

How can it be?

The woman sits in the front row of the town hall meeting, her hands clasped in pleading mode. The chair of the commission panel on stage invites her to speak.

She asks the commissioners, **'How can it be that an aggressive neighbouring country can roll tanks into our lands and claim that *we* are the aggressors? How can that be?'**

She lifts her diary of handwritten notes and waves it in frustration,

'Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, as *we* shelter in the cellars,' she says, **'the enemy missiles smash into our houses, our electricity, our water, our factories and fields ... and it is *our* fault? How can that be?'**

The audience is silent, listening, waiting.

The commissioners are attentive. Their role is to collect and verify tales of crimes against humanity to use in future international court actions.

'I am an educated woman with a university degree,' she continues. **'I was our town historian as well as holding down a responsible position in our local government. I am a mother ... and now a widow. I am tired and no longer understand the world around me.'**

The lady beside her puts her arm around the weary shoulders and passes another tissue to replace the one crumpled in the woman's free hand.

She continues. **'My husband, my parents and two of my children are dead from the attacks. I have buried them ... and they even bomb the graveyard! Neighbours have been tortured and killed. Our town is a wasteland of ruined buildings ... and it is *my* fault?'**

'My fault for being born, my fault for being who I am, my fault for being here ... how can it be?'

'What sort of reverse logic can justify innocent little me ... and millions like me ... being blamed for invaders coming violently into our land – uninvited, unwelcome, unjustified and unexpected – to kill, to plunder, to impose their repressive will? And then blame *us* for causing their assault on all that is precious to us. This is a madness!'

'We have done nothing to that country. Our only fault is that they want to take over our lands, our lives ... and impose their ideas onto us. For us to be their slaves ... or be gone! How can this be?'

'They are criminals, violent criminals ... and so they accuse *us* of being criminals – just to distract and confuse – when we have done nothing but live our quiet lifestyles.'

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'They tell absolute lies about us and proclaim themselves as saviour saints – the complete opposite of the truth.'

'The truth is checkable and their lies are provable ... yet they saturate all the communications with their vile hate talk ... and ignore any semblance of real justice.'

'In their eyes, we are a nuisance to their expansionist desires. We are in the way! Therefore, we must be denigrated and vilified, tortured and killed until they have created ruined desolation where we once lived. And then they will brazenly call that peace! And any survivors will be subjugated to their will.'

'How can this be happening?'

'All my tears have been shed. There is nothing left. But I am a mother and I have a responsibility to protect my remaining daughter ... to keep her safe from harm, to help her grow into adult independence ... and then to face what? This madness?'

She crumples in her seat as other supporting arms reach out to her.

'I'm sorry.' Her voice is cracking. 'I have difficulty finding my words. But **I need to share what is happening ... so that others might know.** I owe that to those who can no longer speak.'

'I understand that much of the history books is the narrative of those who were in power ... but the quiet tales of the powerless are passed down verbally through the generations. I hope what I am saying can resonate with some of you ... and you can tell others what you have heard and seen.'

'For me, I'm just drained. Death would be a welcome release but that cannot be ... I have a responsibility to protect my remaining daughter ... otherwise ...'

'Thank you for listening. I must go now!'

There is an eerie silence as the woman is supported from her seat towards an exit.

The commissioners express their thanks for her testimony. When, suddenly and spontaneously, a wave of clapping begins in the hall and the audience rises from their seats, row by row, to acknowledge and encourage the bravery of the woman ... for the hardship she has endured and for being here in this hall to tell her story.

Eventually, the audience resume their seats and the chief commissioner on the stage says, 'A poignant story. We will support her ... be assured ... as we try to do with so many who are traumatised by such experiences.'

'Sadly, there are dozens of countries around the world where such tales can be, and are being, told about similar experiences of innocent people in shock at the irrational violence'

being visited upon them ... in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and in many of the former colonies of expansionist powers.

He continues. 'The challenge is first to document the actual evidence and perspectives such as those from the lady who has just spoken ... because **the perspectives of the invaders are** as she described – **the opposite of rationality**. They say they are entitled to invade or to colonise or to enslave using spurious justifications that bear no basis in valid treaties or truth. They distort the historical claims for ownership. That's why the international courts of justice have commissioned panels like ours to collect the evidence and stories for the time when the culprits can be held accountable.'

A man calls out. '**So, will they be held accountable?**'

'Indeed,' replies the commissioner. 'There comes a time, even after the worst of criminal abuse, particularly by nations, when the collective of world societies will react to the grave responsibility of righting the wrong against world peace. In Robert Jackson's famous speech in the Palace of Justice at the Nuremberg trials in 1945, *The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilisation cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated.*

'Yes. They will be held accountable. **The survival of civilisation as we know it depends on the ability to apply the power of reason to judgements**, based on evidence collected by commissions like this.'

'**But they are more powerful than we are! How can you bring them to trial?**'

'Accurate knowledge is power. Checkable truth is power. Sharing understanding brings support together ... alliances of nations to resist and overcome the bullies.

'These invaders intimidate by threats. Quiet peaceable citizens avoid conflict ... until the tanks roll down the streets and missiles explode in the dwellings. The knowledge we are collecting is building the resistance to the bully's terror and, in time, it will bring them all to reckoning in the International Courts of Justice.

'It is not a perfect process ... but as the understanding of factual truth is shared, the alliances of resistance grow. No doubt, there is pain ahead ... as has happened throughout recorded history. But by **clever asserting of the will of the masses – rather than the random irrationality of the power-hungry dictators – together we will restore peace and respect on this troubled planet** ... and evil-doers will be purged by the international legal foundation first established in the Nuremberg Charter of 1946.'