

When Governments Make Immoral Laws, it Is Our Duty to Disobey Them

By [Dmitry Glukhovsky](#)

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Borodianka, Kyiv Region. **Oleksandr Ratushniak / UNDP Ukraine**

The trial in absentia of exiled Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky began in a Moscow court on March 21. Glukhovsky has been charged with “spreading deliberately false information about the Russian army” over his outspoken criticism of Russia's war in Ukraine. This is his open letter to the court addressing the charges against him.

We need the law to protect the weak from the strong, and to protect the strong from the temptation to target the weak. We need the law to hold criminals accountable and to prevent new crimes. To eradicate the worst in humans and to nurture the best.

There is nothing more important and precious than your life. Your life belongs only to you, and to you alone. No one has the right to take it away from you. No one has the right to hurt those you love. And no one has the right to order you to kill an innocent person.

If a law is passed that forces me to kill the innocent, my duty is to break this law. If a law is passed that forces me to cover up the murder of the innocent, I must violate this law, too. If a law is passed that forbids me from telling the truth about others killing the innocent, I am not obligated to abide by it.

It's irrelevant if the murderers are our own soldiers. It's irrelevant if they were following orders issued by their commanding officer or by the commander-in-chief. A soldier killing an innocent person is a criminal. In fact, he is worse than a regular criminal as he is backed by an enormous organized force that the victim is helpless against.

Cases of torture, rape and extrajudicial killings have all been documented in Ukraine. The bodies — hands tied behind their backs with the white ribbons that Russian soldiers order Ukrainian civilians to wear — have been exhumed. These are facts. This has already happened. You cannot ban the truth. You can only try to conceal it in order to carry on with your killings, torture and rape with total impunity.

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The war against Ukraine is the most destructive and dehumanizing thing that has happened to Russia in recent memory. Without reason or cause, my country invaded the territory of our neighbor that we used to consider a brotherly state. It sent out tanks to seize the Ukrainian capital. It sent planes to bomb Ukrainian cities. It ruined countless human lives. It razed dozens of cities and settlements to the ground. It occupied Ukrainian lands and called them its own with utter disregard for international law.

This war has no justification. Its horror and senselessness are too obvious. But the people who ordered the invasion — Vladimir Putin and his close circle — cannot back down as they are the real criminals and they are afraid of being punished for their crime.

Russia is now ruled by force alone. This breaks people's backs, bends the law and steamrolls the legal system to allow the authorities to continue breaking the backs of the weak and bending the law to their will.

This is why Russia is introducing anti-human laws.

They forbid us from calling the war a war: we are told to say “special military operation” instead. This is done so that they won't have to be held accountable in front of their own citizens about how many Ukrainians have been killed for nothing; and how many Russians lost their lives in vain. To silence anyone who dares speak out. To send them to prison for 10 or 15 years.

They forbid us from calling out the state's lies and from seeing the truth. There are even laws forcing us to say that proven facts are “deliberately false information.” They have allowed the killings of the innocent. They ordered us to cover up their crimes, to free criminals. To encourage criminals to kill again.

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Those in power are giving us a crash course in how to believe that unimaginable evil is normal, even welcome. They are trying to force us to abandon our basic moral principles, which we have been taught from childhood by our parents. They are forcing us to get used to lies and murders.

There is a reason for this ban on speaking the truth and this demand to proclaim lies in public. The reason is to rid a new generation of Russians of any self-respect. To break their dignity, to make them give up on themselves in fear of unfair punishment, and to make them renounce their moral code.

The war against Ukraine is the most destructive and dehumanizing thing that has happened to Russia in recent memory. But, unable to dehumanize Ukrainians, the Russian government is dehumanizing its own citizens. The scale of destruction in Ukraine can be seen with the naked eye, even from space. While the destructive processes launched by a government obsessed with self-preservation in the soul of the Russian nation, in the very fabric of our society, are unseen for now, they threaten the very existence of Russia itself.

In order to save themselves, the Russian government is destroying its once beautiful and prosperous neighbor. But it is also destroying Russia, my homeland. There is nothing I can do to stop it, but I cannot stay silent.

I am confident that I am telling the truth by exposing the crimes of the Russian army in Ukraine. I am confident that the Defense Ministry and the Russian leadership are lying and have been lying for some time in an attempt to justify this terrible, senseless war. I am confident that I am not the one committing the crime against Russia and its future here — they are.

There are certain laws that no one must ever abide by. And I won't adhere to them, either.

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