

# **Rally to Mark Two Year Anniversary of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

## **Speech by Shane Rattenbury, 24 February 2024**

For those gathering here today, you don't need any reminder about the far-reaching consequences of Russia's genocidal war in Ukraine. But on the second anniversary of Russia's illegal attempt to invade Ukraine, I want to sketch out some of those consequences anyhow, because it is imperative that the courage and unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people continues to be globally supported even more strongly than it has been until now.

The human toll alone is heartbreaking. While the estimates vary, it is clear hundreds of thousands have lost their lives and been injured. Innocent Ukrainian civilians, the soldiers killed in combat – children, parents, brothers, sisters – all loved ones. The tragedy of lost human life sits squarely as a consequence of the decision by Russia to attack Ukraine.

Beyond the direct loss of human life in Ukraine, there are of course other impacts. There is the prospect of famine in the global South, given Ukraine's role as a breadbasket for the world.

The environmental damage caused by events like the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in the middle of last year, and the potential destruction of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant are enormous.

More than 12,000 square kilometres of Ukraine's nature reserves have now become a war zone.

Estimating the total environmental damage inflicted by war is not possible until the war ends, and we have no idea when that will be.

According to preliminary data, it will take Ukraine at least 15 years to recover.

On top of repairing and rebuilding ruined buildings, residential and commercial infrastructure, schools, hospitals and priceless cultural heritage, repairing environmental damage will be an immense task.

Meanwhile, the dysfunction, vacillation and, in some cases active sabotage, in the United States Congress, with regard to continuing support for Ukraine, is sending dangerous signals to dictators, despots and autocrats around the globe. If Ukraine does not prevail in this war, millions more people will face a more dangerous future.

An article I read this week on the war was titled "Not Losing is not enough: it's time for Europe to finally get serious about a Ukrainian victory". The author's central point was that all of Europe is at war, and he went on to say "If we don't face up to the urgency of enabling Ukraine to consolidate its defensive, positions, regroup and ultimately win the war that it is

fighting on behalf of all of us, then a few years down the road we will face an even more direct attack from an emboldened, expansionist Russia.”

That is a clear, powerful and succinct reminder that we cannot simply sit on the sidelines and speak of solidarity with Ukraine, to admire the courage and tenacity, but that we must actively support Ukraine with all the means they need.

I’m by no means the first person to say this, but it bears repeating: Democracy is not a spectator sport.

People and countries who believe in democracy, who value freedom, must stand staunchly with Ukraine, and must actively support them.

To quote just one resident of Ukraine, whose words I came across while thinking about this event today, “I don’t know a single person that is not trying to help with the war effort. Of course, not everyone is a soldier, but everyone I know is either donating to the military, helping to raise money, involved with different charities, helping the army with logistics and supplies, crowdsourcing drones for the armed forces, and whatever else you can imagine.”

The people of Ukraine are showing us all how it can be done, and why it needs to be done.

According to Putin’s plan, Kyiv was supposed to fall within a few days, yet it is still by all accounts a vibrant city where the people continue their daily lives as best they can. In Kyiv and Kharkiv, children are going to school in subways and bunkers.

Australia as a nation, and we as individuals, must maintain and strengthen our commitment to Ukraine, because Russia is not going to back down. Experts warn that nations in the Baltic and Eastern Europe will be in Putin’s sights next if Ukraine does fall.

To the members of the Canberra, Queanbeyan and district communities who have been keeping vigil outside the embassy of the Russian Federation every Saturday and often during the week as well, in partnership with the Friends of Ukraine... keeping vigil continuously since February 2022... You understand all of this very well. Your tenacity is remarkable.

Thank you inviting me to be here today – to stand with you in commemorating the efforts of the brave people of Ukraine, in shining a light on the ongoing injustice driven by Russia, and in standing together in demanding more support for Ukraine.

Slava Ukraini!