

For my foreign colleagues,

The worst-case scenario, which nobody could imagine, is now the reality in Ukraine. On the night of February 23-24, Russia began a large-scale military intervention, undeclared war, in my country. This war was ongoing staying half-frozen for many years, since 2014 when Russia occupied the Crimea peninsular and a part of the Donbas region. But now Putin shockingly trying to conquer the entire Ukraine. The extent of the civil disaster can't be expressed in words. All regions of Ukraine were attacked. Our cities are being constantly subjected to bomb strikes, by aviation, ballistic missiles and multiple rocket launchers. Columns of numbering hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles crossed the Ukrainian border. Putin is insane in his frenetic will to take over the Ukraine. He is leading the largest country, which citizens are blindfolded by the state propaganda. I could not imagine that something like that is possible in the 21st century. This is beyond any understanding. Nobody could imagine such an inhuman tragedy nearing the scenario of the WW2 and impacting the entire Europe, not limited to Ukraine, Russia as well as Belarus. The open letter of signed by 165 Nobel laureates compared that Russian aggression with the infamous attack of Hitler's Nazi Germany on Poland in 1939 and on the Soviet Union in 1941.

The Putin's plan to take over the country fell short of expectations facing firm resistance of Ukrainian people ready to fighting till the very end. A young soldier destroyed a bridge blowing it up and killing himself in the attempt to stop tanks nearing the town Genichesk. Putin's Blitzkrieg failed. Six days after the beginning of the war, none of the major cities was captured. Several towns such as Okhtirka or Volnovakha (with a population of 50 and 20 thousand people) were wiped out by the invaders for not willing to surrender. The same is going to happen to the citizens country's largest cities resisting to give up under incessant rocket strikes aiming to break peoples' spirit by any means, including vacuum bombs. In contrast to reports claiming that the war is only targeted on the military infrastructure, strikes equally hit civilians. Hardly anybody in Europe believed that the much smaller Ukraine could resist the powerful enemy even a single day. Yet, about two-thirds of the Russian's military equipment, dozens of aircrafts, hundreds of vehicles, has already been destroyed by defenders. The war

will strongly hit Russian citizens as the war's toll is already nearing 8,000 soldiers' lives, and even more were captured or insured. The impact of the war will hit Russian citizens but not Putin himself. He is steadily driving his country into a collapse being safe in a bunker in the Urals. His violent desire to take over the Ukraine is turning into intensified attacks on civilians and ever-growing numbers of deaths. Would he consider deploying nuclear weapons when Ukraine will keep resist him?

None of us can convincingly answer the last question. This makes the war not a regional conflict but a global problem. This is neither an ethnic conflict, nor a conflict around disputed territories. Cities with predominantly Russian-speaking population are being bombed like any other city in the Ukraine. Nobody is safe. This war is against the entire civilized world and we need your support more than ever. We appreciate political support and condolences as well as worldwide anti-war demonstrations. Economic sanctions against Russia are stronger than ever. Strong sanctions banning technical exchange, goods, and fossil fuels are extremely important to deplete funds fueling the war. But our country also needs modern weapons, ammunition and fuel. We want and can defend ourselves, but we need this kind of help because is crucial for our people to stop the invasion and, literally, to survive.

Many of you think that science is out of politics. This might be true to a certain extent. However, the war and deaths do not belong to a sustainable politic. This is an extreme and deadly situation, for my country, literally deadly. No cause or grievance justifies such death toll. Soon after the war had begun, we asked our Russian colleagues, mycologists, to be active and help us to stop this meaningless, violent and bloody war. A few responded with support but many others are still blinded by propaganda supporting this war. Meager anti-war protests in Russia do not change the situation as the vast majority either stay silent or offensive. No sustainable development, research and networking is possible under these circumstances. Therefore, **I ask you to act consistent with the economic embargo and extend it to the cultural and scientific fields, and not to joint scientific projects, publications with scientists from Russia.** I speak to funding agencies, including reviewers from the international research community, to drop support for research bilateral grants with Russia. **I ask you to**

contribute to the isolation of the aggressor country, Russia, as long as its army is killing people in my country.

You know me as a broad mycologist and curator of the fungal herbarium in Kharkiv – CWU (Myc). I co-authored a few publications with you in the past. Some more cooperation projects are yet unfinished. Now, I was forced to leave my home in Kharkiv. My family, my sick mother, my wife, my son, my cat and myself are now refugees. We found a temporary asylum at our friends' place in Ternopil. The university, laboratories and the collections are now in the past and probably do not exist anymore. Any research work is not feasible. There is a great uncertainty ahead of me. I have no military skills, so I do what I can do. Here, I advocate to you and ask you to help.

Three days ago I asked the International Mycological Association to circulate my letter. After much discussion, I was kindly advised to soften the written text and make it more personal. My letter is indeed emotional and this is because of these extreme circumstances, the war. Given the circumstances, I have to address each of you personally. The official position of IMI, published on the website of the organization, greatly disappointed Ukrainian mycologists. We need support more than ever. Long ineffective discussions and carefully expressed deep concerns do not help to solve the problem, literally save our lives. Time is running out for us as we might not survive the next attack. We urgently need more action, even a small action like **distributing this my letter**.

I assure you that we do not panic or show any signs of hysteria. We understand our present situation as we have no place to retreat. This is terrifying but this is our land and we will fight for it. Everyone does what they can do best. The truth is on our side and we will definitely win! With your support.

Yours,
Alex Akulov



Destroyed Russian armored vehicles in Kyiv suburbs



One of the buildings of Kharkiv National University caught in fire



Destroyed maternity hospital in Zhytomyr



Residential quarters of Kharkiv today