



Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association

From Гласность to the Українська Steppe

**Thomas R. Benke, President
May 21, 2024**

Good afternoon my name is Thomas Benke. I'm President of the Portland Khabarovsk Sister City Association.

Unfortunately, my presentation today will not be as bright as some you will have seen. But I want to speak very briefly about our history with our Russian (sister) city from Glasnost to the Ukrainian step. And I want to briefly present to you a summary of our Platform for Peace.

Opinion: Portland should maintain sister-city relationship with Khabarovsk

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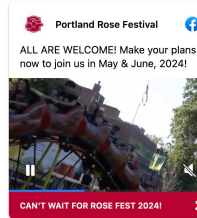


Buildings line the Amur River in Khabarovsk, Russia, in the country's Far East. Portland should not abandon its long-standing relationship with the Russian city, despite a request from Ukraine's president, the author writes. AP Photo/Daniel Kozin AP Photo/Daniel Kozin



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As you've seen, we've elected to maintain our Sister City relationship with Khabarovsk. Every other US Russian (Sister) City relationship has gone dormant or has been dissolved outright. We maintain our relationship with Khabarovsk because by our example we feel we can demonstrate that *Peace is Possible*. I want to talk briefly about our roots.

A Bond Formed Amid Adversity & Uncertainty

- October 20, 1987: Formation of the Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association
- April 5, 1988: Pravda publishes “The Principles of Perestroika”
- May 29, 1988: U.S. President Ronald Reagan visits Moscow
- June 1, 1988: Portland Sister City delegation visits Khabarovsk
- December 26, 1991: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved



As you can see from these dates from 1987 through 1991, through the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that our Association was formed four years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. You'll note that we visited Khabarovsk at about the same time that President Ronald Reagan visited Moscow in 1988.

Mike Lindberg

**Portland City Council Member
and Vice Mayor in Khabarovsk
June 1988**



I want to talk to you briefly about our founders. There's Mike Lindberg, who some of you may have known from days past. He was a member of the first delegation to Khabarovsk.

Sid Lezak

**U.S. Attorney for the District of
Oregon 1961-1982 in Khabarovsk
June 1988**

Catherine Hay

**First President of the Portland-
Khabarovsk Sister City
Association in Khabarovsk
June 1988**



Some of you might have known Sid Lezak or you certainly should know of him. He was also in that delegation along with Catherine Hay. I want to say of all our founders I admire most Sid Lezak and Catherine Hay. Sid Lezak was a giant of Portland's legal community. Catherine Hay reached out to our Russian partners long before it was fashionable.

Declamation Platform for Peace

pkzca.org/platform-for-peace/

pkzca.org/платформ-за-мир-в-україне/

PKSCA **declaims** this **Platform for Peace** to articulate a basis for the end of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine:

- That is consistent with international law;
- That recognizes the preeminence of human rights over the juridical rights of nation-states;
- That is culturally equitable; and
- Which ensures the well-being of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples in perpetuity.



So, like Mike Lindbergh, Sid Lezak and Catherine Hay, the Board of Directors of the Portland Khabarovsk Sister City Association has asked itself, what can we do in these unprecedented times? And we decided on *Words as Action*, what we hope will be useful words.

We declaim. I chose that word very purposefully. We declaim. We stand on a soapbox in the middle of the street and we tell people what we believe, in large part because we think that a lot of the hurt in the world could have been avoided had others stood up and declaimed in a time of peril and crisis. You think of Nazi Germany an example.

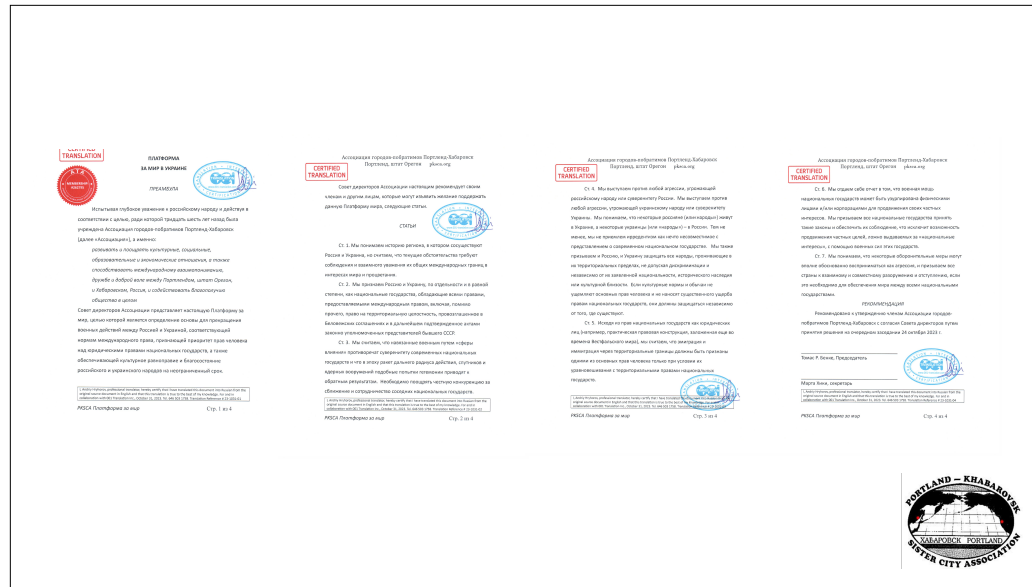
We declaim a Platform for Peace that is consistent with international law, that recognizes the preeminence of human rights over the juridical rights of nation-states. I've used that word purposely again, juridical, because I know that *nation-states are ultimately fictions...but people are not*.

We want a platform for peace that is culturally equitable and which ensures the well-being of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples in perpetuity. Some of you may not know the importance of that word “peoples” but we used it very specifically here to demonstrate that we absolutely do believe that the Ukrainian people exist and should be self-governed. We're not apologists for the Russian Federation.

<p>A PLATFORM FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE</p> <p>PREAMBLE</p> <p>With deep respect for the Russian people, and acting in accordance with the purpose for which the Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association (hereinafter "the Association") was organized thirty-six years ago, to wit:</p> <p><i>to foster and promote cultural, social, educational, and economic relations and to further international understanding, friendship, and goodwill between Portland, Oregon and Khabarovsk, Russia, and to promote the well-being of the public at large;</i></p> <p>the Board of Directors of the Association declares this Platform for Peace to articulate a basis for the end of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine that is consistent with international law, that recognizes the preeminence of human rights over the juridical rights of nation-states, that is culturally equitable, and which ensures the well being of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples in perpetuity.</p> <p>The Board of Directors of the Association hereby recommends to its Members and to all others who may wish to endorse this Platform for Peace the following Articles.</p>	<p>Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association Portland, Oregon plka.org</p> <p>ARTICLE</p> <p>Art. 1. We understand the history of the region in which Russia and Ukraine meet but believe that present-day circumstances require adherence to, and mutual respect for, their shared international boundary in the interests of peace and prosperity.</p> <p>Art. 2. We recognize Russia and Ukraine, individually and equally as nation-states with all rights afforded under international law, including but not limited to the inviolability of their territorial limits as indicated in the Sakhalin Accords and as later affirmed by acts of lawfully authorized representatives of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.</p> <p>Art. 3. We believe that militarily imposed "spheres of influence" are antithetical to the sovereignty of nation-states and that the use of long-range missiles, satellites and nuclear armaments that such attempts at hegemony are counterproductive. Fair competition for the affairs and cooperation of neighboring nation-states should be encouraged.</p> <p>Art. 4. We espouse any aggression that impacts the Russian people or Russia's sovereignty. We oppose any aggression that impacts the Ukrainian people or Ukraine's sovereignty. We understand that some Russian people (or "separatists") live in Ukraine and that some Ukrainian people (or "separatists") live in Russia. Nevertheless, we regard invasions as incompatible with the concept of a modern nation state. Likewise, we call on both Russia and</p> <p>Page 1 of 4</p>	<p>Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association Portland, Oregon plka.org</p> <p>Ukraine to protect all people living within their territorial limits without discrimination and irrespective of their claimed nationality, heritage or cultural affinity. Cultural norms and practices, so long as they do not infringe upon basic human rights or substantially impair the rights of nation-states, must be protected whenever they exist.</p> <p>Art. 5. As a corollary to the rights of nation-states as juridical persons (e.g., as a practical legal construct dating back to the Peace of Westphalia), we believe that emigration and immigration across territorial boundaries must be managed on a basis however legal rather than to be binding against the territorial rights of nation-states.</p> <p>Art. 6. We understand that the military power of nation-states can be usurped by individual and/or corporate actors to advance their private interests. The right of nation-states to exist and enforce such statutes as necessary to ensure that private interests fairly pursued to be national interests are not advanced by the military power of nation-states.</p> <p>Art. 7. We understand that some defensive postures can be fairly perceived as aggression and urge all nations to mutually and cooperatively disarm and stand down as necessary to ensure peace among all nation-states.</p> <p>Page 1 of 4</p>	<p>Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association Portland, Oregon plka.org</p> <p>BY CONSENSUS</p> <p>Recommended to the Members of the Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association by consent of the Board of Directors by letter at its regularly scheduled meeting on October 24, 2023.</p> <p><i>Thomas R. Beane</i> Thomas R. Beane, President</p> <p><i>Martha Hickey</i> Martha Hickey, Secretary</p> <p>Page 4 of 4</p>
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There's the Platform for Peace. It's packed full of meaning. It should be read slowly, but I won't read it to you here and now. I can see you breathing more easily.



Even more so we've got it posted on our website in the Russian language. We would post it in every language if we had the budget but the point of it being posted in Russia is that it's intended not necessarily for an American audience but for our Russian friends. These are words, ideas, that our Russian friends can use to push back against the dominant narrative in Russia today...when the moment comes.

Precepts

- Ukraine and Russia Recognized as Nation-States
- Human Rights Construed Broadly
- Rights of Nation-States Construed Narrowly
- Spheres of Influence Rejected
- Irredentism Rejected
- Right to Emigrate / Immigrate Balanced Against the Right of Nation-States to Exist
- Military Power of Nation-States Not Usurped by Private Interests



Various precepts of the Platform for Peace are that Ukraine and Russia are recognized as nation-states. We believe that human rights should be construed broadly. We believe that the rights of nation states should be construed narrowly. There's a concept that is not steeped in common international law but one which we believe should be self-evident.

We reject spheres of influence. We reject irredentism. For those of you who have to look that up (I know I did) it means taking another's territory under the premise that you're protecting your own people. People should be protected no matter what their culture and no matter what nation-state they live in. The right to immigrate, to come and go, is balanced against the right of nation-states to exist, something that may be controversial in certain circles. What is not controversial, we believe, is that the military power of nation states should not be usurped by private interests.

If you're wondering about the applicability of these various precepts please go home and think about them in terms of the relationship between Jerusalem and Gaza, Israel and Gaza. I think that these are universal ideas that can be applied outside of the Russian Ukrainian conflict.

Goal

- To be heard
- To promote constructive discourse among persons diametrically opposed on the facts but fundamentally in agreement on how people should treat each other
- Historical argument becomes irrelevant
- The least statement necessary to advance consensus consistent with PKSCA's values and mission



Our goals are to be heard. Again, we are declaiming. Our goal is to promote constructive discourse among persons diametrically opposed on the facts but fundamentally in agreement on how people should treat each other. If I only had time to say one thing to you it would be that sentence. *People who are diametrically opposed on the facts should be able to agree on how human beings should be treated.* Under our Platform for Peace historical argument becomes irrelevant. And importantly, if we're to be criticized because it includes too much or includes too little, my goal in drafting the Platform for Peace was to draft the least statement necessary to advance consensus consistent with our values and mission. Because the more you have to argue about, the greater the opportunities to get sidetracked.

Desideratum

- The Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association operates under a Charter issued by the City of Portland but is otherwise independent of the City, the Mayor and City Council. Views expressed in the Platform for Peace are solely those of the Board of Directors of the Portland-Khabarovsk Sister City Association and/or its President Thomas Benke.
- We encourage you to read the Platform for Peace in full on the PKSCA website pkzca.org
- If you have questions or comments please contact Thomas Benke (trbenke@me.com) or submit them on the PKSCA website pkzca.org



This of course is not your statement it's mine. If you have any questions you can ask me after the presentation. We have a comments box on our website. If you give us any words of encouragement they will be widely disseminated. If you have any words of criticism they will be welcomed and duly addressed. Thank you.



Mayor Wheeler: Thomas, could I just make a comment here? First of all, thank you for your continued leadership. You're the boss at a very difficult time. And I think most of us up here can probably appreciate that. And in thinking about the emails and the calls we tended to get from a year and a half to a year ago I will tell you we get a lot fewer today. I think people are starting to understand and appreciate that this is not a formal relationship with the Putin administration. That is not what this is. And by definition, it is a people to people contact for cultural, educational and commercial purposes. And the reason this entire Sister City program was created was exactly for moments like this, when people, when nations were not seeing eye to eye. When the world was at risk of chaos led by political leaders, that the people would still have an open line of communication and an opportunity to share, so that rather than demonizing people based on the politics of their leadership we can actually see the value of them as fellow humans. And I know you personally have taken some grief for your stewardship of this particular Sister City relationship. I just want to tell you how much I personally appreciate it. You could have walked away and you did not. You stuck with it and that's exactly what you needed to do. So thank you.



Thomas Benke: There's one more slide.

Mayor Wheeler: Sorry I did not mean to interrupt.

Thomas Benke: That's okay, I forgot. It's exactly what you just said. No putinizm. Thank you very much.



Councilman Mapps: Thomas, I just wanted to underscore some of the Mayor's comments. I really appreciated the subtle and sophisticated approach you've taken to an awfully difficult moment. I think the Sister City program is really important. I can see some of the tensions that you refer to replicating themselves throughout the globe. And I think we're all struggling with figuring out how we move forward in a positive way. And you've really modeled that today. And I really appreciate it. Thank you.