

Editorial

Victor Pinchuk*

Acceptance Speech of the Thomas J. Dodd Prize

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Dear President Maric, Governor Lamont, Senator Dodd, Representative Holtzman, Rabbi Lazowski, Ms. Shue, Dr. Waller, dear friends.

It is a great honor to receive the Thomas J. Dodd Prize in International Justice and Human Rights on behalf of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. I am accepting this prize on behalf of a fantastic team, mostly young Ukrainians, who work at the Babyn Yar Center. And on behalf of our country, Ukraine, which wants the truth about Babyn Yar to be told.

Let me tell you a bit about the Babyn Yar memorial project and why it became so important for me. I reflected on this recently, because of a phone call: On September 30, 2023, I was sitting on a train about to cross the border from Poland to Ukraine. The call was from an unknown number, and upon picking up, I heard a voice: “Hi Victor, this is Chris Dodd.”

In our conversation Senator Dodd shared how significant he found it that the Dodd Prize is awarded to the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. Senator Dodd spoke of his father, Thomas J. Dodd, of whom the prize is named – a prosecutor in Nuremberg. He spoke of his own travels to the Soviet Union in 1975, where he met a young man, Natan Sharansky. Sharansky would later be in jail in the Soviet Union for speaking the truth, also about Babyn Yar. And – he serves today as the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial.

Chris Dodd also told me about his visit to Kyiv during this trip in 1975, including to Babyn Yar, where he noted that almost nothing reminded there of the tragedy of 1941. In answered that I was on a train leaving Poland, en route to Kyiv. I was going to travel through the night and meet my oldest daughter in Kyiv in the morning, and visit Babyn Yar with her. Because these very days, September 29 and 30, marked the anniversary of the Babyn Yar mass shooting in 1941.

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When our call ended, I reflected on some parallels and intersections. You, Senator Dodd, are here tonight because your father prosecuted Nazi perpetrators in Nuremberg. And I am here because of my father, and my parents. My parents, a small Jewish boy and girl, were evacuated in 1941 to Russia beyond the Ural Mountains, shielding them from the Nazi atrocities. Today, I can stand here and discuss Babyn Yar because my parents were not shot by the Nazis at Babyn Yar as nearly 34,000 Ukrainian Jews from Kyiv were in September 1941.

The connection through my parents extends further. When I was invited to accept the Dodd Prize at the University of Connecticut, I immediately said yes, also because of some special ties to Connecticut through my father: In my childhood, many nights, my father would read me Mark Twain's wonderful children's novel "A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court." I think, I must have read this book ten times in my youth; it is a very important book in my life. So, standing here, where the Yankee comes from, feels very personal. When I landed in Hartford, the birthplace of the Connecticut Yankee and home to Mark Twain, I went to the Mark Twain Museum and shared a few photographs of this visit with my father, which made him very happy.

In addition, there is one more reason connected to my father why I am here: It was exactly my father and my mother who told me about Babyn Yar in the 1970s when I was a child. In the Soviet Union, the truth about Babyn Yar was not told. There was no truth in the Soviet Union. I heard about Babyn Yar only from my parents and grandparents. It is exactly their stories that inspired me to take up the project of telling the truth about Babyn Yar.

In the 1970s, when I learned about Babyn Yar from my parents, incidentally, Natan Sharansky was already in jail for telling the truth, also about Babyn Yar. He kept telling the truth and is a real hero, and no one in the world is more deserving to be here to accept this prize. Regrettably, Natan Sharansky, who wished to participate in your conference tomorrow, had to cancel his trip due to the war in Israel.

After having spoken to Chris Dodd on the phone, I contemplated these parallels on my train ride to Kyiv on September 30. But I did not only think about the past, but also of the present and the future. As my train was riding into Ukraine, a country Russia assaulted to commit genocide, I recalled how the work of Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center has altered in this new reality.

Following Russia's attack on February 24, 2022, I suggested a halt to the construction of the memorial. Instead, the funds originally budgeted for the memorial construction were redirected to the needs of Ukraine: humanitarian aid for civilians, and supporting soldiers with essentials, such as bullet-proof vests, helmets, and armored ambulances.

I also believe that when the war is over, we must reconsider the plans of the memorial we had originally. I believe that we must take into account the current genocide against Ukrainians when building the memorial to tell about the Holocaust in 1941.

Now, let me share something crucial about this war. Ukraine has for many centuries fought for its independence. It is only now that we have a real chance to win because the entire civilized world supports us. And I am sure that the United States will continue to support us, regardless of elections or campaign rhetoric. There are at least two compelling reasons for this.

Firstly, the geopolitical struggle between democracy and autocracy is fought out exactly in the war in Ukraine now. The US cannot let Russia win. The US must assist Ukraine, not only to support our fight for independence, but because it is in the deepest interests of the US – in terms of security, economy, and global rules. The US must win in this competition against autocratic regimes. US politicians recognize that the US needs Ukraine to succeed in its defense of life, freedom, and democracy.

The second reason why the US must continue supporting Ukraine is rooted in moral principles – similarly important and fundamental. After the Nazi Holocaust in the Second World War, the US cannot let genocide happen again in the same territory. Unlike during the Second World War, when Americans did not know, the world is aware now, and action can be taken. This means we must act to stop it. Therefore, the US has a moral obligation to stop the genocide in Ukraine. Your attention to this critical issue through the Dodd Prize is immensely appreciated.

In 2016, we started the work on Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center with the aspiration that by telling the truth about Babyn Yar in Ukraine, we would contribute to the dream of “Never Again.” However, faced with an ongoing genocide, our mission has transformed from “Never Again” to “STOP NOW.”

Now, I want to recount something very important from my conversation with Chris Dodd. As Chris Dodd told me, his father Thomas J. Dodd did something extraordinary and powerful during the hearings in the Nuremberg trials. When the prosecution presented facts, figures and legal arguments, Thomas Dodd recognized the need for something more impactful. He went to Chief Prosecutor Jackson, asserting that cold facts alone were not enough, what was necessary was to also stir emotions. Thomas Dodd proposed showing pictures and a movie depicting the Nazi crimes, a move that proved to be immensely powerful in the Nuremberg trials.

The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center today follows a similar logic when it helps collect evidence on Russian war crimes. Through my foundation, we have a project exposing Russian war crimes. In May 2022, at the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos, we transformed a luxury venue known as the “Russian House” into the “Russian War Crimes House” using information, images, and a film showing thousands of pictures of Russian war crimes. The exhibition shows how

every day Russia's actions destroy lives – the lives of children, old, young, strong, and sick – for nothing. Until Russia is stopped.

We have presented this exhibition in many cities in the Western world including at the House of Commons in London, the European Parliament in Brussels, the UN General Assembly in New York, in Berlin, at the Munich Security Conference in Munich, and the NATO summit in Vilnius. Unfortunately, the exhibition requires updates with new cases of war crimes and genocide every time we open a new edition. Unfortunately, evil is very productive.

At the exhibition, here at the University of Connecticut, which we have just opened informally with Senator Dodd, and which will be here this week, you can witness crimes as recent as this month. I want to encourage you to visit the exhibition at the Dodd Center.

Our responsibility is to show these war crimes. In the hope that emotions will help us understand the urgency for Ukraine to receive more weapons to stop and further prevent genocide. So that genocide can be stopped now and not mourned later.

It is crucial to close the skies. As the war continues and we must survive, there is an urgent need for air defense, F16 fighters, and more Patriot systems. This will not only save lives but also allow the economy to function and develop even amidst the war. Reconstruction commitments are essential. But much more urgent is closing the skies now.

Let me emphasize, we must act now, guided by truth, emotional truth. Not “Never Again” later, but “Truth Now.” To act now.

Leaders want to keep their countries out of war, which we all understand. However, what distinguishes a great leader from a good leader is, I believe: While a good leader does what is needed when it is possible, a great leader does what is needed – when it is needed. Western leaders now have a chance to be great, at this critical moment in human history. They must feel the urgency of now propelled by the truth. The emotion of truth can make leaders great. “Truth Now.”

This is why awarding the Dodd Prize to the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center is so significant.

It is timely also in another dramatic, terrible and incredibly important context: the terrorist attack on Israel. President Biden rightly stated that this attempt at genocide represents the deadliest attack on Jewish life since the Holocaust. Babyn Yar in Ukraine is not merely a reflection on the past; it is a cry: Stop Genocide Now. In Ukraine, in Israel. Babyn Yar is not over unless we are ready to Stop Now.

As you know, Natan Sharansky had to cancel his participation in your conference due to the war in Israel. He cannot discuss the genocide in Ukraine against Jews in the past because of the current threat of genocide against Jews in Israel. How evil is connected! To stop connected evil, we need united good.

Dear Senator, my parents told me about the genocide at Babyn Yar, and your father, Senator Dodd, told the world about the Nazi genocide. Now, it is our responsibility to tell the world about genocides happening today.

Let me mention my parents and my country, again. As I told you, in 1941, my parents were evacuated from Kyiv to Russia, saving them from German Nazis. In 2022, they faced a second evacuation, this time to save them from the Russian Nazis. They found refuge in Western Europe, where they spend most of their time – in Germany. Many Ukrainians who could not evacuate, were killed.

From this, I draw two conclusions.

Firstly, we owe deep gratitude to all who support us, facilitate Ukrainian evacuations and provide humanitarian aid, weapons, and economic assistance. I want to take this moment to express my deepest gratitude to the United States, its people, the President, Congress, Republicans, and Democrats. Ukrainians will not forget this.

Secondly, in 1941, the German Führer sought Ukraine as the breadbasket for his empire. In 2022, the Russian Führer went to Ukraine because he could not imagine his empire without Ukraine. In the contemporary world, Ukraine cannot be alone. Ukraine must return home, where it belongs: to Europe. Therefore, Ukraine's integration into NATO and the EU is crucial. This will be a victory for Ukraine no less important than liberating our territory.

Moreover, Ukraine's NATO and EU membership would be a very important step to justice. Russia's war criminals must be brought to justice. But to bring Russia's main war criminal to court is challenging. But a life sentence can be imposed on him, even without a courtroom. This life sentence would be his witnessing Ukraine thrive within NATO and the EU. You know, in certain Hollywood movies the villains are told, "Killing you is too little punishment for your crimes. You should see how all your dirty dreams and plans fail before your eyes." This is precisely what we can achieve for the Russian Führer. He will sit in solitary confinement, even if it is in a golden room in the Kremlin, and watch Ukraine prosper and grow. I believe Thomas Dodd would also agree that this is a powerful first measure.

Now, as I am concluding: The war will persist for a long time. However, even during war, there are moments of happiness. Not only happiness due to military successes, but also moments of happiness which happen in many families. During the war, in our family, a moment of great joy was related to Connecticut. My daughter got a call last year that she was accepted to Yale University, which had been her dream. Among the four first courses my daughter enrolled in Yale were: Ukrainian language (my daughter is from a Russian-speaking family, and she chose to study Ukrainian – during the war, while in Connecticut), and "The Making of Modern Ukraine," a series of lectures about the history of Ukraine by professor Timothy Snyder. I tell you about this not only as a proud father but also to show through my daughter's example how

the new generation of Ukrainians is even more patriotic than the previous ones – because of the war.

With her Ukrainian patriotism, my daughter is an example of the spirit of new Ukraine. Russia's Führer did everything wrong: through death and destruction he accelerates the creation of a modern new nation of super-patriots. Here I would like to quote something Thomas Dodd wrote in 1959:

Nowhere in the vast territory of the Soviet Union has the Kremlin encountered greater or more stubborn resistance than in (...) Ukraine. And nowhere has the Kremlin been more ruthless. (...) But) after 40 years of persecution, mass murder and cultural oppression, the Ukrainian people, more than 40 million strong, are perhaps more united than ever before in their desire for freedom and in their yearning for national independence. (...) We ought to ask ourselves if we are doing everything that is within our power to foster the will to liberation.¹

This is so powerful and relevant today. And it was said over 60 years ago. When I hear a Western politician who comprehends this today, I am happy. How visionary was Thomas Dodd's wisdom to say this 64 years ago already. I appreciate the significance of BYHMC receiving the Thomas J. Dodd award.

In conclusion, the Ukrainian people are more united than ever today in their desire for freedom, which is an unstoppable force. This is why we can look forward to a bright future. But to really do "everything that is within our power," we need: "Truth Now."

Thank you for awarding the Thomas J. Dodd Prize in Human Rights and International Justice to the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. And for this opportunity to say again the truth, now. "Truth Now".

1 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp75-00149r000200330118-7>.