

Finding Peace After the Violent Summer of 2014

Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Book Launch, Calgary, August 6, 2014

The violence-torn summer of 2014 has dismayed people around the world who had thought that – just maybe – the world was beginning to move away from war as a means of resolving conflict. The killings in Gaza, Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, to name but the top of the list of centres of atrocities, have depressed those who are working every day to build the structures of peace. We find it hard to have our voices heard against the relentless barrage of bombings, mayhem, and maimed children that fill the TV screens. Stopping the carnage seems overwhelming.

It doesn't seem to be a good time for me to bring out my book, *Peacemakers: How People Around the World Are Building a World Free of War*. The central message of the book is that people in many parts of the world have discovered that war is futile and great numbers of civil society activists are working to build the conditions for an enduring peace. Does the summer of 2014 shatter that conviction? It does not.

After the 20th century in which two world wars plus the Korean and Vietnam wars and numerous conflicts killed upwards of 100 million people, did we think that it would suddenly be easy to turn the corner and enjoy peace gardens everywhere? Did we forget that the political structures are still mired in a culture of war in which the economic interests of the

military-industrial complex outweigh the peace proposals of visionaries? Did we suppose that institutions to guarantee peace through the rule of law would just blossom in a desert?

We are living through a transformative moment in history and movement forward is uneven. The ugliness of war has become etched in people's minds, but the force of humanitarian law is not yet engraved in public policies. We now realize that in modern warfare there are no victors, but we have not yet gained sufficient confidence to reinforce the structures of peace. We must probe further to comprehend Dag Hammarskjöld's message that peace is not just a passive state of affairs in a world without war, but a state of living devoted to action.

The negative news of the day must not dissuade us from continuing our work for peace. There may still be killings to come, but the trendline of history is moving away from the widespread practice of violence.

It doubtless is more consoling to deal only with the long-term prospects for peace, but we cannot escape the exigencies of the short-term.

Here, what we are witnessing in 2014 is the spread of extremism. It shows up in the ISIL terrorism in Syria and Iraq, the shoot-down of the passenger aircraft over eastern Ukraine, and the escalation of violence in the occupied Gaza strip and the killing of civilians. Some of this extremism has its roots in the 2003 Iraq war, demonstrating vividly the havoc wreaked by war. In all these cases, the actions of extremists, driven by ideologies and with scant respect for international law, have overwhelmed moderate leadership. It is obvious that a UN Emergency Peacekeeping Force needs to be assembled for dispatch by the Security Council to strife-torn areas, but

the archaic veto system still cripples UN action. Accountability and preventive actions, strategies that are, thankfully, working in other conflict zones, were absent in this summer's crisis areas

If there is a silver lining, it is in the way social media is conveying the plight of the victims of war in near real time. Massacres are much harder to hide than they were even 20 years ago; unfiltered news of atrocities reaches the public in time to evoke empathy even before the bleeding stops, lifting the fog of war, and potentially making a yet-unrealized rapid-reaction peacekeeping force a more viable prospect.

Immediate steps must be taken: the Arms Trade Treaty, meant to regulate the \$70 billion business that fuels conflict, undermines peace and security, threatens economic and social development, and causes widespread human suffering, needs to come into effect. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine needs to be fully implemented by the UN. Negotiations must start on a global law to prohibit and eliminate all nuclear weapons. These are steps that can be taken now.

With respect to the Gaza war, which seems destined to produce even more extremists, Adama Dieng, Director of the UN's Office of Genocide Prevention, has expressed outrage at the "high number of civilians killed and injured in the ongoing Israeli operations in Gaza and at the rocket attacks launched by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israeli civilian areas." Unfortunately, Dieng does not have the power to stop on-the-ground killings, but he has called for a thorough and impartial investigation: "Those found responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, on either side, must be held accountable for their actions."

In the course of writing my book, I interviewed Mr. Dieng, an international law expert from Senegal, in his UN office in New York. His mandate is to mobilize action in troubled areas before mass killings begin. This work of prevention – as distinct from clean-up after slaughters – may become the most important contribution the UN makes to building peace in the 21st century. If atrocities do not break out in such strife-torn areas as the Central African Republic, Congo, Myanmar, Guinea, Nigeria and Sudan, areas now under investigation, credit may belong to this quiet, forward-minded work. Dieng’s accomplishments will likely never be in headlines, and the world will go on oblivious to the great value of prevention. It is the body counts that make the news.

Taking a long view, Dieng pointed to the UN’s wide range of tools – commissions of inquiry, sanctions, special envoys, judicial settlement of disputes, referrals to the International Criminal Court – that can be used to head off future genocides without having necessarily to resort to force. “Despite ongoing crises, the UN has made real progress. It is now universally recognized that averting future genocides is a shared responsibility, and more nations are becoming involved.”

All this is unheralded movement forward in the journey to peace. We have to look beyond the headlines of the day to see the gradual build-up of instruments of peace. Of course, if you insist that the greed, corruption and hypocrisy so evident in world politics cannot be overcome, if you believe that humanity is perpetually fated for war, if you believe that the United Nations is just a talk shop and cannot accomplish much – you will probably not agree that the world as a whole now has the most hopeful prospect for peace in the last several centuries. But if you examine new UN mechanisms to improve peacekeeping, peacebuilding and international justice now

laboriously being built, if you look at the record of a dozen countries, ranging from Rwanda to Cambodia, that suffered indescribable atrocities but are now at peace, if you meet the new leaders in a myriad of civil society organizations in the development, human rights, disarmament and environment fields -- you will experience the pull of history towards peace.

All the big themes that comprise social intercourse – health, education, commerce, science, energy, shipping, communications, transportation, law, women’s rights, are expanding. The major countries – the US, the UK, Russia, China, France, India, Brazil, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Iran – are not at war with each other. A new generation is coming to maturity with an intuitive understanding of the meaning of human rights in a globalized world.

Of course, fighting has not ended and there is no guarantee of peace. The world is still spending \$1.7 trillion a year on arms, and the continued existence of more than 16,000 nuclear weapons with the power to cause unimaginable catastrophes are sobering reminders of the precariousness of the concept of peace. But it would be irresponsible to close our eyes to the effects of the programs to build peace that are found around the world.

Consider some of the places whose very names conjure up the spectre of genocide and mass human suffering in the recent past: Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, Hiroshima, Northern Ireland. In the small East African nation of Rwanda, where about 800,000 people were killed over the span of a hundred days in 1994, commerce is thriving in a stable atmosphere. In Bosnia, thousands of Muslims were massacred in the worst crime on European soil since World War II, and now the Muslims and Serbs live in a fragile peace. In Cambodia, where two million people died in the “killing fields,” the international community mounted an effective restoration

program, and the country has become a tourist centre of South Asia. In Hiroshima, where the first atomic bomb killed 140,000 people, the rebuilt vigorous city is a centre of the anti-nuclear weapons campaign. In Northern Ireland, “the Troubles” – the fierce and violent clashes between Catholics and Protestants in which 3,500 people were slain – had been seen as one of the world’s intractable conflicts, but today the people live basically in peace.

The list of war-torn places that have given way to processes of peace and reconciliation is long: Angola, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Guatemala, El Salvador, Timor Leste, Sierre Leone. All of these places have stories of progress to tell in building the conditions for peace. New mechanisms to improve peacekeeping, peacebuilding and international justice, many under United Nations auspices, are laboriously being built. This creativity goes largely unreported and people are unaware of the great strides being made in changing the old culture of war into a culture of peace. Despite the headlines, a new dynamic for peace exists in the world. As former US President Bill Clinton noted: “In places once synonymous with conflict, like the Balkans and Rwanda, former antagonists are now working together to solve problems.”

There is no better example of how the world is moving from war to peace than Europe, which suffered through two World Wars in the 20th century and now basks in the glow of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union. The fighting in eastern Ukraine certainly challenges this aspiration, but it has not unleashed wider conflict. Wise political leadership is now desperately needed to draw Russia into the European orbit, not keep it out.

Given competent and caring political leadership, there is no such thing as intractable war. Gradually, humanity is beginning to understand that war

is futile. That is an enormous gain in the struggle for peace. The public rejection of war has enormous ramifications for how society will conduct its affairs. It portends an upswing in acceptance of the role of the UN as a mediating force. New thinking for the protection and development of the human community is taking form. It is a moment of astonishing change in the history of the world. Humanity is discovering a power it never had before to construct a more peaceful world.