

PM remarks at the Sir Winston Churchill Leadership Award ceremony: 26 July 2022

President Zelenskyy,

Your Excellency Ambassador Prystaiko,

ladies and gentlemen, it's great to see you here today.

It was at 4 o'clock on the morning of 24th February 2022 that you called me Volodymyr to say that the incredible had happened, that insanity had broken out, and Russian tanks were surging across the frontier of a sovereign independent country in Europe and cruise missiles were exploding all over Ukraine.

And in that moment of supreme crisis, you faced a test of leadership that was, in its way, as severe as Churchill's challenge in 1940.

As the Russians launched their lightning assault on Kyiv, you knew that you were at the top of their target list, and you knew that squads of killers were hunting for you.

And you could have left Kyiv, you could have said – and it would have been hard to contradict you – that the survival of the Ukrainian state required the survival of the President.

But of course Volodymyr you did none of those things: you chose to stay in Kyiv, among the Ukrainian people, just as Churchill stayed in London in 1940.

And when one world leader offered you a way out, you replied "I need ammunition, not a ride" and I think Churchill would have cheered – and he would probably have wept too – because he was often moved to tears at the sheer moral and physical courage you showed in those grim weeks.

Now I would like to think that when Ukraine's tragedy triggered a global outpouring of support, and when dozens of countries came forward to supply your heroic armed forces with weapons, and scores of nations imposed sanctions on Russia, and almost three quarters of the entire membership of the United Nations voted to condemn the invasion, I would like to think this was an inevitable reaction, because never in my lifetime in international affairs has there been a clearer case of right against wrong.

But the truth is that it wasn't inevitable, that reaction wasn't inevitable, and the global wave of solidarity for Ukraine was, in large measure generated by your own personal articulation of the cause.

Your defiance, your dignity, your unfailing good humour has moved millions,

and as you stand against barbarism, you've become a symbol of the heroism of the Ukrainian people.

You've addressed so many parliaments that I've lost count and you brought both sides of the House of Commons to their feet, something that Churchill would surely have envied, and I can imagine his spirit walking with you, silently urging you on, encouraging you through every ordeal, jabbing the way ahead with his walking stick and perhaps marvelling at your superb indifference to physical danger, something that he himself understood.

And like Churchill you've understood that you are not yourself the lion, the Ukrainian people are the lion, but you have been called upon to give the roar, the roar of freedom against tyranny, good against evil, of light against darkness.

And you have delivered that roar magnificently and that's why it was such a huge stroke of good fortune that you should have been in office at this time of crisis for Ukraine and the world.

And inspired by your leadership, I know not just that Ukraine can win but Ukraine will win, and when that day comes, as it will, Ukraine will rise and take its place, as a free sovereign and independent nation.

Thank you Volodymyr for everything you have done and Slava Ukraini.

Our physical separation notwithstanding, it gives me great pleasure Volodymyr to present you with this award.