

## **Opening of the exhibition « Women Against War »**

21 April 2026, Hemicycle Lobby, Strasbourg

Speech by Ms Petra Bayr  
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with deep emotion that we open today this exhibition dedicated to women who have stood up and spoken out against war. I had the opportunity to see this exhibition in Vienna on a cold winter day.

Across times and continents, women have often been among the first to feel, in their very bodies and in their daily lives, the profound injustice that war and dictatorship represent. An injustice that does not stop at the front lines, but enters homes, disrupts families, and constrains personal choices.

Today, this injustice is tragically visible in the war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine. Millions of women of Ukraine have seen their lives turned upside down overnight - forced to flee, separated from their loved ones, exposed to violence.

But there are also women in Russia who have stood up against the patriarchal drift of their society against this war, which represents its tragic culmination. Through acts that are sometimes modest yet require immense courage in the face of disproportioned repression, they have voiced this sense of injustice and refused to remain silent.

This sense of injustice is not new. It echoes that experienced by so many women throughout history.

Let us think of the mothers of the disappeared in Latin America, who, during times of dictatorship, refused silence and came together to demand truth and justice. Let us think of the women of the Balkans in the 1990s, confronted with violence and the fragmentation of their communities, yet who continued to work towards reconciliation. Let us also think of African women who, in contexts of prolonged conflict, have been both victims and agents of peace.

More recently, let us think of women in Iran, imprisoned or killed for claiming their rights. Let us think of Afghan women, who continue to speak out, even when deprived of their voice in the public space.

In all these contexts, a shared conviction emerges - war is profoundly unjust, and this injustice is often perceived with particular clarity by women, because they experience its most concrete and enduring human consequences. Often, sexual violence.. We know about the high proportion of women among civilian victims.

But this exhibition does not merely denounce. It pays tribute.

It pays tribute to those who have refused to yield to fatalism. To those who have transformed their indignation into action.

Even today, this commitment continues. Through feminist initiatives (Feminist Anti-War Resistance initiative), rooted at the grassroots level, women's movements continue to resist, to organise, to speak out and to mobilise - both in exile and on the ground, in Russia. Their actions, sometimes discreet yet deeply transformative, remind us that resistance is measured not only by its visibility, but by its perseverance.

Thank you.