

Let me first of all thank the organizers of today's conference for inviting me to address you this morning at the opening of your conference on health and justice for torture survivors in Ukraine.

But some of you might ask yourself the question: What does the ambassador of Denmark have to do with health and justice for torture survivors in Ukraine?

Isn't that an issue for medical professionals, civil society representatives and lawyers – rather than for diplomats? Diplomats are supposed to take care of bilateral relations and official contacts at the highest level.

The theme of your conference does however have a lot to do with Danish-Ukrainian relations. Because the most important component of the Danish-Ukrainian relationship is that we share the same fundamental values: Freedom, liberty, democracy and human rights.

They form the very bedrock of our societies. Those values were the values that Ukrainians fought for in 2014 during the revolution of dignity.

Torture is one of the most serious violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This is why Denmark has been particularly engaged in the global fight to end the use of torture. During four decades, Denmark has worked tirelessly to build international support for UN resolutions on torture and to investigate member states that breach them.

Since 2014 Denmark has also been leading a small group of countries from different continents that work together in the Convention against Torture Initiative, focusing on making the UN convention against torture universally ratified and better implemented by the year 2024.

Danish civil society organizations are likewise at the forefront of the fight against torture and support local organizations around the globe.

The most prominent example is today's co-organizer, DIGNITY, the Danish Institute against torture. For decades DIGNITY has been a leading civil society force in the global fight against torture, working in 25 countries worldwide in close partnerships with human rights defenders, civil society organizations and, where possible, local authorities.

Over the years, DIGNITY has built strong partnerships in Ukraine with national and international actors in order to further its vision of a world free of torture.

With EU funding DIGNITY has been able to enhance the capacity of the Ukrainian legal and health professionals in documenting cases of torture and establish an effective referral system and real help for survivors.

DIGNITY has helped Ukrainian counterparts address complex needs resulting from trauma and spread the access to high-quality rehabilitation for survivors.

This project has also given birth to DIGNITY's collaboration with the Ukrainian Ombudsman, proudly supported by the Danish government via the UNDP as implementing partner.

The armed conflict in Ukraine's East and the occupation of Crimea - both conflicts ongoing for more than 7 years - have made the problem of torture and severe human rights violations especially acute for Ukraine. That is why the presence of a strong and experienced actor such as DIGNITY with a global outreach and a yearlong experience in the field is ever more vital here.

Thus, the fight against torture is very much part of Danish-Ukrainian relations. I hope that your conference will be an important milestone in the fight against torture in Ukraine and a good example of how Denmark and Ukraine are working hand in hand for the fundamental values that we share.

In this context I wish extend warm thanks to the European Union for its financial support for the program. I am proud that DIGNITY has been chosen as the implementing partner for the program and that you work closely with two Ukrainian NGOs – Human Rights Protection Group – SICH - and Forpost Mental Health and Trauma Therapy Center. I also wish to thank the UNDP for your important role.

Finally I wish to express my sincere appreciation of the support of the Ukrainian authorities. I am pleased to note that the department for torture investigation of the prosecutor's office is part of the conference. The National Human Rights Strategy for Ukraine was approved in March 2021. Your presence today, Mr. Belousov is proof that words and political declarations are translated into action.

I hope that the cooperation with Ukrainian authorities can be further expanded, for instance by reaching out to law enforcement agencies and prison authorities. I am ready to facilitate such outreach via the ministry of justice, which is a close partner for us in other areas.

The broad participation in your conference is also a sign that the epic battle against torture can only be won if public authorities, civil society and international partners work together.

Denmark is proud to be part of that process together with our Ukrainian and international partners. I wish you a productive conference.