

**Speech by Ms. Dalia Steiblienė**  
**medical doctor, former anaesthesiologist and reanimatologist**  
**of Vilnius City Clinical Hospital No 1 (St. Jacob),**  
**at the sitting of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania**  
**dedicated to the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991**  
**and the Freedom Prize 2021 award ceremony**

January the 13th was the unforgettable day when we all experienced the power of human unity and social and civic awareness.

That particular night, I was scheduled to be on duty in the Intensive Care Unit at the St. Jacob's Hospital, which was then called Soviet Hospital No 1. In the beginning, everything was unusually calm. It felt like the lull before the storm. Right around the midnight hour, however, we heard a series of machine-gun shots (I can still remember that dry crackling sound), the blasts of which made the windows of the ICU rattle. We then all realised that something terrible was happening.

I guess it took only a few moments for ambulance cars and tarpaulin-covered vans carrying people to roll, one by one, into the hospital courtyard. The first flow of wounded and injured people surged into to the hospital's emergency room.

Those who were still able to stand on their feet, were offered chairs or benches, while the rest were put on couches, stretchers, carts, or placed right on the floor.

It was a shocking view, causing a great stress even to medical professionals, who were generally accustomed to many things. A great deal of effort was needed to control our emotions. We had to assess the situation rapidly and make a decision as to who needs our help most, what kind of help was needed and how to proceed further: should we first help the one, who was groaning, or the one, who was lying quietly, or the one, whose blood was soaking through the stretches down on the floor.

All wounded needed urgent help - right there and without any delay. There was no time for us to call anyone for additional assistance, but in fact, there was no need for that.

Within half an hour, our small on-call surgery team comprising of an anaesthetist and traumatology doctor, and two neurosurgeons was no longer on its own, as medical doctors, nurses, and surgery staff came rushing to the hospital. Dr Juozas Olekas (*translator's remark: the then Minister of Health*) stood panting in the doorway, saying that he 'might be needed not as a minister, but as a surgeon'. A few hours later, we welcomed a van of neurosurgeons from Kaunas Clinics, who brought along with them surgical material and instruments 'in case there was a shortage of hands or medical supplies'.

The unity of our colleagues helped us maintain our emotional balance, concentrate, and fulfil our professional duty properly.

Thirty years ago, people defended freedom and sacrificed their health and lives on the altar of freedom. But what kind of altar are their lives laid on now, as the pandemic virus keeps killing people?

Those deaths are so pointless, and thus so infinitely painful. In order to get the sick out of the grip of the coronavirus, doctors along with volunteers spare no effort or dedication, but often at the expense of their own health and even lives.

January the 13th is a symbol of freedom and an opportunity to live in that freedom. Let us therefore get united, focus and help stop the rampage of the virus. Let us choose life over the meaningless death from COVID-19.