UNESCO’s work on developing the vision and program of the culture of peace, which was accepted by the entire UN system 25 years back. With 75 million people signing on to the UNESCO culture of peace manifesto, we actually thought we were saving the world, nothing less. It is time to bring the culture of peace program again to the forefront.

Friends, we have work to do!