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Current Concerns

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Upholding international law over anarchy

"To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"

Speech by Jeffrey Sachs to the UN Security Council on US aggression against Venezuela

Jeffrey Sachs during his speech to the United Nations Security Council on 5 January 2026. (picture screenshot)

> "The issue before the Council today is not the character of the government of Venezuela. The issue is whether any Member State – by force, coercion, or economic strangulation – has the right to determine Venezuela's political future or to exercise control over its affairs. […] Members of the Council are not called upon to judge *Nicolás Maduro.* They are not called upon to assess whether the recent United States attack and ongoing naval quarantine of Venezuela result in freedom or in subjugation. Members of the Council are called upon to defend international law, and specifically the *United Nations Charter*."

cc. Jeffrey D. Sachs, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at the Vatican, delivered the following speech as an invited expert at the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Monday, 5 January 2026.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Security Council,
The issue before the Council today is not the character of the government of Venezuela.

The issue is whether any Member State – by force, coercion, or economic strangulation – has the right to determine Venezuela's political future or to exercise control over its affairs.

This question goes directly to Article 2(4) of the *United Nations Charter*, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.

The Council must decide whether that prohibition is to be upheld or abandoned.

Abandoning it would carry consequences of the gravest kind.

Since 1947, United States foreign policy has repeatedly employed force, covert action, and political manipulation to bring about regime change in other countries. This is a matter of carefully documented historical record. In her book *Covert Regime Change* (2018), political scientist *Lindsey O'Rourke* documents 70 attempted US regime-change operations between 1947 and 1989 alone.

These practices did not end with the Cold War. Since 1989, major United States regime-change operations undertaken without authorization by the Security Council have included, among the most consequential: Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), Syria (from 2011), Honduras (2009), Ukraine (2014), and Venezuela (from 2002 onward).

The methods employed are well established and well documented. They include open warfare; covert intelligence operations; instigation of unrest; support for armed groups; manipulation of mass and social media; bribery of military and civilian officials; targeted assassinations; false-flag operations; and economic warfare aimed at collapsing civilian life.

These measures are illegal under the UN Charter, and they typically result is ongoing violence, lethal conflict, political instability, and deep suffering of the civilian population.

The recent United States record with respect to Venezuela is clear.

In April 2002, the United States knew of and approved an attempted coup against the Venezuelan government.

In the 2010s, the United States funded civil society groups actively engaged in anti-government protests, notably in 2014. When the government cracked down on the protests, the US followed with a series of sanctions. In 2015, President *Barrack Obama* declared Venezuela to be "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

In 2017, at a dinner with Latin American leaders on the margins of the UN General Assembly, President *Trump* openly discussed the option of the US invading Venezuela to overthrow the government.

During 2017 to 2020, the US imposed sweeping sanctions on the state oil company. Oil production fell by 75 percent from 2016 to 2020, and real GDP per capita (PPP) declined by 62 percent.

The UN General Assembly has repeatedly voted overwhelmingly against such unilateral coercive measures. Under international law, only the Security Council has the authority to impose such sanctions.

On 23 January 2019, the United States unilaterally recognized *Juan Guaidó* as "interim president" of Venezuela and on 28 January 2019 froze approximately $7 billion of Venezuelan sovereign assets held abroad and gave Guaidó authority over certain assets.

These actions form part of a continuous United States regime-change effort spanning more than two decades.

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"Upholding international law …"

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In the past year, the United States has carried out bombing operations in seven countries, none of which were authorized by the Security Council and none of which were undertaken in lawful self-defence under the Charter. The targeted countries include Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and now Venezuela.

In the past month, President Trump has issued direct threats against at least six UN member states, including Colombia, Denmark, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria and of course Venezuela. These threats are summarized in Annex I to this statement.

Members of the Council are not called upon to judge *Nicolás Maduro*.

They are not called upon to assess whether the recent United States attack and ongoing naval quarantine of Venezuela result in freedom or in subjugation.

Members of the Council are called upon to defend international law, and specifically the *United Nations Charter*.

The realist school of international relations, articulated most brilliantly by *John Mearsheimer*, accurately describes the condition of international anarchy as "the tragedy of great power politics." Realism is therefore a description of geopolitics, not a solution for peace. Its own conclusion is that international anarchy leads to tragedy.

In the aftermath of World War I, the League of Nations was created to end the tragedy through the application of international law. Yet the world's leading nations failed to defend international law in the 1930s, leading to renewed global war.

The United Nations emerged from that catastrophe as humanity's second great effort to place international law above anarchy. In the words of the Charter, the UN was created "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."

Given that we are in the nuclear age, failure cannot be repeated. Humanity would perish. There would be no third chance.

To fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter, the Security Council should immediately affirm the following actions:

1. The United States shall immediately cease and desist from all explicit and implicit threats or use of force against Venezuela.
2. The United States shall terminate its naval quarantine and all related coercive military measures undertaken in the absence of authorization by the Security Council.
3. The United States shall immediately withdraw its military forces from within and along the perimeter of Venezuela, including intelligence, naval, air, and other forward-deployed assets positioned for coercive purposes.
4. Venezuela shall adhere to the *UN Charter* and to the human rights protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
5. The Secretary-General shall immediately appoint a Special Envoy, mandated to engage relevant Venezuelan and international stakeholders and to report back to the Security Council within fourteen days with recommendations consistent with the *Charter of the United Nations*, and the Security Council shall remain urgently seized of this matter.
6. All Member States shall refrain from unilateral threats, coercive measures, or armed actions undertaken outside the authority of the Security Council, in strict conformity with the Charter.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members,

Peace and the survival of humanity depend on whether the *United Nations Charter* remains a living instrument of international law or is allowed to wither into irrelevance.

That is the choice before this Council today.

Thank you. •

Source: *https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/jeffrey-sachs-un-security-council-venezuela*

A coup that may not have been one

gl. Following the attack on Venezuela on 3 January 2026 – an operation that reportedly left around 100 people dead and resulted in the kidnapping of President *Nicolás Maduro* and his wife – the United States president has been accused of committing a serious violation of international law. The incident followed weeks of escalating tensions, including targeted killings of Venezuelan boat captains accused of drug trafficking, repeated threats against the country, and an unprecedented US military build-up in the Caribbean.

Despite the gravity of these developments, much remains unclear. While the population has been deeply shaken, daily mass demonstrations have taken place across Venezuela – not against the government, but in support of Chavismo and demanding the return of President *Maduro*. Contrary to widespread speculation, no coup has been formally declared and the government has not been overthrown.

Notably, US President *Donald Trump* has declined to appoint *María Corina Machado* – previously backed by Washington as the leader of the Venezuelan opposition – as interim president, citing her alleged lack of "sufficient support among the people." (sic!) Instead, *Delcy Rodríguez*, Venezuela's former vice president and a senior, widely respected figure within the Chavista movement, has assumed the role of acting president. Her appointment follows constitutional provisions governing the temporary absence of the head of state.

On 12 January, Rodríguez reaffirmed Venezuela's sovereignty during the inauguration of a new school, stating that the Bolivarian government remained firmly in power. Later that day, she received ambassadors from the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland at the *Miraflores Palace* in Caracas. Venezuelan Foreign Minister *Yván Gil* used the occasion to underscore the country's longstanding economic ties with Europe.

At the same time, talks are reportedly under way with the US government concerning the use of Venezuelan oil assets seized by Washington, as well as the possible easing of sanctions. Meanwhile, President Maduro, currently imprisoned in New York, sent a message to the Venezuelan people through his lawyers, which was delivered by his son at a rally in Caracas. In it, Maduro expressed confidence in the leadership team now headed by Delcy Rodríguez.

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Swiss sanctions policy against Venezuela

Neutrality looks different

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

"Me sött de Pilet go laa!" (We should let Pilet(-Golaz) go) – with this play on words, our ancestors demanded the resignation of Federal Councillor Marcel Pilet-Golaz, head of the Federal Department of Political Affairs (now the FDFA), during the Second World War because he tended to give in to the constant threats and pressure from the Nazi war machine. At that time, our country was in real danger, and when our big neighbour France surrendered in June 1940, the then Federal President Pilet-Golaz called for restraint and compliance with Germany in a radio address, thereby jeopardising Switzerland's sovereignty and neutrality. Fortunately, we had General Henri Guisan at that time! A month later, in July 1940, he responded to this weak stance in a unique way with the Rütli Report, which was both fundamental and unforgettable. The vast majority of the population felt strengthened in their own will to resist by the highly esteemed General Guisan and rejected the weakness of the Federal Council.

Unfortunately, today we have no figurehead anywhere near the stature of Henri Guisan, neither in the Federal Council nor, indeed, in the Swiss army (where senior officers who take a stand for neutrality and against NATO membership are systematically weeded out!). This makes it all the more important for us citizens to take action.

The current head of the FDFA, Ignazio Cassis, constantly demonstrates his admiration and zeal for Western power politics and, accordingly, tramples on Switzerland's obligations to neutrality and human rights. This is evident in his failure to protect Swiss citizens Nathalie Yamb and Jacques Baud and, once again, in his uncritical adoption of EU sanctions, this time against Venezuelan citizens. It is time for a clear "Me sött de Cassis go laa!" (Cassis must go!).

A sitting head of state was attacked by the *Trump* administration in his own country with armed force and shipped abroad in handcuffs. Many countries around the world condemned this criminal act, which violated international law and human rights, in no uncertain terms. But not Switzerland. Instead, on 5 January 2026, the Federal Council announced that it had "decided to freeze any assets in Switzerland belonging to Nicolás Maduro and other persons associated with him with immediate effect."[1]

Sovereignty through perpetual independence.

Wording of the neutrality initiative "Preserving Swiss neutrality"

The Federal Constitution is amended as follows:
Art. 54a Swiss neutrality
1) Switzerland is neutral. Its neutrality is perpetual and armed.
2) Switzerland shall not join any military or defence alliance. Cooperation with such alliances is reserved in the event of a direct military attack on Switzerland or in the event of actions in preparation for such an attack.
3) Switzerland shall not participate in military conflicts between third countries and shall not take any non-military coercive measures against belligerent states. This does not apply to obligations towards the United Nations (UN) or measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military coercive measures by other states.
4) Switzerland uses its perpetual neutrality to prevent and resolve conflicts and is available as a mediator.

Text of the Neutrality Initiative
Source: neutralitaet-ja.ch
(Translation Current Concerns)

Sanctioning of "politically exposed persons" and collective punishment

The associated ordinance[2] is based on the Federal Act of 18 December 2015 on the "Freezing and the Restitution of Illicit Assets held by Foreign Politically Exposed Persons (FIAA)". It is therefore apparently sufficient for someone to be a "foreign politically exposed person" for the "constitutional state" of Switzerland to be able to arbitrarily freeze their assets. Proof that the assets were "unlawfully acquired", as required by the underlying federal law, is not required.

Members of the current Venezuelan government are not affected by the asset freeze, according to the Federal Council. However, this distinction is problematic: who decides who belongs to the "current" government? The annex to the ordinance of 5 January 2026 lists 37 names of individuals subject to sanctions, including numerous members of the government, marked with the adjective "former". For example, next to Nicolás Maduro's name is written "former President of Venezuela". However, he and the other "former" members of the government and senior officials were not removed from office by the population or parliament. This means that someone who is still effectively in government may be on the list, such as the current interim president *Delcy Rodríguez*, who, according to media reports, was sanctioned by Switzerland under an earlier regulation from 2018. In addition to various "former" ministers and directors of banks or energy companies, all kinds of relatives such as wives, brothers, sons, daughters or cousins, even Nicolás Maduro's stepsons, are also on the list – collective punishment? Furthermore, "close ties" to a sanctioned person, or even "close ties to *Hugo Chávez*", the long-deceased former president, are sufficient grounds for the freezing of assets.

Once again: uncritical adoption of EU sanctions

In its press release of 5 January 2026, the Federal Council does not reveal from whom it copied its hasty sanctions and the list of those sanctioned. However, he refers to his earlier sanctions from 2018, stating that the new ban is "complementary" to them. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the 2018 press release will find the answer. It states: "On 28 March 2018, the Federal Council imposed coercive measures against Venezuela. Switzerland is thus joining the sanctions imposed by the EU on the grounds of human rights violations and the undermining of the rule of law and democratic institutions."[3] The reasoning at the time: "The Federal Council is very concerned about the repeated violations of personal freedoms in Venezuela, where the principle of separation of powers is being disregarded and numerous irregularities have occurred in the run-up to the upcoming elections." How dare the EU and Switzerland interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state and impose sanctions without a mandate from the UN Security Council!

What is also astonishing is the remark in the current press release of 5 January that this is merely a matter of securing assets for possible future legal proceedings. Just because someone might bring a case against me at some point, my assets have to be frozen as a precautionary measure? Whether they were acquired legally or not will only be determined in court. Goodbye, rule of law!

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"Swiss sanctions policy …"

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And the icing on the cake: no statement from the Federal Council on the criminal attack by the USA

One would expect a neutral state to at least issue a statement on the criminal attack on another state and the capture and abduction of a foreign head of state from his own territory. Not a word about this in the Federal Council's press release. We do not want to withhold from our readers the text that once again demonstrates the disastrous state of the Swiss government: "On 3 January 2026, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was *arrested* by US forces in Caracas and *transferred* to the US. […] Switzerland has called for de-escalation, restraint and compliance with international law, including the prohibition of the use of force and the principle of respect for territorial integrity. Switzerland has also repeatedly offered its good offices to all sides and is endeavouring to find a peaceful solution to the situation."[4] (emphases mw)

It seems that the Federal Council and its administrative team urgently need a lesson in neutrality law and policy, as well as the rule of law! Such a blatant failure to take a stance is almost inconceivable – and then, after the violent act, to call for "de-escalation, restraint and compliance with international law"! Perhaps the Federal Council is referring to the Venezuelans? And who has disregarded "territorial integrity"? And last but not least, offering "good offices" – as a label that can be used to cover up any act contrary to neutrality?

Neutrality initiative is urgently needed

This whole outrageous story from the Federal Government in Bern confirms how urgently the *neutrality initiative* and the discussion about it are needed among the population!

Paragraph 3 of the initiative contains an important provision on the prohibition of economic sanctions:

> *3 Switzerland shall not participate in military conflicts between third countries and shall not take any non-military coercive measures against belligerent states. This does not apply to obligations towards the United Nations (UN) or measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military coercive measures taken by other states.*

If the Swiss people approve the initiative, economic sanctions against other countries will no longer be permitted. How can a neutral country contribute to entire populations, such as the Venezuelans, being forced to live in economic misery? How can Switzerland freeze individuals' bank accounts, potentially causing them hardship, without a court ruling and without legal recourse? It is outrageous that Western countries, which have bled Venezuela's economy dry with severe sanctions for years, are now trying to blame the Venezuelan government for the country's poor economic situation!

> *4 Switzerland uses its perpetual neutrality to prevent and resolve conflicts and is available as a mediator.*

Regarding the Federal Council's assertion that it has "repeatedly offered its good offices to all sides in the conflicts surrounding Venezuela and endeavoured to find a peaceful solution to the situation", it should be noted that Switzerland can only carry out genuine peace work within the meaning of paragraph 4 of the *neutrality initiative* on the basis of its perpetual neutrality. The first prerequisite for offering good offices is the confidence of all parties involved in Switzerland's impartiality. The Federal Council has squandered this confidence with many countries in recent years with its policies that run counter to neutrality. Regaining this confidence through the careful and trust-building neutrality and peace policy that Switzerland has built up over centuries is an important goal of the neutrality initiative. •

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[1] "Federal Council freezes any assets held by Nicolás Maduro in Switzerland". *Media release* of 5 January 2026

[2] "Ordinance on the freezing of assets in connection with Venezuela (Venezuela Ordinance)" of 5 January 2026

[3] "Sanctions against Venezuela". *Federal Council press release* of 28 March 2018

[4] "Federal Council freezes any assets held by Nicolás Maduro in Switzerland". *Media release* of 5 January 2026

To the Swiss Federal Council: Condemn the US attack on Venezuela as a violation of international law (23.753 signatures)

"We call on the Federal Council to condemn the US attack on Venezuela clearly and unequivocally and to publicly commit to protecting international law, Venezuela's sovereignty and democratic principles. [...]

Switzerland sees itself as a neutral country that stands for peace, human rights and international law. These values lose their credibility if they are not defended even when powerful states violate them. Now is high time for a clear change of course and for a clear voice against aggression in violation of international law.

By clearly condemning the attack, Switzerland is sending an important signal. It is showing that democracy, the rule of law and international law are not empty words, but principles that must be consistently defended."

(Excerpts from the Campax petition. Source: https://act.campax.org/petitions/angriff-der-usa-auf-venezuela-verurteilen)

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What is happening in Iran? A peek behind the headlines

by Karin Leukefeld[*]

Karin Leukefeld (picture Thilo Gläser)

Leading radio and television media outlets and major daily newspapers in German-speaking countries are considered authorities on reporting. It is astonishing, however, that in their coverage of numerous crises and wars, they fail to adhere to their own and to international standards.

The current reporting on events in Iran – which more closely resembles incitement against enemies – is not the only example of how media often fail to inform, and instead become mouthpieces for specific interests. This is evident when comparing our media outlets with those in other parts of the world, which utilise more available sources and think outside the box. They incorporate regional, Iranian, Asian, and international sources, giving a voice to Iranian government ministers and analysts, who draw connections that are absent from our local media.

However, journalistic reporting in Germany is governed by rules, namely those of the *Press Code*. This code, comprising 16 articles, details the rules that apply to journalistic work. It is about "truthfulness and respect for human dignity" and "diligence," about "protecting personal rights, honour, religion, and worldview," about avoiding "sensationalist reporting," about "discrimination," and the "presumption of innocence."

The *German Federal Agency for Civic Education* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung BpB) has published several booklets on media policy, which are freely available. One of these booklets deals with the "basic principles of media ethics," which are defined as "truthfulness, privacy, non-discrimination, respect for human dignity, avoidance of sensationalism, source integrity, and transparency in cases of conflicts of interest."

In traditional journalism training, journalists learn that there are up to seven "W-questions" that should be answered in news reports and articles to establish credibility: who (did something); what (did they do); where (did they do it); when (did they do it); how (did they do it); why (did they do it); and where (is the information from)? Checking the source, i.e. where the information has come from, is of particular importance. Source verification serves to ensure the veracity and thus the quality of a news item or report. Generally, it is said that at least three sources should underlie a news item or report.

Given the chaotic developments in the media landscape due to social media and artificial intelligence, which are leading to the news "business" moving at a rapid pace in new schools of thought advocate dispensing with the "W-questions". This increasingly turns reporting into advertising for what is being conveyed – in short, into *public relations*.

Added to this is a highly complex and often opaque international development, and background knowledge and time are required to communicate this to the public. In times of war and crisis, political and economic interests come into play, which are increasingly being strengthened – even in Europe – by suppressing dissenting perspectives. Media outlets from other parts of the world are banned, journalists are defamed, and for several months now, the EU Commission has been attempting to silence journalists and analysts with so-called "sanctions."

To explain this to the public – or justify it –, so-called "fact-checkers" are presented as particularly high-quality review bodies for distinguishing "falsifications" from "facts". For example, the German public broadcaster ARD has established its own "fact-finder" department to lend credibility to its own reports. In Brussels, there is an "EU Disinfo Lab" where, among other things, a "fact-checking project" develops standards for "facts" for the EU. The "fact-checkers" work on behalf of their funders, which could indeed create a conflict of interest for them. Who checks them?

In Germany and Europe, a new class of journalists appears to be emerging. Alongside the "fact-checkers," there is a "privileged" journalism in which selected accredited journalists receive privileged information from the EU Commission, NATO, at the Munich Security Conference or other events, or while accompanying chancellors and ministers on their travels.

Furthermore, television broadcasters and print media are establishing their own rules that apply to their editorial staff.

For example, in October 2023, the German public broadcaster ARD published a "Glossary for Reporting on the Middle East Conflict" for "internal use," which established a set of language guidelines for employees and correspondents. The 44-page glossary was published on 18 October 2023, ten days after the attack by Palestinian militias on Israeli villages east of the Gaza Strip. On the same day, Israel began a war of annihilation against the population of the Palestinian coastal strip, that would last more than two years.

"Fact-checking", prescribed language, and privileged journalism flourish most of all during times of war and crisis, because publicly available information is heavily influenced by the interests of governments, corporations, rulers, and ruling alliances. If media outlets and reporters do not clearly distance themselves from these dominant interests or supplement them with alternative perspectives, information becomes propaganda.

Simply disseminating unverified death tolls and claiming that the figures cannot be verified in war zones and crisis areas is insufficient. What cannot be verified – and in the case of Iran, information from organisations based in Norway or the US cannot be verified – should according to journalistic principles not be adopted.

So, what do we know about Iran and its society? What is known about the turbulent history of this country, which, due to its oil wealth and geostrategically significant location, has been in the sights of the US and Great Britain since the end of World War II?

Iran – Background

91.5 million inhabitants (source: *World Bank*), roughly half women and half men. Women have a high level of education, making up more than 60 per cent of university graduates. There is a significant urban-rural divide. The country possesses resources of coal, oil, gas, iron, chromium, manganese, lead, and zinc. Iran shares borders with 11 countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Iran borders three seas: the Caspian Sea to the north, the Persian Gulf

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[*] *Karin Leukefeld*, born in 1954, is an ethnologist, Islamic and political scientist, and historian. She has been working as a freelance correspondent since 2000. Her main areas of focus are the Near and Middle East. Her most recent book is "Krieg in Nahost. Geopolitik, Verwüstung, Widerstand und Aufbruch einer Region" (War in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Devastation, Resistance and the Awakening of a Region) (*Hintergrund Publishing House* 2025).

"What is happening in Iran? …"
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to the west, and this is connected to the Gulf of Oman to the south via the Strait of Hormuz.

Since the beginning of the US-led "War on Terror" in 2001, Iran has taken in 3.6 million refugees. The vast majority come from Afghanistan, fewer from Iraq. 20,000 Iraqis and approximately 2.6 million Afghans are officially registered as refugees in Iran. Around 1 million Afghans are unregistered.

Iran is one of the 51 states invited by the "Big Four" – China, Great Britain, the USSR, and the USA – in 1945 to found the United Nations. Iran signed the UN Charter on 26 June and ratified it on 16 October 1945.

Since 2024, Iran has been a member of BRICS, an alliance of countries of the Global South that united to collectively challenge political and economic pressure from the USA. Iran has been a member of the *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* since 2023. It has extensive agreements, including military ones, with Russia and China.

Iran's main trading partners are China, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey. According to the *World Bank*, Iran also has – less – trade with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, India, Russia, and Turkmenistan.

In 1953, Iranian Prime Minister *Mohamed Mossadegh* nationalised Iran's oil reserves. The CIA (USA) and MI6 (Great Britain) orchestrated a coup, and Mossadegh was ousted. Oil was once again controlled by US companies. Under the leadership of Shah Reza Pahlavi, Iran was firmly allied with the USA, EU member states, and Israel.

In January 1979, the Shah left Iran, having been overthrown by an Islamic Revolution. Its leader, *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*, returned to Iran from exile in France on 1 February 1979. In April 1979, the country's constitution was amended, and Iran became an Islamic Republic. A turbulent history ensued.

A glimpse behind the headlines

The most recent unrest began on 28 December 2025. The trigger was the fall of the Iranian rial on the Dubai Stock Exchange, where it lost 30 percent of its value. Business owners at the bazaar, Tehran's large market, protested the massive devaluation of the Iranian currency. The government had supported traders in buying and selling goods abroad with subsidised US dollars; this support could no longer be maintained due to the massive sudden loss in value.

The government signalled understanding for the merchants' discontent, stating that a solution would be found through talks and negotiations. And a solution was found; the merchants reopened their shops. However, ordinary demonstrators from all walks of life had joined the merchants' protests. The economic situation is strained due to long-standing US and EU sanctions. Financial mismanagement only exacerbated the situation.

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What followed was an uprising orchestrated by intelligence agencies. The plan was most likely devised by the Israeli *Mossad* and the US CIA. *Trump* and *Netanyahu* may have reached an agreement at their meeting in Florida at the end of December 2025. In Israel, media outlets were certain that they had received the "green light" from Trump for an attack on Lebanon and Iran. The CIA monitors the entire region anyhow, and *Mossad* has two large bases in Erbil in northern Iraq and in Azerbaijan. From there is not far to Iran.

Alastair Crooke, a long-serving British diplomat to the European Union and MI6 intelligence officer, outlines on his blog, *Conflicts Forum*, the individual steps that escalated the situation within a very short time and were to lead to an armed "regime change." The call to "remove *Khamenei*" echoed through European think tanks and media outlets, shortly after a US special forces unit had abducted Venezuelan President *Nicolás Maduro* and his wife, *Cilia Flores*, in Caracas and taken them to the United States.

While the Iranian protests were primarily directed against the poor economic situation, Western capitals and leading media outlets described the "fall of the regime" in Tehran as "imminent" if the US and Europe helped the demonstrators. US President Trump declared that they stood by their side with loaded weapons and that help was on the way. The demonstrators were urged to seize Iranian government buildings; shortly thereafter, government offices and banks were burning.

The Turkish army informed Iran about armed insurgents advancing from Kurdish northern Iraq via Kermanshah in western Iran. Iran killed most of them but was overwhelmed by the insurgents, who mingled with demonstrators nationwide and used brutal force. Shaky video footage captured the destructive actions: shops, cars, fire trucks, and mosques went up in flames. Iranian security and police forces were fired upon from the rear or sides of the demonstrations. They returned fire, rarely hitting the actual shooters but rather mere demonstrators.

German politicians like Foreign Minister *Johann Wadephul* and Chancellor *Friedrich Merz* rejoiced that the end of the "mullah regime" was imminent.

Wadephul called the massive protests against the "ayatollah regime" a consequence of EU sanctions: "This means: sanctions are working, and we should continue along this path." Meanwhile, former French Foreign Minister *Dominique de Villepin* warned against foreign intervention in Iran and, in an interview with *Euronews*, advocated talks.

Chancellor Merz, however, declared on his trip to India that he assumed the "regime is effectively finished." Germany was coordinating closely with the US and within the E3 format (Germany, France, and the UK), and the foreign ministers were in close contact. It could only be "a few more days or weeks," Merz said. *T-Online* then asked: "What does Merz know?"

Iran shut down the internet to cut off contact with the outside world. Israel and the US activated *Starlink* connections, but these were quickly and successfully blocked by Iran, using technology from China and equipment from Russia. Around 40,000 *Starlink* units were effectively shut down within a very short time, according to Alastair Crooke, who cited Iranian security firms. The *Starlink* units, equipped with a small solar panel, had been illegally brought into Iran and were confiscated from warehouses by Iranian security forces. This severed the connection between the violent groups and their instigators abroad. The demonstrations also subsided due to the enormous violence and destruction and the high number of fatalities.

On 12 January, Iranian Foreign Minister *Abbas Araghchi* stated that Iran had intercepted audio messages originating from abroad. The callers had told the recipients to open fire while they were among the demonstrators. "If you can shoot at the police, do so. If you can't, shoot at anyone. And if that doesn't work, shoot the girl or boy who is directly in front of you."

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"What is happening in Iran? …"
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Official Figures

Alireza Zakani, the mayor of Tehran, estimated the damage in the capital at more than 20 million US-Dollars on Wednesday. He said the devastation was perpetrated by violent terrorists who had infiltrated the "peaceful protests against the dire economic situation".

Damage to infrastructure, including the public transportation network, amounts to almost 39 trillion rials. Eighty-nine buses were set on fire, 57 of which were so badly damaged that some had to be taken out of service. Two city administration buildings and eight newly purchased fire engines were destroyed. A complete list of the damaged property was being prepared. The administrative authorities would decide on the number of repairs and compensation that could be paid.

The governor of Tehran province said that around 1,000 private and public vehicles had been destroyed or damaged, including 54 ambulances and 71 fire engines. Forty-four mosques, 26 government buildings, houses, and businesses had been destroyed or damaged in Tehran and the surrounding area. The Iranian news agency *IRNA* reported extensive damage to urban infrastructure in Rasht in the north, Mashhad in the east, and Kerman in the south.

The Iranian government blamed Washington and Tel Aviv for the devastation, accusing them of exploiting public anger over Iran's poor economic situation since the 12-day war of Israel and the United States against Iran. Foreign Minister Araghchi stated that the alleged summary executions by hanging would not take place.

Last Wednesday, Iran filed an official complaint with UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* at the United Nations. *Amir-Saeid Iravani*, the Iranian ambassador to the UN, referred in the letter to statements by US President Donald Trump in which the latter openly called for violence in Iran and threatened military intervention. "Iranian patriots, keep protesting, take over your institutions! Help is on the way," Trump had declared, explicitly urging people to politically destabilise and stoke up the situation and thus inciting to violence. This, the ambassador stated, constitutes a threat to Iran's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security.

Rules exist not only for the media, but also for politicians and governments of all 193 United Nations member states: namely the UN Charter. In light of the experience of the two great wars (1914/18 and 1939/45), the preamble promises a commitment to peace and constitutes equality, sovereignty, respect for borders, and security for all people and all states, large and small. Iran adheres to this principle in its actions before the UN Security Council, while the US, Israel, and other states in the US sphere of influence have – based on their own interests – developed their own "rules-based order" that seeks to override the UN Charter and international agreements.

The dead are being buried

While German media still give much room to calls for "regime change" and new sanctions against Iran, funerals have begun in Iran. To gain an impression of the funeral procession in Isfahan, the author watches Iranian television footage. One should look closely at the images. Young and old walk in loose lines. Some women wear black abayas, some wear trousers and mid-length coats, with scarves loosely draped over their hair. The Iranian reporter approaches them; most speak proudly of their country, yet are deeply shaken. Young and old men march along in the funeral procession. Enlarged images of the dead are displayed on banners; the procession is interspersed with loudspeaker trucks showing large pictures of Supreme Leader *Ali Khamenei* and General *Qasem Soleimani*. The commander of the Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps was assassinated by the Trump administration in a drone strike at Baghdad airport almost exactly five years ago, in early January 2020.

At the front of one of these trucks stands a young man holding up a picture the size of an A4 sheet of paper. He is dressed in black; the picture is in colour. It shows a little girl beneath a garland of colourful balloons. Her long black hair falls over her shoulders as she twirls, beaming, in a flowing white dress. The writing beneath the image is illegible to the viewer of the video footage. Her name will likely be inscribed in Farsi, the national language of Iran, along with details of what happened to her. The man is weeping.

Among the dead whom Iranians are burying in cities across the country these days are children, teenagers, women, and men, members of the Iranian security forces, bus drivers, and merchants – they come from all walks of life. Even a police officer, trampled to death by provocateurs, will find his final resting place. The names of most will remain unknown to outsiders. All leave behind them families, loved ones, who do not know what their future holds.

And a current update

On Thursday evening – 15 January 2026 – the UN Security Council in New York addressed the situation in Iran. UN rapporteur and Assistant Secretary-General *Martha Pobee* summarised the known facts in a brief statement and warned against escalation. She reiterated the principles of the UN Charter and the obligation of member states to resolve conflicts peacefully. The threat or use of force is prohibited in international relations between states. "These principles are not abstract ideals," the UN rapporteur stated. They are "the foundation of international peace and security. This is as true today as when the United Nations was founded."

The US-Iranian journalist *Masih Alinejad* expressed a completely different view. An internationally renowned and active opponent of the Iranian government, she has lived in exile in New York since 2009 and made no secret of her contempt for the Iranian government in a detailed indictment. The Islamic Republic behaved "like the Islamic State," she declared, and demanded that Iran be treated like the Islamic State.

US Ambassador *Waltz* echoed these demands, stating that "all options to stop the carnage are on the table in the White House." President Donald Trump, he said, is a man of action, not of the useless rhetoric so common at the United Nations. The Russian representative called on the "hotheads" in Washington to come to their senses, and the Chinese representative declared that "US President Donald Trump's direct threats against Iran" must be stopped. •

> " 'Fact-checking', prescribed language, and privileged journalism flourish most of all during times of war and crisis, because publicly available information is heavily influenced by the interests of governments, corporations, rulers, and ruling alliances. If media outlets and reporters do not clearly distance themselves from these dominant interests or supplement them with alternative perspectives, information becomes propaganda."

First published on *globalbridge.ch* on 16 January 2026. You will also find numerous links to sources and further reading there.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Raw reality" in Palestine

In conversation with a former political prisoner

*by Cara Marianna**

Cara Marianna (picture kpe)

I learned about Rateb al–Hribat from my Arabic interpreter, a young woman named Sadeel. This was November of last year [2024] and we, Sadeel and I, were traveling in the West Bank as I continued research for a series of essays called "Palestinian Voices." Rateb had recently been released from prison after twenty-two years. His was a voice I wanted to hear.

We spoke for more than an hour about his experience and the Israeli prison system as it was prior to 7 October 2023. It was during this interview that I learned about Rateb's volunteer work in the infamous Ramla Prison Hospital. Rateb had been incarcerated there from January 2015 until June 2018, when he was transferred to Gilboa Prison. The transfer of prisoners is common, and Rateb was moved more than one hundred times during his years of incarceration. While at Ramla he wrote two books about the prison clinic and the medical abuse and neglect of Palestinian prisoners.

2 December 2025 – I met *Rateb* at his family's home on a quiet street in a residential neighbourhood of Dura. *Sadeel* was with me. We were greeted at the door by members of his family. These were men and women, some smiling and some not, each as curious about me as I was about them – all extremely polite. Throughout the interview, Rateb's family displayed the same hospitality I have come to expect when traveling in Palestine. I was never to learn names or in what way each was related to Rateb – in part a consequence of the language barrier. But that was not the purpose of the visit. I had come to interview their son, brother, cousin, nephew – the 45–year-old man recently released from prison.

We removed our shoes in the entryway, setting them among a large pile of family footwear. From there we were escorted up a flight of stairs to a spacious guest room on the second floor.

Arab houses are distinguished by a division of public and private space. Most homes, with the exception of those belonging to nomadic people or the very poorest Palestinians, have a room specifically for guests. These are formally furnished with the best a family has to offer.

Sadeel and I were seated next to each other on an elegant ivory-coloured sofa that wrapped along two walls. A young woman carried in a tray and set it before us on a low table. There was Arabic coffee served in delicate demitasse cups. Small glass bowls filled with seeds, nuts, dates, and other delicacies crowded the tray. As I found in other interviews, these remained largely untouched. Sadeel's rapid translation and my hurried scribbling of notes left little opportunity to eat.

We waited some moments for Rateb. I took a sip of coffee and noticed three books lying on the couch near me. I picked one up. One of the men explained: These had been written by Rateb while he was in prison.

When Rateb finally entered the room, I was immediately impressed by his composure and the obvious respect his family showed. Rateb's presence filled the space. His face, solemn and handsome, betrayed no evidence of the years he'd spent in prison. He was dressed in a suit and carried himself with dignity. He was articulate and soft-spoken. These initial impressions remain vivid in my mind even as I write this.

He took some steps towards me and broke the silence with a formal Arabic greeting, "Welcome. Dura is your second home."

I thanked him for meeting with me. "I will do anything that's related to the Palestinian cause," he said as he took a seat.

Rateb had been released from Negev Prison at the end of July, only four months earlier. He didn't look like a man recently freed from the hell of the Israeli gulag. "Will it be difficult for you to speak of your experience in prison?" I asked.

"No." he said. "Because what happened to me is part of the same continuum of violence that my people have experienced since the *Nakba*."

What follows from here is Rateb's story as he conveyed it to me in Arabic and as interpreted by Sadeel. I present his replies to my numerous questions as a seamless narrative. I've done so for brevity and continuity and to showcase Rateb's voice. My few insertions serve clarification.

> "We are talking about raw reality. This is not related to politics. I'm not different from any of my people and the sequence of violence that has been inflicted on my people. My experience and suffering aren't unique."

This was a sentiment I heard from others, men and women, who spent time in Zionist prisons. The immense suffering prisoners endure is apparently made more bearable because it's a shared experience. In this way a prisoner knows he or she is not alone. It must be noted: This was before events of 7 October 2023, before the systematic starvation of prisoners, and before the escalation and intensification of beatings, torture, and rape.

> "I was part of the Al–Aqsa Intifada. It began when *Ariel Sharon* raided the mosque in September of 2000. It moved Arabs and Palestinians to defend themselves and their rights. I was one who tried to do something to defend my country. This is the result of injustice our people have been living with. Although we have eyes for peace and normal lives, Israel didn't allow our people to live normally."

The expression "we have eyes for peace" is one I heard frequently in my travels and conversations with people in urban and rural areas. It conveys a passionate desire for peace with the poetic nuance characteristic of Arabic.

Ariel Sharon, chairman of Likud from 1999 to 2005, became prime minister six months after the Al–Aqsa incident.

> "In the Israeli prisons system, prisoners endure a lot of violence through the whole process. We are beaten when we're arrested, and again during the so-called investigation process, when we're interrogated. There is mental and physical torture.
>
> Mental torture includes blackmail. When they arrest someone, they frequently threaten to demolish the homes

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"'Raw reality' in Palestine ..."
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of their families. Mental pressure is applied to friends who have also been arrested. They spread rumours that one of your friends was martyred or died in prison. There are other methods specific to different contexts. For example, during interrogations they will say things like, 'There's no future for you. We will destroy you.'"

Elsewhere during my travels, I learned, reliably, of one notorious instance of sexual blackmail used to turn someone into an informant. In consequence, he was killed by the resistance. Rateb would never have spoken of sexual blackmail to a woman, but it is not hard to imagine the truth of it. This type of blackmail, at which Israelis excel, would be highly effective in Palestine, where sexuality is confined to marriage between a man and woman and any deviation carries social and criminal penalties.

"The other side is physical torture. Israelis beat prisoners with tools, they keep us sitting in small dark dungeons with no room to move and no light. They harass people, forcing them to stay awake so they lose sense of time. Even the physical abuse has a psychological effect. They put plastic bags on our heads; we're handcuffed with our hands behind our backs and forced to sit in small chairs. They scream and swear at us. They use humiliation.

The real struggle for Palestinian prisoners is being parted from family for years. For many years the prison authority didn't allow family members to visit. This was used as punishment. Another way to punish or break prisoners is constantly moving us from one prison to another.

The main reason they do this is to destroy any sense of stability for prisoners, because a prisoner searches for a sense of settling, so he can have a schedule and take advantage of time in meaningful ways. Constantly moving prisoners destroys any sense of stability and any community."

Rateb is referring here not only to communities' prisoners form inside of prisons, but also to communities on the outside. Families lose contact with their loved ones when they're moved from prison to prison, sometimes not knowing where they are. Or if they're even alive.

"Prisoners are moved in metal boxes in prison vans. Our hands and legs are cuffed with our arms behind our backs. The seats are made of metal. Prisoners are not belted to the seats and are

Rateb al–Hribat. (picture ma)

injured during transport. The space is small and prisoners fall on each other or on the floor. Because Palestine is a small area, the distance between facilities is [typically] about 45 minutes. But they keep the prisoners in transport vehicles for about five hours. They don't let them use a toilet, and prisoners have to hold their urine. Men who suffer from diabetes urinate on themselves."

In May 2024 I spoke with a woman from Ramallah who spent a year in prison and was released just prior to 7 October 2023. She reported a similar experience when being transported. The prison transport personnel deliberately drive for hours on rough, winding roads. They take corners and turns at high speeds. All of this is intended as a form of torture. During summer months the vehicles get dangerously hot so that it becomes difficult to breathe. There were times, she told me, when she thought she would die.

"I was charged with being a member of *Shoada Al–Aqsa*, the military branch of *Fatah*. This was the charge. Israelis play games. They've been working on the Zionist project many decades. They do whatever it takes to destroy Palestinian community. The main accusation against me was resisting occupation. Trials are only for media show for Israelis. There is no justice in Israel's law.

Being Palestinian gave me the strength to endure twenty-two years in prison. This is a benefit only Palestinians have. We can live in any circumstances and cope. Palestinian prisoners live inside the prison, but the prison doesn't live inside of them.

Palestinian prisoners can endure their circumstances because we don't have a home besides Palestine and because of our belief in our right to live and to live a decent life. We always look to the future and freedom for our country. Just like any other people, we don't like violence. We don't like killing. The occupier forces it on us.

For the family of a prisoner, their struggle is double that of the prisoner. I say this because a prisoner suffers from separation from his family. But this is a personal struggle. It's an individual struggle. He alone suffers.

For the family and community and friends the loss of a loved one is great. Their suffering is greater. On every happy occasion, like a birthday or wedding, the happiness isn't complete or whole. Also, to go see their loved one in prison they must endure the hardships of traveling. Families endure constant worry. For example, when families hear bad news coming from inside the prisons and the condition of the prisoner (their loved one) isn't known. This causes fear and worry. The prisoner knows his own condition and circumstances but the family doesn't.

Most prisons are in 'the '48 lands' [the Palestinian term for the land stolen during the *Nakba*]. The families struggle to see their loved ones. They endure checkpoints and road closures, and are often prevented from traveling for 'security reasons.' The prison authorities frequently take away the right to visit, and visits are limited to forty-five minutes once a month. They take place behind thick glass. Conversation is by phone. Visits are restricted to parents and siblings, spouses and children. Visits require permission. Visitors are forced through slow and elaborate security checks. Their belongings are searched. Prisoners have to endure a body search.

I went ten years without seeing my family. My mother passed away before she could see me. My father saw me once before he passed away. My sister saw me several times and then she also passed away. This is one of the sad experiences prisoners encounter, when they lose a family member.

Prison is like a community – a kind of village. Prisoners form friendships and support groups. Some of the strongest relationships are formed in prison. Prisoners have strong social connections and become like family inside. Of course, there is a common religious connection and practice. Through long years of protest, including hunger strikes, prisoners won some religious rights. The price was high. A lot of prisoners were martyred.

Looking back, after the protests and hunger strikes, we were able to create a system to organise our lives. [There

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The West and the trap of its own narrative

Russian assets, a long war, and a politics that no longer knows how to stop

*by Giuseppe Gagliano**

There is one detail that matters more than a thousand solemn declarations: the Russian assets frozen in Europe. The figures most often cited range from roughly 180 to 195 billion Euro, held largely through Euroclear, with the legal and operational burden ultimately falling on Belgium. From this comes a paradox: Brussels and several European capitals are debating whether to use that hoard as collateral or as a funding source to sustain Ukraine, yet the very country that hosts the crucial financial infrastructure fears being left to shoulder a staggering bill should a peace agreement require restitution or trigger international litigation.

The issue is not the exact number; it is the logic. If you spend today what may have to be returned tomorrow, you build a time bomb. And if tomorrow the balance of power – both on the ground and at the negotiating table – tilts in Moscow's favour, who pays? The host state? The Union as a whole? Or, more realistically, Ukraine turned into a structural debtor, with a financial noose that begins to resemble a punitive post-war settlement: a devastated country, an economy already under strain, reconstruction that becomes militarisation, and a future purchased on instalments.

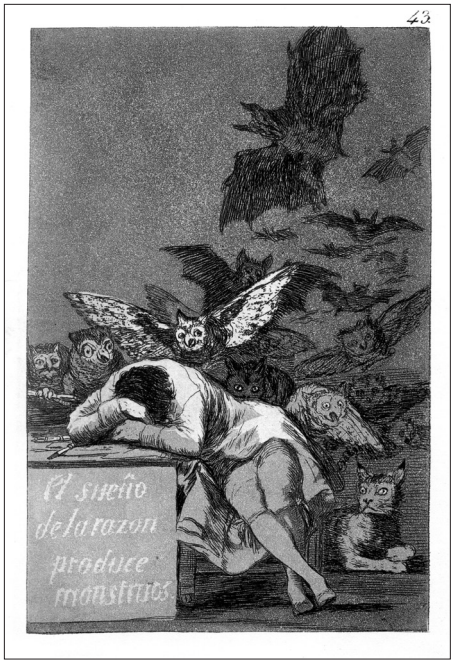
A lost opportunity and the price of the "just war"

Within this reasoning, a recurring theme resurfaces: the idea that an early negotiating window might have produced a less punishing outcome for Kyiv. If that window was truly closed for political calculations and for the belief that Russia could be broken on the battlefield, then its weight today is crushing. Because every month of war shifts the balance – not only in territorial or military terms, but above all in political room for manoeuvre. If you build a public strategy around the promise of the enemy's "total defeat," you become hostage to that very promise. And when reality refuses to cooperate, instead of changing course, you raise the stakes.

This is where the most dangerous dynamic kicks in: political sunk costs. Many Western leaders have staked reputation, consent, and credibility on the prospect of a weakened – if not fragmented – Russia, with an eye to a possible economic "reopening" of that vast space. A bet that, if it fails, leaves no graceful retreat. The narrative then stops describing the conflict and becomes the conflict: the war is no longer fought for measurable objectives, but to avoid admitting that the underlying wager was wrong.

The economic war hidden behind reconstruction – when finance prepares the post-war

The debate over Russian assets is a chapter of economic warfare more than one of international law. The word "reconstruction" sounds reassuring, but it often means something very specific: military spending, weapons procurement, and defence-industrial supply chains. If those resources are "advanced" today and it later turns out they must be returned or offset, the result is not victory – it is debt. And in geopolitics, debt is a chain. If Kyiv were forced to account for colossal sums, its economic sovereignty would be squeesed for decades, and its fate would become negotiable by whoever holds the credit – or controls the financial taps.



Francisco de Goya (1764–1828): The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters. As relevant today as it was 200 years ago. (picture Wikipedia)

This is the scenario that worries the cautious: not a war that ends, but a war that changes shape – from the front line to the state budget.

Military strategy and the reality on the ground – the distortion that fuels escalation

The discussion exposes a contradiction that repeats itself across Europe: on the one hand, Russia is portrayed as worn down, inept, economically fragile; on the other, it is presented as an imminent threat poised to expand across the rest of the continent. If a country is truly in ruins, how could it prepare within a few years for a direct confrontation with powers that possess large militaries, deep resources, and nuclear deterrence? The point is not

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have been many strikes through the years; several large hunger strikes occurred in the 1990s.] We won the basic means for comfort: stability, a book – books were allowed inside – prisoners had eating schedules, sports, exercise. We were able to walk and read. We were able to meet with other prisoners inside our prison units. We created this improved situation with the prison administration after a long fight. Our lives weren't so chaotic. If there was a problem we could meet and talk about it.

After 7 October, circumstances changed one thousand percent: decent food and eating schedules, contact with the prison administration – all these accomplishments and rights were taken away. Now prisoners have only a bare minimum to live – a bare minimum of food, clothes, water. The worst abuses are to their humanity and dignity. Prisoners are beaten with tools, prevented from meeting with each other and organising, cells are overcrowded, the caloric intake has been reduced to starvation level. Sickness spreads in prisons. There are a lot of skin diseases. This is intentional.

7 October showed us the true face of the occupation. We discovered they have no decency."

I carried Rateb's books with me when we left, determined to get the first one into English as quickly as possible. •

Source: *The Floutist* of 2 December 2025; *thefloutist.substack.com* (slightly abridged). This series was previously published at *Winter Wheat*.

There will be no peace this way

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

The war in Ukraine has now been going on for almost 12 years. There are no universally accepted figures on the human and material costs of this war, but they are certainly enormous – and every additional day of war means even more death and destruction. Efforts to end the war and establish stable peace are therefore an urgent imperative of reason and humanity that arising every day.

However, not everything that says "peace" on the label is a genuine offer of peace. Unfortunately, the call for "peace" is also being misused for propaganda purposes by those who want to continue the war and know full well that their "peace" plans will not lead to peace – but want to cover this up. It was therefore to be expected that the decision taken on 6 January in Paris[1] by the "coalition of the willing" led by British Prime Minister *Starmer*, French President *Macron* and German Chancellor *Merz*, with the participation of *Volodymyr Zelensky* and the two envoys of the US President, *Steve Witkoff* and *Jared Kushner*, would not bring us any closer to peace. On the contrary, this decision hardens the fronts. This is evident from the official reaction of the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman on 8 January[2].

But why did this meeting and this decision take place if they do not lead to peace?

1. The "coalition of the willing" and Volodymyr Zelensky are trying with all means at their disposal to keep President *Trump's* US administration on its war course against Russia. The participation of the two US envoys and their broad agreement with the decision of the "coalition of the willing" – albeit without signing the decision – was therefore probably the greatest "success" of this coalition.

2. The Paris decision ignores the Russian position with its demands, for example, for a massive rearmament of Ukraine, for NATO troops in the country, for a quasi-NATO alliance and the unquestioning adoption of the formula of Russian aggressiveness and threat. This underlined by the official response of the Russian Foreign Ministry. At the same time, however, the resolution speaks of "stable and lasting peace", "just and lasting peace", "consistency with the principles of the *Charter of the United Nations*", "progress achieved", "self-defence", "guaranteeing sovereignty", etc. This resolution is quite obviously part of the information war. The actors involved know that the vast majority of the international community wants nothing more than an end to the war. After many years of trying to pillory Russia for its role in the war, now the blame for the war not ending is being shifted to Russia.

3. Meanwhile, the "coalition of the willing", led by the governments in London, Paris and Berlin, have an interest in continuing the war in Ukraine. A peace agreement that, given the current state of the war, would have to take Russia's political goals into account would be a total defeat for these three governments, which since 2014 have taken an increasingly clear stance against all of Russia's concerns. The house of cards built on disinformation and propaganda would collapse. This would be compounded by

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Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

"The West and the trap ..."

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to declare, in absolute terms, who is right or wrong, but to recognise the practical effect of this rhetoric: it justifies any decision, however risky, by turning prudence into "appeasement" and compromise into "betrayal."

And when politics convinces itself that war is the only path, the military objective tends to drift: no longer to defend, no longer to contain, but to "destroy" the other side's capacity to fight. That formula carries an escalating human cost and a diplomatic horizon that recedes ever further.

The Baltic and radicalisation – Russian-speaking minorities, fear, and lit fuses

Then there is the question of the Baltic states and their Russian-speaking minorities. If domestic rhetoric becomes discriminatory or punitive, it hands Moscow an additional argument: the protection of "its own" abroad. It is not automatic, but it is a risk. Moreover, the economic and demographic erosion of those societies – depopulation, polarisation, social fractures – feeds extremism. And extremism, in such a geopolitically sensitive corridor, is fuel.

The paradox is straightforward: the more fear of Russia grows, the more policies are adopted that weaken internal cohesion and make the region unstable. And the more the region destabilises, the more that fear appears justified. A perfect – and perfectly self-destructive – loop.

The United States, Europe, and a change of tone – from allies to customers: the risk of dependence

The argument also points to a shift in tone attributed to Washington: the idea of a Europe that must "manage on its own," while the United States remains the arms supplier. In geo-economic terms, that would mean a transformation of the alliance: less sharing of burdens and risks, more of a commercial relationship. Europe pays, buys, borrows; the United States collects, innovates, and preserves its industrial and technological edge. If that truly is the trajectory, then European strategic autonomy would not be a project – it would be a necessity, but without the tools to make it happen quickly.

The crisis of European democracy – parties change, policies remain

The most bitter passage concerns domestic politics: unpopular governments, radical decisions, populations that seem resigned. It is the core of contemporary disillusionment: people vote, yet the fundamentals do not change. Party labels rotate, but the course remains the same – especially on the major issues of security and international alignment. And "anti-system" movements, once they enter institutions, tend to be normalised: they become part of the very machine they once promised to dismantle.

At that point, propaganda is no longer merely communication: it becomes a blanket. It is used to hold together a building that is starting to creak, to cover contradictions, and to prevent the simplest question from being asked: "Where are we going, and what are the real costs?"

Conclusion – when the story we tell becomes truer than reality

The thread tying everything together is "the denial of reality" as a political reflex. Strategy is not adapted to facts; facts are adapted to strategy. And when a narrative is repeated long enough, it ultimately turns into a belief system – an internal, self-sufficient truth, impervious to refutation. This is how the West risks believing its own propaganda: not because it is foolish, but because it is trapped in a political and psychological investment that makes admitting error too costly.

And yet, precisely for this reason, the question of Russian assets is revealing: it is where rhetoric collides with accounting. And accounting, unlike speeches, always sends the bill. •

Strong turnout of young Red Cross volunteers at Dunant commemoration

by Angela Schubert

Encouraging number of young Red Cross volunteers at Commemoration marking the 115th anniversary of Henry Dunant's death on 30 October 2025.

As dusk settled over the town of Heiden on 30 October 2025, visitors made their way toward the former district hospital where *Henry Dunant* spent the final 15 years of his life. Inside the historic building, a dignified ceremony marked the 115th anniversary of the death of the founder of the Red Cross. The rooms on the second floor, once Dunant's living quarters, are today part of a museum dedicated to his life and work. Redesigned and reopened in spring 2025, the exhibition was brightly illuminated for the occasion, drawing a steady stream of visitors throughout the evening.

The museum soon filled with Red Cross delegations from across the region, representing a wide range of ages. Their uniforms bore the names of their places of origin: Rottweil and Ravensburg in southern Germany, several towns in Austria's Vorarlberg region, and numerous Swiss associations. Among them was a delegate from Munich who remarked that this was his fiftieth time attending such a commemoration. Civilian guests and local residents mingled easily with the volunteers dressed in red.

Shortly after 6 p.m., participants gathered on the museum terrace. There, a replica of the *Peace Bell* – saved intact from Nagasaki – stood as the central symbol of the evening, flanked by flag bearers from the various associations. In his welcoming address, the chairman of the museum association turned particular attention to the many young volunteers present, describing their strong turnout as a hopeful sign for the future of the Red Cross. Earlier, many of them had signed the visitors' book using ink and fountain pens, echoing the writing tools of Dunant's own time.

One by one, guests were invited to ring the bell, gripping the thick rope firmly to set the heavy instrument in motion. From there, they moved on to members of the Heiden Johanniter group, who handed each participant a lit pitch torch. The resulting procession formed a long, glowing line as it made its way up the main road toward *Henry Dunant Square*.

At the square, an imposing memorial stone depicts Dunant with his arm raised, as if calling on future generations to remember his mission. A local brass band played solemn music as the crowd gathered. A representative of the *Swiss Red Cross* – who had previously overseen humanitarian operations in the Middle East – addressed the assembly. Speaking especially to the younger volunteers, he recalled the organisation's core principles of impartiality, neutrality and universality, and emphasised the everyday work of local Red Cross groups in assisting people in need, responding to accidents and emergencies, and supporting communities in difficult situations.

Encircled by torchlight, the flag bearers stepped forward and slowly lowered their flags in tribute to the Red Cross founder. The ceremony concluded with a solemn song.

Afterwards, participants moved on to the Kursaal, where warm refreshments awaited them. A barley soup prepared by the Vorarlberg delegation of the *Austrian Red Cross* in a large field kitchen vehicle proved especially welcome. Many attendees, familiar with one another from past meetings or relief operations, lingered in conversation.

Outside, white Red Cross minibuses lined the road – vehicles more often associated with emergency deployments, but on this evening serving to transport visitors home – bringing the commemorative gathering to a quiet close. •

"There will be no peace this way"

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the inevitable economic decline. All this would have far-reaching consequences. At the same time, however, these governments do not want to be seen as those responsible for prolonging the war. This distinguishes them from Nazi Germany, which, after its defeat at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942/43, openly declared total war – which meant more death and destruction until the end of the war than in the preceding years of the war. Despite this difference, however, everyone must be aware that if the "coalition of the willing" continues as before, the consequences could be the same as after Stalingrad.

The war in Ukraine is being fought primarily on the backs of the people of Ukraine and – albeit to a much lesser extent – the people of Russia. In the countries of the "coalition of the willing", there has been no death or destruction directly related to the war so far. This is particularly shocking about the policy of this coalition: it is waging war at the expense of others. Chancellor Merz openly demanded that Ukraine recruit more young people as soldiers, as cannon fodder for the front. How long can this continue to work?

No less shocking is the fact that the leaders of the "coalition of the willing" show no insight into their own mistakes – except for the no less propagandistic formula that they were slow to recognise the true nature of Russian politics. Self-righteous and smug, they still behave as if they were the masters of the world. Why not instead seriously and publicly examine the question of what part they *themselves* have played in the war in Ukraine?

Lines such as those above do not please the "coalition of the willing". And they please them even less the more this coalition finds itself with its back to the wall. This explains why critical voices are to be suppressed in an increasingly blatant manner. In this war waged by the "coalition of the willing", the motto seems to be: if you're not with us, you're against us – and therefore on the side of the "enemy" that must be fought. This construct is illogical. The correct interpretation is that anyone who questions the "coalition of the willing" course of war is primarily concerned with peace. That is why the fight for freedom of expression is so important!

PS: In a speech at the New Year's reception of the Halle-Dessau *Chamber of Industry and Commerce* (IHK) and the Halle *Handwerkskammer*, the German Chancellor also spoke about relations with Russia at the very end of his detailed speech. Friedrich Merzs' statements caused an international stir. He said:

"If we then succeed in ensuring that peace and freedom return to Europe, that we finally find a balance with our largest European neighbour, namely Russia, in the longer term – I am not saying this because I am here in the East; I say it everywhere else in Germany too: Russia is a European country – if peace prevails, if freedom is guaranteed, if we succeed in all of this, ladies and gentlemen, then this European Union, then we in the Federal Republic of Germany will have passed another test, and then we can look ahead with great confidence beyond the year 2026. I wish for this for us. I am sure that we will succeed. Please contribute to this!"[3]

We must take the Chancellor at his word and indeed contribute to ensure that there is a change of course – and that the Chancellor's words become something more than just another of the many feints of recent years. •

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1 *https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/992814/2401868/f-72a4c4f4c998aa017f254e22864f93/2026-01-07-paris-ukraine-koalition-der-willigen-data.pdf?download=1*

2 *https://mid.ru/print/?id=2071702&lang=en*

3 *https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rede-kanzler-ihk-halle-dessau-2402682* of 14 January 2026

Enough is enough! Thus far and no further!

We protest against the unlawful sanctions imposed on Colonel Jacques Baud and against the EU's course toward war!

Patrik Baab, Laura von Wimmersperg and Sevim Dagdelen presented the appeal to the public on 8 January. (picture nds)

With its most recent sanctions package, the EU has placed the military historian and former colonel of the Swiss Army and the Swiss Strategic Intelligence Service, as well as member of the Swiss General Staff, *Jacques Baud*, under sanctions. Jacques Baud is a Swiss citizen and lives in Brussels. He is no longer allowed to leave Belgium, his assets have been seized, his accounts have been frozen, and his books may no longer be sold.

Jacques Baud has worked, among other things, for NATO and the United Nations. He is an impeccable scholar and an honorable man. His books meet the highest standards of professional historical analysis. He works strictly neutrally according to the principle: Both sides must be heard.

It is not a crime to name the true reasons for the Ukraine war. It is not a crime to draw readers' attention to untruths and to the EU's and NATO's own propaganda. It is not a crime to point out the thoughtless cooperation of the West with Ukrainian forces that show a dangerous proximity to fascists.

The Council of the European Union is destroying the foundations of freedom of opinion through arbitrary punitive measures against Jacques Baud and in total against 59 journalists and scholars.

These sanctions are illegal and contrary to international law, because they were not imposed by the UN Security Council. The legal opinion by former judge at the European Court of Justice Prof. Dr *Ninon Colneric* and the legal scholar Prof. Dr *Alina Miron* of the University of Angers shows that the underlying legal acts also violate EU law. The EU is using the sanctions list as an instrument to silence critics and is maneuvering itself ever deeper into an abyss of lawlessness.

We call on the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the German Bundestag, the German state and local parliaments, the entire German people, and the people in all countries of the European Union to now oppose with all their might those who are destroying democracy and those who are driving the war.

The preamble of the Basic Law obliges Germany to serve peace. Article 5 of the Basic Law states: "There shall be no censorship." The actions of the EU Commission and the EU Council contradict our Basic Law. We call on the Federal Government, in accordance with its oath of office, to point out this unlawful proceeding.

We demand the immediate lifting of the illegal sanctions against Jacques Baud as well as against all journalists, scholars, and EU citizens.

We demand that the Federal Government and the EU contribute constructively to peace in Ukraine and cease all attempts that are contrary to the constitution to prolong the war!

First signatory:

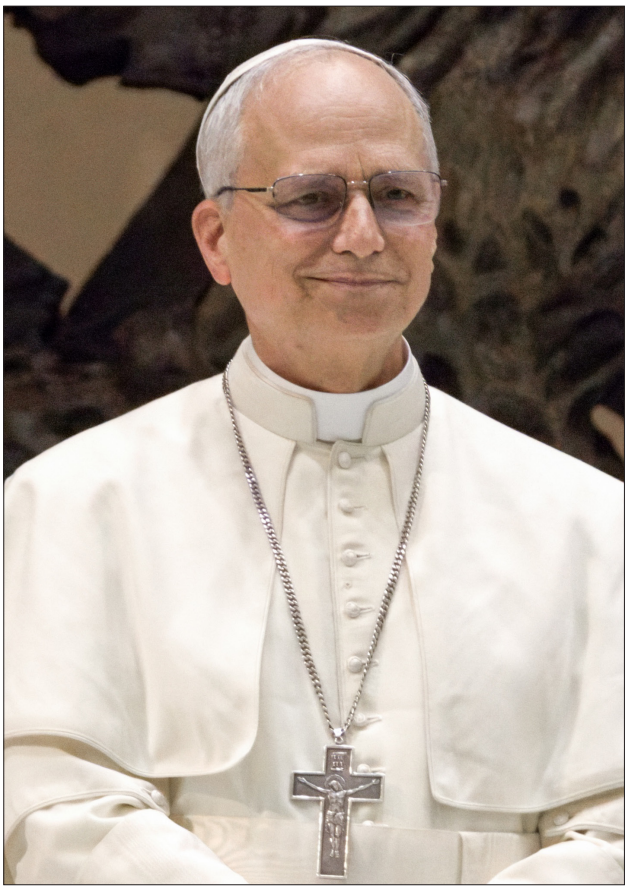
*Prof. Dr **Nima Rostami Alkhorshid**, civil engineer, University of Brasilia; Dr **Michael Andrick**, philosopher and writer; **Patrik Baab**, publicist and political scientist; **Volker Braun**, writer; **Max Blumenthal**, journalist and documentary filmmaker, USA; Lieutenant Colonel ret. lic. phil. **Ralph Bosshard**, military historian; Prof. em. Dr **Joseph O. Boyd-Barrett**, Professor Emeritus at California State University, Channel Islands, USA; Prof. Dr **Peter Brandt**, historian and publicist; **Michael Brie**, philosopher, member of the Executive Board of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; **James W. Carden**, journalist and author, former advisor to the Special Representative for Intergovernmental Affairs at the US State Department, USA; Prof. Dr **Michael Jabara Carley**, History Department, University of Montreal, Canada; **Sevim Dagdelen**, publicist, Federal Executive Committee of the BSW; **Daniela Dahn**, writer; Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) **Daniel Davis**, recipient of the Bronze Star for bravery in Iraq and for service in Afghanistan, USA; **Dieter Dehm**, writer and songwriter; Prof. Dr **Glenn Diesen**, political scientist at the University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway; **Tino Eisbrenner**, musician and writer; **Thomas Fazi**, author, Italy; **Ruth Firmenich**, MEP, political scientist; Dr. **Heiner Flassbeck**, economist, former State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Finance and former Chief Economist of UNCTAD; **Justus Frantz**, conductor, founder of the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival; Prof. Dr **Hajo Funke**, Free University of Berlin; **George Galloway**, Chairman of the Workers Party of Britain, United Kingdom; Dr **Daniele Ganser**, historian and publicist, Switzerland; Prof. Dr **Ulrike Guérot**, political scientist and publicist; **Gabriele Gysi**, writer and director; **Marie-Christine Giuliani**, National Councillor, Austria; **Christoph Hein**, writer; Dr **Hannes Hofbauer**, historian, publicist, publisher; Prof. Dr **Stefan Homburg**, Public Finance, Leibniz University Hannover; **Andrej Hunko**, Honorary Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; **Larry Johnson**, former CIA analyst and publicist, USA; **Markus J. Karsten**, publisher, Westend-Verlag; **Alexander King**, member of the Berlin House of Representatives (BSW); Prof. Dr **Dieter Klein**, economics, Humboldt University (retired); **Patrik Köbele**, chairman of the DKP; **Roger Köppel**, publisher and editor-in-chief of Die Weltwoche; **Markus Kompa**, media lawyer; Prof. Dr **Gabriele Krone-Schmalz**, journalist and university lecturer; Major General (ret.) **Dennis Laich**, US Army; Dr **Anatol Lieven**, Director of the Eurasia Programme at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, Washington D.C., USA; **Andrew Lowenthal**, founder and CEO of liber-net, Australia; Prof. Dr **Pascal Lottaz**, professor at Kyoto University, Japan; **Marcel Luthe**, chairman of the Good Governance Union; Dr **Hans-Georg Maassen**, former president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution; **Aaron Maté**, journalist, Canada; **Ray McGovern**, co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, retired CIA analyst, USA; Prof. Dr **John J. Mearsheimer**, political scientist, University of Chicago, USA; **Peter Mertens**, Secretary General of the Partij van de Arbeid (PVDA), Member of the Chamber of Representatives, Belgium; Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) **Peter Misch**, publisher; **Albrecht Müller**, founder and editor of NachDenkSeiten; **Haralampi G. Oroschakoff**, visual artist and writer; Prof. Dr **Max Otte**, economist; **Dirk Pohlmann**, journalist and filmmaker; Prof. Dr **Nikolai Petro**, political scientist at the University of Rhode Island, USA; **Didier Pfirter**, retired ambassador, representative of Switzerland at the founding of the International Criminal Court and former advisor to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Switzerland; Prof. Dr **Theodore A. Postol**, Emeritus Professor of Science, Technology and National Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA; **Milena Preradovic**, journalist, Austria; **Scott Ritter**, former UN weapons inspector and military expert, USA; Prof. Dr **Richard Sakwa**, University of Kent, United Kingdom; **Michael von der Schulenburg**, MEP, former UN and OSCE diplomat; Vice Admiral (ret.) **Kay-Achim Schönbach**, Deputy Chair of Bündnis Deutschland; **Gabriel Shipton**, brother of Julian Assange and founder of The Information Rights Project, Australia; Lord **Robert Skidelsky**, historian, House of Lords, United Kingdom; Prof. Dr **Wolfgang Streeck**, Director Emeritus at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne; Prof. Dr **Ola Tunander**, Research Director Emeritus at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Norway; **Raymond Unger**, writer and visual artist; **Ron Unger**, retired soldier of the US Marine Corps, member of Veterans for Peace, USA; Prof. Dr mult. Dr h. c. mult. **László Ungvári**, managing director of Development in Relations of Industrial and Education Management GmbH; **Aya Velazquez**, freelance journalist; **Alexander Wallasch**, writer and journalist; **Roger Waters**, musician, United Kingdom; Dr phil. **Dieter Weber**, retired diplomat and historian; **Hans-Eckardt Wenzel**, musician and author; retired Colonel **Lawrence Wilkerson**, former chief of staff to US Secretary of State Colin Powell, USA; **Laura von Wimmersperg**, Berlin Peace Coordination; **Achim Winter**, journalist and satirist; **Flavio von Witzleben**, journalist.*

Source: https://free-baud.org/en/; Here you can see the other signatories; anyone can sign the appeal; so far, over 20,000 people have signed it.

"Rediscovering the meaning of words"

Address of Pope Leo XIV to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See at the New Year reception on 9 January 2026 in Rome

cc. At the beginning of each year, the Pope addresses the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See at a New Year's reception. In his speech, he addresses numerous topics from world politics and social life, formulating the position of the Roman Catholic Church on these issues. This year was no exception. The variety of topics and the responses to them are impressive, and the entire address is worth reading. We are publishing an excerpt here that focuses on secular issues.



Pope Leo XIV (picture Wikimedia Commons)

[…]

Dear Ambassadors,

Prompted by the tragic events of the sack of Rome in 410 AD, Saint *Augustine* wrote *De Civitate Dei, The City of God.* […]

The City of God does not propose a political program. Instead, it offers valuable reflections on fundamental issues concerning social and political life, such as the search for a more just and peaceful coexistence among peoples. Augustine also warns of the grave dangers to political life arising from false representations of history, excessive nationalism and the distortion of the ideal of the political leader.

Although the context in which we live today is different from that of the fifth century, some similarities remain highly relevant. We are now, as then, in an era of widespread migratory movements; as then, we are living at a time of a profound readjustment of geopolitical balances and cultural paradigms; as then, we are, in Pope *Francis's* well-known expression, not in an era of change but in a change of era.

In our time, the weakness of multilateralism is a particular cause for concern at the international level. A diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force, by either individuals or groups of allies. War is back in vogue and a zeal for war is spreading. The principle established after the Second World War, which prohibited nations from using force to violate the borders of others, has been completely undermined. Peace is no longer sought as a gift and a desirable good in itself, or in the pursuit of "the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men and women." Instead, peace is sought through weapons as a condition for asserting one's own dominion. This gravely threatens the rule of law, which is the foundation of all peaceful civil coexistence. […]

It was precisely this attitude that led humanity into the tragedy of the Second World War. From those ashes, the United Nations was born, whose eightieth anniversary was recently celebrated. The UN was established by the determination of fifty-one nations as the center of multilateral cooperation in order to prevent future global catastrophes, for safeguarding peace, defending fundamental human rights and promoting sustainable development.

I would like to draw particular attention to the importance of international humanitarian law. Compliance with this cannot depend on mere circumstances and military or strategic interests. Humanitarian law, in addition to guaranteeing a minimum of humanity during the ravages of war, is a commitment that States have made. Such law must always prevail over the ambitions of belligerents, in order to mitigate the devastating effects of war, also with a view to reconstruction. We cannot ignore that the destruction of hospitals, energy infrastructure, homes and places essential to daily life constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law. The Holy See firmly reiterates its condemnation of any form of involvement of civilians in military operations. It likewise hopes that the international community will remember that the protection of the principle of the inviolability of human dignity and the sanctity of life always counts for more than any mere national interest.

With this in mind, the United Nations has mediated conflicts, promoted development and helped States protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In a world facing complex challenges such as geopolitical tensions, inequalities and climate crises, the UN should play a key role in fostering dialogue and humanitarian support, helping to build a more just future. Efforts are therefore needed to ensure that the United Nations not only reflects the situation of today's world rather than that of the post-war period, but that it is also more focused and efficient in pursuing policies aimed at the unity of the human family instead of ideologies.

The purpose of multilateralism, then, is to provide a place where people can meet and talk, modeled on the ancient Roman Forum or the medieval square. At the same time, in order to engage in dialogue, there needs to be agreement on the words and concepts that are used. Rediscovering the meaning of words is perhaps one of the primary challenges of our time. When words lose their connection to reality, and reality itself becomes debatable and ultimately incommunicable, we become like the two people to whom Saint Augustine refers, who are forced to stay together without either of them knowing the other's language. […]

Today, the meaning of words is ever more fluid, and the concepts they represent are increasingly ambiguous. Language is no longer the preferred means by which human beings come to know and encounter one another. Moreover, in the contortions of semantic ambiguity, language is becoming more and more a weapon with which to deceive, or to strike and offend opponents. We need words once again to express distinct and clear realities unequivocally. Only in this way can authentic dialogue resume without misun-

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"'"Rediscovering the meaning ...'"
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derstandings. This should happen in our homes and public spaces, in politics, in the media and on social media. It should likewise occur in the context of international relations and multilateralism, so that the latter can regain the strength needed for undertaking its role of encounter and mediation. This is indeed necessary for preventing conflicts, and for ensuring that no one is tempted to prevail over others with the mindset of force, whether verbal, physical or military.

We should also note the paradox that this weakening of language is often invoked in the name of freedom of expression itself. However, on closer inspection, the opposite is true, for freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed precisely by the certainty of language and the fact that every term is anchored in the truth. It is painful to see how, especially in the West, the space for genuine freedom of expression is rapidly shrinking. At the same time, a new Orwellian-style language is developing which, in an attempt to be increasingly inclusive, ends up excluding those who do not conform to the ideologies that are fueling it.

Unfortunately, this leads to other consequences that end up restricting fundamental human rights, starting with the freedom of conscience. In this regard, conscientious objection allows individuals to refuse legal or professional obligations that conflict with moral, ethical or religious principles deeply rooted in their personal lives. This may be the refusal of military service in the name of non-violence, or the refusal on the part of doctors and healthcare professionals to engage in practices such as abortion or euthanasia. Conscientious objection is not rebellion, but an act of fidelity to oneself. At this moment in history, freedom of conscience seems increasingly to be questioned by States, even those that claim to be based on democracy and human rights. This freedom, however, establishes a balance between the collective interest and individual dignity. It also emphasizes that a truly free society does not impose uniformity but protects the diversity of consciences, preventing authoritarian tendencies and promoting an ethical dialogue that enriches the social fabric.

In a similar way, religious freedom risks being curtailed. As Benedict XVI recalled, this is the first of all human rights, because it expresses the most fundamental reality of the person. The most recent data show that violations of religious freedom are on the rise, and that sixty-four percent of the world's population suffers serious violations of this right. […]

In its international relations and actions, the Holy See consistently takes a stand in defense of the inalienable dignity of every person. It cannot be overlooked, for example, that every migrant is a person and, as such, has inalienable rights that must be respected in every situation. Not all migrants move by choice, but many are forced to flee because of violence, persecution, conflict and even the effects of climate change, as in various parts of Africa and Asia. In this year, which also marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the International Organization for Migration, I renew the Holy See's hope that the actions taken by States against criminality and human trafficking will not become a pretext for undermining the dignity of migrants and refugees. […]

Despite its centrality, the institution of the family faces two crucial challenges today. On the one hand, there is a worrying tendency in the international system to neglect and underestimate its fundamental social role, leading to its progressive institutional marginalization. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the growing and painful reality of fragile, broken and suffering families, afflicted by internal difficulties and disturbing phenomena, including domestic violence.

The vocation to love and to life, which manifests itself in an important way in the exclusive and indissoluble union between a woman and a man, implies a fundamental ethical imperative for enabling families to welcome and fully care for unborn life. This is increasingly a priority, especially in those countries that are experiencing a dramatic decline in birth rates. Life, in fact, is a priceless gift that develops within a committed relationship based on mutual self-giving and service. […]

Similar considerations can be extended to the sick and to those who are elderly or isolated, who at times struggle to find a reason to continue living. Civil society and States also have a responsibility to respond concretely to situations of vulnerability, offering solutions to human suffering, such as palliative care, and promoting policies of authentic solidarity, rather than encouraging deceptive forms of compassion such as euthanasia.

A comparable reflection can be made concerning the many young people who are forced to confront numerous hardships, including drug addiction. In order to prevent millions of young people around the world from falling victim to substance abuse, concerted efforts are required to eradicate this scourge upon humanity and the drug trafficking that fuels it. Together with these efforts, there must be adequate policies for recovery from addiction, as well as greater investment in human development, education and the creation of employment opportunities.

"We need words once again to express distinct and clear realities unequivocally. Only in this way can authentic dialogue resume without misunderstandings. This should happen in our homes and public spaces, in politics, in the media and on social media. It should likewise occur in the context of international relations and multilateralism, so that the latter can regain the strength needed for undertaking its role of encounter and mediation. This is indeed necessary for preventing conflicts, and for ensuring that no one is tempted to prevail over others with the mindset of force, whether verbal, physical or military."

In light of these challenges, we firmly reiterate that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right. A society is healthy and truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it.

The aforementioned considerations lead me to believe that, in the current context, we are seeing an actual "short circuit" of human rights. The right to freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, religious freedom and even the right to life are being restricted in the name of other so-called new rights, with the result that the very framework of human rights is losing its vitality and creating space for force and oppression. This occurs when each right becomes self-referential, and especially when it becomes disconnected from reality, nature and truth.

[…] •

Source: *https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/january/documents/20260109-corpo-diplomatico.html* of 9 January 2026