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Andrei Sakharov Prize Talk: For Peace and Human Rights

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War means the total abolition of human rights, first and foremost the right to life. Physicists have a tradition, born from the horrors of the II. World War and their scientific understanding of what wars in the era of nuclear or thermonuclear weapons would mean. The Russel-Einstein manifesto and the Pugwash movement aimed for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, and of war as a social institution to settle international disputes. Andrey Sakharov was a bearer of this tradition and of human rights. Today we seem to have become inured to undeclared wars, which do not abide by any bounds. All around us, especially in the Middle East, first in Iraq, then in Syria, in Yemen and Libya, civil wars, proxy wars, wars for the hegemony of strategic resources, are raging between governments, coalitions, rebel forces, ISIL Apart from an estimated 4 million dead in the first Gulf War and the Iraq war, now Syria is being torn to pieces and plundered by foreign intervention, occupation and local warlords. At least 6 million Syrians have become refugees in Turkey and Jordan. Tens of thousands of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have perished in the Mediterranean. The human, cultural and ecological devastation is horrendous. Meanwhile weapons exporters are having a heyday. This is unconscionable. Scientists must once again raise their voices for peace and human rights. Indeed, the international scientific community showed admirable solidarity with the Academics for Peace, the two thousand signatories of the statement We shall not be party to this crime, who were prosecuted for protesting the armed intervention against Kurdish civilians in South Eastern Turkey. The Constitutional Court finally declared the statement to be within the limits of freedom of speech; the sentences, which included prison terms, are now being overturned.