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By Douglas Roche

Global warming is taking us to massive catastrophe. A new nuclear arms race is starting. Migrants and refugees are piling up by the millions. Nationalist populism is driving political systems and has produced “Trumpism.” Violent protests consume the government of France. Brexit challenges European unity. Canada reels from oil price shocks and car plant closings. Fear is in the air. Everybody is bewildered — and mad at somebody. Anyone want to celebrate Christmas?

Well, I do.

Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace and hope, both of which seem to be in very short supply these days. It’s hard to be jolly when the airwaves are filled with shouting politicians, calamitous weather forecasts, the absurdities of the Trump administration and the prospect that artificial intelligence may soon put you out of a job.

Christmas is not the solution to what ails us. Rather, the star that guided the shepherds to the peace of the manger is still there — if we will turn off the television news for a little while and think about the broader story of humanity rising.

Most humans have never enjoyed greater peace or prosperity than the opening years of the 21st century have brought. As the historian Yuval Harari writes in his new book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, “For the first time in history, infectious diseases kill fewer people than old age, famine kills fewer people than obesity, and violence kills fewer people than accidents.”

The false narrative of our time that the world is spinning out of control must be countered by a recognition that virtually every index by which we measure

world progress is accelerating upwards. Commerce, technology, science, agriculture, renewable energy, medicine, communications, transportation, and women's rights are all leaping forward.

As *The Economist* of London declared, "For most people on earth, there has never been a better time to be alive."

Great numbers of people are rejecting violence, eradicating poverty, strengthening the United Nations, keeping the peace in conflict areas, trying to protect the environment, developing renewable energy, extending human rights and laying the groundwork for a new generation of leaders with an instinctive understanding that all human beings have a right to live in peace.

The slow grinding of the machinery for peace is drowned out by the tectonic shifts in the political landscape. There is so much noise in the political systems today that some fear the present rancour will inevitably lead to permanent chaos. We are not living through a clash of civilizations, no matter how much right-wing extremists want class warfare.

Rather, we are witnessing a rebellion against the elite political and economic establishments, which have for too long betrayed the interests of people. The greed of the powerful, enriching themselves at the expense of the common good of humanity, has caused extremism, not so-called enmities between Islam and the West. Most people, whether they live in Western or Muslim countries, want a peaceful development of the world.

In this frenetic climate, the ideas to sustain peace play out on the sidelines while centre stage is occupied by the confrontations. The transformation of the world from a culture of war to a culture of peace may take generations. It's not going to happen on Christmas Eve.

But Christmas helps to focus our minds on the long-range goal of peace on earth. The "good will" that we sing about should start in our own hearts recogniz-

ing how lucky we are to live in Canada. We need to reach out more to help people to reconcile with one another.

Christmas strengthens our hope and lifts up our minds to greater understanding of how to build peace. Will I be celebrating? You bet.

Former Senator Douglas Roche's latest book is Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World. He lives in Edmonton.