

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 1st Prize]

YOU CANNOT KILL PEOPLE.

(Original)

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(Age 20, Russia)

It has always been so clear and obvious for me. An axiom that does not require any proof. Fire is hot, ice is cold, every life matters. Something you do not need to explain to others.

However, it changed about three months ago. As the country I live in started the WAR.

The WAR. It comes out of nowhere and hits you on the head. Pain for people who are dying and losing their families and home, despair over not being able to stop it, fear of how it ends all at once permeate you, making you want to hide, to forget, to imagine it is fiction. But it is real. And it turns the world you live in upside down.

The values you have always believed in, the values you have cared about, the values that have been the cornerstone of your life principles seem to have all been turned into ashes by that cruel destructive fire called WAR.

Peace.

Since childhood I was taught the importance of living in peace. Every person remembers the great price that was paid during the Second World War. Despite all the cruelty and violence, dedication and courage of our ancestors gave us a chance for a peaceful future.

However, the tragedy that is happening right now gives Victory Day a new meaning. It seems impossible to me to celebrate it knowing that at the exact same time people of the neighboring country fight and die for clear blue sky above their heads. The great day in honor of the memory of the fallen heroes is filled with hypocrisy and falsehood as the person who ordered to bomb a city lays flowers to its stele, as the festive fireworks cannot coexist with rumblings of the batteries in my mind.

Freedom of speech.

You may ask what can be even worse than that? I can tell you. It is inability to openly speak about what is going on. The illusion of free speech can be simply revealed as you try to share your opinion. One "wrong" word – *war* – can become a spark that will lead to an explosion. We are not allowed to call *it* that way. We are not allowed to say "no" to *it*. We are not allowed to want peace.

I got used to live in the world where people can share their opinions with each other without being punished for that. I remember listening to different points of view in the media. It is over now. All the people, who do not agree with the government have been called "foreign agents". It is tantamount to strangulation. I am literally feeling a rope tightening harder on my neck, robbing me of the opportunity to breathe.

Human life.

Why are people looking for excuses for killing innocent people? Why do they believe somebody has a right to destroy others' lives? Genocide is tragic and gruesome and must not be justified.

Nevertheless, I still have to prove it to others.

"You really do not understand? People are dying!" I am screaming at the top of my lungs, tears threatening to make their way down my face.

"That is their own fault."

"Have not you watched TV?"

"It is politics, it is never that simple."

Every word hits me worse than a bullet, leaving more gaping holes in my damaged heart. Confidence and cold indifference in their eyes make my soul and my mind cry in horror. Has the world gone mad? Do I miss something?

No. I do not. I am sure of that. And as the world I was used to begins to collapse the faith I have helps me to hold on, helps me to put the pieces together.

Somebody may tell I sound naive, but I believe that good triumphs over evil. I know I am not alone. I trust together we can change the situation. Peace, freedom to speak, people's lives. This is something I stand up for. These are *my values*.

And I am right because it is just so simple –

YOU CANNOT KILL PEOPLE.