Human Rights Research League
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UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Center for Geopolitics, Peace and Security (GPS)
The Grey Zone research group

Conference

Ukraine: Braving Aggression

Resilience and Resistance in Times of War

5 November 2026, 10:00-15:00, AUD 2

The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø (UiT)

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Ever since the invasion of Ukraine began, the Russian Federation has committed serious violations of the most fundamental laws governing war and human rights. These atrocities do not appear to be the result of chaos on the battlefield; they are deliberate tactics in a campaign aimed at destroying the Ukrainian people, obliterating their culture, and undermining the principles upon which the United Nations were founded. The war of aggression and the erosion of the international legal order threaten not only Ukraine's survival but could also pose a direct threat to democratic Europe as a whole, including Norway.

We are currently witnessing a turning point ("Zeitenwende", in the words of former Chancellor Olaf Scholz) in world history against the backdrop of global geopolitical upheavals and a fundamentally altered threat landscape. It is therefore imperative to prepare one's own country and population for the fact that, from now on, much more needs to be managed on one's own.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated just how crucial Ukraine's determination, resilience, and resistance—not only on the battlefield but also the resilience of the civilian population—is to a nation's overall resistance. The civilian population has endured immense suffering and nearly constant, direct attacks and abuses over a very long period of time and the enormous strain on the military is palpable, with lack of manpower rendering direly needed rotations impossible.

The importance of adapting the entire society (not just the military) to the new risk and vulnerability landscape has recently been emphasized by the Norwegian government, including by designating 2026 as the Year of Total Defense. The Total Preparedness Report states that in times of war and other exceptional situations, civil society must be prepared to handle serious incidents to a far greater extent on its own and must accept restrictions and interventions in their private lives.

This conference, co-organized by Human Rights Research League, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, UiT's Center for Geopolitics, Peace and Security (GPS), and The Grey Zone research group, aims to provide insights into life in times of war, and to encourage reflection and debate on what individuals are willing to do (or are forced to do) and accept in such exceptional circumstances. It will include roundtables on the geopolitical security situation; on children growing up and surviving in war, facing forced displacement, Russian indoctrination and militarization in the temporarily occupied territories or being constantly exposed to missile and drone attacks by Russia in Ukraine-held territory; on findings from a recent research collaboration between the University of Montreal and Human Rights Research League related to Mental Health in Times of War; and discussions of how to best reconcile the exigencies of Total Defense with life in an open society as we know it.

The event will be accompanied by a photo exhibition (Ukraine: Daily Resistance), featuring photographs by renowned Ukrainian photojournalist Yan Dobronosov, taken since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine and depicting both the front lines and the lives and suffering of the civilian population, thus setting the stage for the ensuing discussions.

This conference will bring together scholars and experts from Norway and abroad, some participating remotely, including Nobel Peace Prize recipient Oleksandra Matviichuk, head of the Ukrainian human rights organization Center for Civil Liberties, who will join us live via video link.

Program:

10:00 Welcome

- Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv (UiT-GPS)
- Tom Syring (Human Rights Research League)

10:15 Keynote

- Oleksandra Matviichuk (Center for Civil Liberties)

10:40 The New Geopolitical Security Situation after Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine and the Particular Challenges in the High North

- *Chair:* Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv (UiT-GPS)

- Sergii Glebov (Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University)
- Laura Janda (UiT)
- Marc Lanteigne (UiT)
- Maryna Rabinovych (UiT)

11:30 Children in War

- *Chair:* Tom Syring (Human Rights Research League)

- Olga Poiedynok (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv)
- June Thorvaldsen Forsberg (UiT-RKBU North)
- Viktoriia Tsymbaliuk (Human Rights Research League)

12:20-12:40 *Coffee Break*

12:40 Mental Health in Times of War and Crisis: Civilian and Military Perspectives

- *Chair:* Tom Syring (Human Rights Research League)

- Ray Aoun (Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth)
- Jon-Håkon Schultz (UiT)
- Nataliia Zaretska (Ukrainian Association for SERE Psychology and Post-Isolation Recovery)

13:30 Total Defense after the Turning Point: How to (Support and) Prepare an Open Society for the New Exigencies of Resilience?

- *Chair:* Laura Janda (UiT)

- Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv (UiT-GPS)
- Volodymyr Kondratiev (Cultural Forces – Armed Forces of Ukraine)
- Jenny Ottosen (Norwegian Civil Defense)

14:20 Concluding Remarks