

Reducing Inequalities Through a Culture of Peace

Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

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When the U.N. marked its 75th anniversary in 2020, a virtual meeting of heads of government unanimously adopted a forward-looking declaration vowing to reinvigorate cooperation and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The leaders committed themselves to protect the planet, promote peace and prevent conflicts, abide by international laws and ensure justice, place women and girls at the centre, build trust, improve digital cooperation, upgrade the United Nations, ensure sustainable financing, boost partnerships, listen to and work with youth, and be prepared for more health crises. All this projects a course of action and should at least be taken into account by those ready to give up on the idea that the world can indeed be made a better place.^{[1][2]}

The work of like-minded governments, civil society coterie of specialists in the human security agenda, and the new multilateral groupings provide mounting evidence that people, in their various forms and representations, are coming together to make the world safer.

It is a supreme irony that in an age of instant and widely available communication, so little is known about the widespread efforts to build human security through the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris

Agreement, the Non- Proliferation Treaty, and the movements to further the developing culture of peace.

Sugar-coating the obstacles is not necessary to affirm the forward movements of humanity. Governments reflect contradictions every day. Trying to inject a firmer unity into the world's governments, U.N. Secretary-General Guterres warned that the pandemic is “not only a wake-up call” but “a dress rehearsal” for challenges to come. “We must be guided by science and tethered to reality,” he added. “Populism and nationalism have failed. Those approaches to contain the virus have often made things manifestly worse.” He repeated his call for a New Global Deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are fairly shared. He said it must be rooted in fair globalization, while sustainable development principles should be integrated into all decision-making.

The first priority of all governments, at this shaken moment, must be catalyzing and coordinating a comprehensive global response to COVID-19 and conjoining these efforts with pressure on regional warring parties to implement a global ceasefire. Even if he only gave words of encouragement to this process – instead of denigrating them, as his predecessor did – U.S. President Joe Biden would have an enormous influence on strengthening the prospects for general peace and human security in the years ahead.

The tasks ahead are daunting. Strengthen the multilateral machinery to head off rising nationalisms. Provide global public goods, such as vaccines, health services and education, to vulnerable peoples. Use the Sustainable Development Goals as the main framework for economic and social policy guidance. Invest heavily in renewable energy. Negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons. Prevent the weaponization of outer space and cyberspace. Incorporate human rights into all policies. Transfer, at least at the start, 10 percent of military budgets to human development. Putting our shoulders to the wheel in all these issues will lift us out of the present doldrums.

A stabilized and safer world will come into better view as we move through perhaps the greatest transformation in human conduct in history – the journey from a culture of war to a culture of peace. It is beyond question that the journey has started and perhaps possible that the youngest babies today may live to see the arrival. It will not be a perfect world by any means, but the seeds of nonviolence, planted in the earth by those who have already grasped nonviolence in all its aspects as a core value, will have a chance to bloom. Human beings are not destined for war or extinction. The very inventiveness of human beings, who every day are developing conflict resolution machinery to avoid war and rushing the full use of renewable energy to head off the fatal global warming, shows that we are creating our own future, not passively abandoning ourselves to fate.

It is not written that humanity must succumb to global warming, nuclear weapons or the coronavirus — or the terrible inequalities that ought to shame us. Left unchecked, of course, each threatens our survival. But raising our voices, taking action and joining with others to fight a common enemy are ways to create our own future.

