Wars have been part of the human experience since the beginning of time. Wars that repeat the same factors: short-term interests, irresponsible leaderships, excluding and regressive ideologies, and victims. Above all other considerations, what remains is the pain and the incurable wounds of the victims, such as the more than sixty million people who suffered in World War II, the biggest expression of barbarism we human beings have been able to carry out. This is true after even after everything goes away. When everything changes, when interests become open, subject to deliberation, cooperative and intergenerational, when human beings go back to coexist, the victims are still there. Family, friends, colleagues and neighbours of anonymous citizens that lost their future all of a sudden.

Today, we are here, first of all, for these people, because we stand with Ukraine, just like we stand with Syria, Yemen, Gaza, Israel, Sahara, every day. And with many others. Above and beyond any other reason, we are here for the victims in these countries that are facing the consequences of the delirium of what human beings capable.

However, it is not only for this reason that we meet here today, but because this is a university. We are not at the university to understand the world. The university has to change the world. Even when the night goes darker, when images are terrifying, testimonies are harder, and when the bloodiest statistics make it hard for us to think straight, the university has to be a place for hope. Not a pointless and mystical hope but the hope given by science and humanities with their methodologies, validity criteria and fields of debate. The university is and has to be, specially when the present shows us a future which is getting darker, the main place where generations must learn to build a better future.

It is true that human beings are capable of doing the worst harm. At the University, not only do we see it, but we address it -we provide society and institutions with tools for a better understanding and management-, and we try to alleviate the terrible consequences.

But human beings are also capable of the best. The University of Barcelona gives training to thousands of students every day. These people will become our next doctors, teachers, attorneys, engineers. And many other
professions that help us to go forward. These will also be our politicians. They will build the society in which situations like today’s won’t happen. Not the conflicts, because they are unavoidable as long as there is pluralism. We will continue to be people with different interests, values, aspirations and dreams.

Now: how these conflicts come up, on what terms, and how they are managed is a responsibility for each generation. We have experienced the Balkans, the Gulf War, Rwanda, Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Falklands and many other massacres. Clearly, we have failed as a generation. I will not deny there was progress, but as long as there is a single war, such as the one caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I think we can say we failed as a generation of human beings.

This is why it is important for the university to continue, and even more during these times, to be the place where science shows that we can live in a different world. We are doing it with the pandemic. We will do it again with any challenge we face as human beings. It is our job, our responsibility, our commitment and our passion.

I want to make a special mention. We are here to defend the victims in Russia too. Russian citizens who are undergoing the deep injustice of living in a country that does not respect human rights. A country that decided to send troops to conquer the area inhabited by citizens from another country, against their will. A country where expressing your disagreement on a political decision can send you to prison.

If there are people suffering, the university will never be a place that divides or separates us from them. The Russian people, just like any other people, are welcome here, as it could not be otherwise, as evidence and data on their reception in Spain. May it also be in Europe.

There is no need to go into considerations on the ideological distribution of the Russian, Ukrainian or any other citizenship: the University of Barcelona will never make such distinctions with victims of a war.

I want to end the speech with this statement, a call to the scientific community, to my colleagues, the rector in ACUP and the Catalan and Spanish systems, the Catalan Minister for Research and Universities, the representative of the Barcelona City Council, to my friends, the deans of the University of Barcelona. Also, to all the colleagues of these institutions, the Catalan, Spanish and international scientific community: let’s coordinate. We are facing a big challenge, and the universities have tools to contribute and provide a response in many fields. We can do it on our own, it is possible, and we are showing it with a great effort. But it is not enough.
We can do so much more if we do it together. With this spirit, I present five measures to be implemented as soon as possible:

1. Establishing a permanent response table with released people to provide a joint response to the situation in Ukraine.

2. Setting a special budget, apart from the general budget, that allows the arrival of students and employees of the involved universities to continue their personal and academic lives here.

3. Jointly articulating an online university for Ukraine so that those students whose activity was interrupted can, at least, follow the general issues that the Catalan universities show to keep the academic tone. The attendance should be certified so that their curriculums are accredited.

4. We must coordinate our community so that it can welcome people who have fled terror.

5. Facilitating residency procedures for people fleeing the war so that they do not suffer any discrimination.

In the same spirit, I will send a proposal to the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE), to the Ministry of Research and Universities, the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and to any other institution that may be of transcendental importance for us to be collectively useful universities. I want to finish with a direct and clear message to the international university:

I want to end my speech by recalling the transcendental role of universities in the return of peace and the maintenance of dialogue. We do not have bombs or soldiers, we only have the strength of science and the impact of words: powerful tools. Very powerful. Words are so strong that they reach every place of the world. Knowledge, sooner or later, prevails over lies and darkness. War is the darkness that does not announce the light. Science and knowledge are the light that never goes out.

Universities are generators of light. The University of Barcelona has been living in light and freedom for 560 years [LIBERTAS PERFUMDET OMNIA LUCE], although we have had moments in which darkness has been imposed upon us. For this reason, I want to ask all the university professors of the world to make use of the strength of their words every day and dedicate five minutes to remembering the barbarity of war, the unfairness of aggression, the perversion of weapons. Please spread this message in the classrooms, our students are the future we will share. A
strong and clear message that marks the course of humanity from university classrooms. It is our job as teachers, as scientists, as a democratic community. An incessant, frenetic, shared echo that sounds like a symphony of solidarity and rationality supporting peace.