

An Open Letter to Language Teachers in Russia

Dear Russian colleagues,

Greetings from Japan! I'm writing today to share my worries about your safety, to express my sympathy for your situation, to appeal for your help and to broach a difficult topic - the "crisis" in Ukraine.

Like you, many of us were shocked by the brutal military attacks ordered last week by your president, Vladimir Putin. It's still hard to believe that he decided to launch an illegal war on a neighboring country just days after an international event - the Olympic Games - devoted to world peace. This unprovoked assault has plunged Europe into a senseless war, has brought needless death, suffering and destruction, and has led to a mass exodus of traumatized Ukrainian refugees fleeing in terror from invading Russian forces.

For decades, Russian teachers have done amazing work to promote language skills, cross-cultural communication and international understanding. It has been an honor for me to work with many of you – in Moscow, Vladivostok, Japan and at conferences around the world - to explore ways that language teaching can contribute to peace, tolerance and a brighter future for the world's people. Vladimir Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and his war against its citizens contravene all the values and ideals that you – and we language teachers overseas - have worked so hard for over the years. Instead of a brighter future, his actions are dragging us back to a dark age of war, brutality and violence symbolized by Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini.

All of you are valued colleagues, friends and educators. I feel terrible about the awful position that your president's invasion has put you in. The death and destruction in Ukraine must be incredibly painful for you to watch. Many of you have friends and relatives in Ukraine, have taught Ukrainian students and know Russian students who have been drafted to fight – and kill - in an immoral war of aggression they never asked for.

As was only to be expected, your president's violent invasion of Ukraine has led to a global backlash including punishing sanctions, international isolation and intense feelings of hatred directed towards your country. All of us outside Russia are very aware of – and incredibly sad about – the great pain and suffering that these will cause you and other innocent Russians – all because of the actions of one man, your president.

Language teachers and students around the world are working hard to stop this cruel war, assist the innocent victims in Ukraine and prevent more deaths of Russian soldiers. My contribution is an "Emergency Bulletin" for educators (see below) that features websites, videos and teaching resources on the crisis in Ukraine. Feel free to share, forward or post this to your friends, colleagues and students via e-mail, websites or social media.

These are difficult times. I realize that it's hard for you to speak out against this war or take action to stop it. But stop it we must. If we allow Mr. Putin's brutal invasion to continue, this will not only destroy Ukraine, its cities and its people, but also blacken the reputation of Russia, make your country a pariah state and cause Russians to be hated for decades to come. Every action counts and anything you can do will be appreciated.

- For those of you who are standing up against this war (by speaking out, attending protests, signing petitions...), I salute your bravery and commend your actions in working for peace in dangerous circumstances
- For those of you unsure of what to do or afraid to act, I urge you to get involved. This brutal war will only come to an end when all of us take action. We can't just sit back, do nothing and watch people die, cities be destroyed and see lives shattered Please follow your conscience. Take action and join us in this fight.
- For those of you who support this war, I beg you to reconsider your stance. I know this isn't easy given the way your government has poisoned people's minds with censorship, lies and propaganda. But, please look again at the photos of dead children, bombed hospitals, terrified citizens and traumatized refugees - all caused by your president's "special operation". If, after all this, you still believe in this illegal war and continue to support it, then please remember this: The world is watching. We are taking names. We will not forget.

In the midst of this cruel war and humanitarian disaster, our thoughts are with you. We care about you, worry about you and want to help. You are also innocent victims of your president's reckless attack. Please reach out, if you can, to contact us and let us know how we can work together to end this immoral war and restore peace.

One of my proudest memories is working with Russian teachers to organize our annual *Asian Youth Forum* (AYF) dedicated to peace, friendship and international understanding. I strongly believe that the actions we take now to stop this war will help to bring back a world where young Russians, Ukrainians, Asians and others can join together in peace to share the joys of international youth exchange that we experienced at AYF.

In anger and in sorrow, in friendship and in hope,

Kip Cates (Professor Emeritus, Tottori University, Japan) <kipcates24@gmail.com>

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To language teachers around the world:

- Feel free to forward this open letter to your friends, colleagues, teachers, schools and associations in Russia and elsewhere.
- Feel free also to use it as a basis for writing letters of your own to send to your Russian contacts and others.
- **Bulletin #3:** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16aughWsHgTIWJIWvCUz3PNTnWibGRQg3/view?usp=sharing>
- **14 Things We Can Do To Help:** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k8UO5bJmOPiQ6tZrYOdJf142W6WIRFLb/view>
- **Three Teaching Activities:** https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RS_1Z51mwmEghw85n1uoiqmmWQ8Oxx5K/view?usp=sharing