

India and Pakistan: A Way to Peace

By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Address to Society to Defy Enmity Encourage Peace

Edmonton, October 21, 2011

I wish to congratulate the founding team that brought the Society to Defy Enmity Encourage Peace into existence. You have focused a spotlight on the fact that both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons, turning an already volatile area into a potential catastrophe affecting the entire world. DEEP has set out to create a South Asian Canadian Forum for Peace; your voice and actions can contribute greatly to building a climate of peace. When Muslims and Hindus come together under your auspices, indeed when Christians and Jews and people of different faiths, races and cultures work together in calmness and mutual respect, the level of hope for peace is raised. Our own community of Edmonton and Alberta is enriched by your vision, and the effect of your work will flow across Canada and also doubtless be felt also in India and Pakistan. DEEP has begun its life at a critical moment in world history, and modern communications will quickly enable you to magnify your influence. The core of your message – that the full implementation of human rights demands the elimination of nuclear weapons – needs to be heard by the public and heeded by political decision-makers. Yours is a message of non-violence, and in all your endeavors I give you my full support.

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In addressing the tumultuous India-Pakistan relations, we should set our eyes on a wider horizon and note what is actually happening in the modern world.

We often feel discouraged at what appears to be a never-ending cycle of killings and violence. But the media seldom dwell on the long-term gains humanity is making. The still-young 21st century has already made a profound discovery: military force cannot bring security. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved to be grossly miscalculated. Their effect has actually created a rising belief in the futility of war. In fact, the UN's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change noted that there were fewer inter-state wars in the last half of the 20th century than in the first half, despite the quadrupling of the number of states.

Over the past dozen years, the global security climate has changed in dramatic, positive, but largely unheralded ways. Civil wars, genocide and international crises have all declined sharply. It is true that there are still wars being fought, there are still gross abuses of human rights and deadly acts of terrorism; but it is also true that more than 100 conflicts have quietly ended since 1988. In the past two decades, more wars stopped than started. The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, headed by the Swedish diplomat Hans Blix, stated that “while people will always have their ideological and national differences, the vast majority of humanity appears to be seeking the benefits of an increasingly interdependent world and is not rallying to the idea of an inevitable clash of civilizations.”

In his new book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Steven Pinker shows that violence is declining in modern history. Globalization,

communications, and the gradual build-up of international law are all having a profound effect on the human psyche. We should not be lulled into complacency, but the forces of history are moving in the reduction of violence. It is this moving history that DEEP is now connecting with.

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DEEP can bring to our community a deeper understanding of two movements – the Alliance of Civilizations and A Common Word – that both reflect and inspire the movement to non-violence.

When Muslim terrorists bombed Madrid trains in 2004, killing 191 people, the Spanish Prime Minister, Rodriguez Zapatero, decided that the response this time must not take the route of vengeance, which followed the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. He formed a partnership with the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, and together they proposed an “alliance of civilizations” project as an international response to the terrorist attack. Rather than a wall of hatred between the Western and Arab and Western worlds leading to a “clash of civilizations,” the “alliance of civilizations” would reaffirm the increasing interdependence of all societies in the areas of economics, finance, security, culture, environment and health. The central aim of the alliance would be to strengthen diversity so that it becomes a source of enrichment and not a threat.

The project took the form of a United Nations High-level Group, headed by Federico Mayor, the former head of UNESCO, and included the Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the religious historian Karen Armstrong, and former Iran president Mohamed Khatani. The Group found that humanity will achieve progress not by ignoring or denying our

differences but by acknowledging them openly and celebrating our diversity. They made the point that these differences are not primarily religious or cultural but political. The Alliance of Civilizations, now a permanent body in the UN system, runs a wide range of programs in education, youth opportunities, help for migrants, and combating media stereotyping. In January 2008, I attended the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid, where 1,000 political, religious, corporate and civil society leaders conducted stimulating dialogues on reducing polarization between nations and launched joint initiatives to promote cross-cultural understanding globally.

In 2007, 138 Muslim scholars wrote a public letter to Christian leaders affirming the common ground of love of God and love of neighbor that Muslims and Christians stand on. Some 300 Christian leaders responded with enthusiasm. An organization, “A Common Word,” was formed and a series of inter-faith meetings started. Subsequently, Pope Benedict XVI received the Muslim delegation and launched workshops in the Vatican. A joint statement said that believers “are called to be instruments of love and harmony...renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all.”

I have cited these two developments – Alliance of Civilizations and A Common Word – to illustrate at least two reasons for my hope that the maturation of civilization as a whole can lead to a more enlightened and peaceful world. The power of these two developments lies in the potential to transform the world from exclusive societies living independently of one another to inclusive societies comprising diverse peoples. “Different” people are no longer confined to distant lands. “Different” people are all around us.

Both movements are manifestations of a rising global conscience that characterizes modern times.

Despite the frequent negative headlines of the day, something is happening that is actually lifting up humanity. An awakening of concern about how we humans treat one another and the planet is taking place. A new view of the human being, you and me, is coming into focus in the development of public policy. A new caring for the wholeness of life is being defined. Humanity is learning to understand all our human relationships, our relationship with the Earth, and how to govern for the common good. The groundwork for a culture of peace is being laid. This is the stirring of a global conscience.

Many people are calling for a new global ethic to make the world a more human place. The point I want to make here is that a new ethic is actually being formulated. From instances close to home – campaigns to stop drinking and driving, new societal concern for people with mental and physical disabilities – to international civil society movements – Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Grameen Bank – there are mounting displays of evidence of the march of humanity forward.

Yes, wars are still being fought, poverty is rampant throughout the developing countries, and the air and waters are being despoiled. Egregious violations of human rights still take place. Greed and corruption continue to infect political processes. But we have to be able to see past the problems of the day to observe a shift in human thinking. The very existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an expression of global conscience. It is filled with an uplifting of humanity. It has spawned covenants on civil and political rights and economic and social rights of all peoples. Numerous commissions have explored how these rights can be fully

implemented.

It used to be that the only thing we thought much about was ourselves and maybe our relationship with those we came into contact with on a daily basis. But, with science and technology and a new understanding of the universal inherency of human rights, an integration of humanity is occurring. Not only do we know one another across what used to be the great divides, we further know that we need one another for common survival. There is a new caring for the human condition. This is the awakening of a “global conscience.”

This “global conscience” is thrusting up new, ever more stark, questions:

- Why is there so much starvation when there is so much food in the world?
- Why are we polluting the atmosphere and waters when we have the technology to avoid this?
- Why do we tolerate the existence of nuclear weapons, which threaten to destroy the processes of life?
- Why do we have the United Nations and then refuse to empower it to stop wars and end starvation?

The answers to these questions are not yet sufficiently strong to overcome an unjust world economy, world disorder and the undermining of human rights and the rule of law. Perhaps the world will still have to endure yet more wars, more religious extremism, and a wave of nuclear proliferation. But the very forces of nature, business, communications, and world politics are building up a single society. The chief characteristics of this society are its common humanity and the need for a common law.

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Nowhere is the need for a common law more urgently needed than a global ban on nuclear weapons, and it is here that the work of DEEP can be particularly helpful. The new campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Convention – a verifiable treaty banning the production and deployment of all nuclear weapons – is gathering strength around the world. Two-thirds of all governments have voted at the UN to start negotiations. The European Parliament has given its support. Mayors for Peace, representing 5,000 cities around the world, is campaigning for it.

The only guarantee we have against a nuclear war, a nuclear accident or a nuclear terrorist attack is the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons and a stringent lock-down on all nuclear materials. The abolition of nuclear weapons is no longer just a lofty goal, a noble aspiration, an idealistic thought. It has become the irreducible essential for survival. It is the paramount human rights issue of our time.

Both India and Pakistan have signaled they recognize their responsibilities as nuclear weapons states. Each has voted at the UN for global negotiations to begin. India has revived the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in a verifiable, phased time period. But more action by both states is needed. You can help both India and Pakistan to raise their sights from longstanding regional quarrels to fuller participation in the world struggle to find ways to live in harmony. By focusing more on the elevation of humanity taking place, India and Pakistan can move beyond the old inter-nation disputes.

It is a sign of hope that the leadership of both countries is trying to smooth out a combustible relationship. This leadership needs support and encouragement from other states, not least Canada. In helping India and Pakistan to find a way forward in peace, Canada can make a great

contribution to relieving the South Asia tension. DEEP now has a critical role to play in showing concretely that Indians and Pakistanis can work together in common cause. This cause is not only your own harmony but the peace of the world.