

<https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/vienna-summit-for-peace-in-ukraine>

Vienna's International Summit for Peace in Ukraine Issues a Global Call for Action

“The institutions established to ensure peace and security in Europe fell short, and the failure of diplomacy led to war,” attendees said in a joint declaration. “Now diplomacy is urgently needed to end the war before it destroys Ukraine and endangers humanity.”

MEDEA BENJAMIN

Jun 12, 2023 [Common Dreams](#)



During the weekend of June 10-11 in Vienna, Austria, over 300 people representing peace organizations from 32 countries came together for the first time since the Russian invasion of Ukraine to demand an end to the fighting. In a formal conference declaration, participants [declared](#), “We are a broad and politically diverse coalition that represents peace movements and civil society. We are firmly united in our belief that war is a crime against humanity and there is no military solution to the current crisis.”

To amplify their call for a ceasefire, Summit participants committed themselves to organizing Global Weeks of Action—protests, street vigils and political lobbying—during the days of September 30–October 8.

Summit organizers chose Austria as the location of the peace conference because Austria is one of only a few neutral non-NATO states left in Europe. Ireland, Switzerland and Malta are a mere handful of neutral European states, now that previously neutral states Finland has joined NATO and Sweden is next in line. Austria's capital, Vienna, is known as “UN City,” and is also home to the Secretariat of the OSCE (the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), which monitored the ceasefire in the Donbas from the signing of the Minsk II agreement in 2015 until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

“We are firmly united in our belief that war is a crime against humanity and there is no military solution to the current crisis.”

Surprisingly, neutral Austria turned out to be quite hostile to the Peace Summit. The union federation [caved](#) in to pressure from the Ukrainian Ambassador to Austria and other detractors, who smeared the events as a fifth column for the Russian invaders. The ambassador had objected to some of the speakers, including world-renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs and European Union Parliament member Clare Daly.

Even the press club, where the final press conference was scheduled, was canceled at the last minute. The Austrian liberal/left newspaper *Der Standard* piled on, panning the conference both beforehand, during and afterwards, alleging

that the speakers were too pro-Russian. Undaunted, local organizers quickly found other locations. The conference took place in a lovely concert center, and the press conference in a local cafe.

The most moving panel of the conference was the one with representatives from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, who risked their lives to participate in the Summit. Yuri Sheliashenko, secretary-treasurer of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, is unable to leave the country and therefore spoke to attendees from Kyiv via Zoom.

“Like many Ukrainians, I am a victim of aggression of Russian army, which bombs my city, and a victim of human rights violations by the Ukrainian army, which tries to drag me to the meat grinder, denying my right to refuse to kill, to leave the country for my studies in University of Münster ... Think about it: all men from 18 to 60 are prohibited from leaving the country, they are hunted on the streets and forcibly abducted to the army’s serfdom.”

Sheliashenko told the Summit that the Armed Forces of Ukraine had tried to deny conscientious objector status to Ukrainian war resisters, but relented when international pressure demanded that the Ukrainian military recognize rights secured under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Several groups at the Summit pledged to provide support for conscientious objectors from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, and also took up a collection for Ukrainian families lacking access to clean water following the recent destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

Highlights of the Summit also included remarks by representatives from the Global South, who came from China, Cameroon, Ghana, Mexico and Bolivia. Bolivia's Vice President David Choquehuanca inspired the crowd as he spoke of the need to heed the wisdom of indigenous cultures and their mediation practices.

“This weekend should be seen as just the start.”

Many speakers said the real impetus to end this war will come from the Global South, where politicians can see the widespread hunger and inflation that this conflict is causing, and are taking leading roles in offering their services as mediators.

Almost all of Europe was represented, including dozens from Italy, the country mobilizing the continent's largest peace demonstrations, with over 100,000 protesters. Unlike in the United States, where the demonstrations have been small, Italian organizers have successfully built coalitions that include trade unions and the religious community, as well as traditional peace groups. Their advice to others was to narrow and simplify their demands in order to broaden their appeal and build a mass anti-war movement.

The eight-person U.S. delegation included representatives from CODEPINK, Peace in Ukraine, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Veterans for Peace. U.S. retired colonel and diplomat [Ann Wright](#) was a featured speaker, along with former Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who joined remotely.

Despite the uniform bottom line of the participants, which was a call for peace talks, there were plenty of disagreements, especially in the workshops. Some people believed that we

should continue to send weapons while pushing for talks; others called for an immediate end to weapons transfers. Some insisted on calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops, while others believed that should be the result of negotiations, not a pre-condition. Some put more blame on the role of NATO expansion and the interference of the U.S. in Ukraine's internal affairs, while others said the blame belongs exclusively at the doorstep of the Russian invaders.

Some of these differences were reflected in discussions surrounding the final declaration, where there was plenty of back and forth about what should and should not be mentioned. There were strong calls to condemn NATO provocations and the role of the U.S./UK in sabotaging early attempts at mediation. These sentiments, along with others condemning the West, were left out of the final document, which some criticized as too bland. References to NATO provocations that led to the Russian invasion were deleted and [replaced](#) with the following language:

“The institutions established to ensure peace and security in Europe fell short, and the failure of diplomacy led to war. Now diplomacy is urgently needed to end the war before it destroys Ukraine and endangers humanity.”

But the most important segment of the final document and the gathering itself was the call for further actions.

“This weekend should be seen as just the start,” said organizer Reiner Braun. “We need more days of action, more gatherings, more outreach to students and environmentalists, more educational events. But this was a great beginning of global coordination.”

MEDEA BENJAMIN

Medea Benjamin is co-founder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK: Women for Peace. She is the co-author, with Nicolas J.S. Davies, of *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*, available from OR Books in November 2022. Other books include, *"Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran"* (2018); *"Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the U.S.-Saudi Connection"* (2016); *"Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control"* (2013); *"Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart"* (1989), and (with Jodie Evans) *"Stop the Next War Now"* (2005).

[Full Bio >](#)