

Roche presents reasons to hope for peace in the world: Herr Lectures

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Douglas Roche, an author, former parliamentarian, and Officer of the Order of Canada presents "Hope not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World," based on his book of the same name, as part of the first in Burman University's 2018-19 Herr Lecture Series on Wednesday, Oct. 10 at the Lacombe Memorial Centre in Lacombe, Alta. Ashli Barrett / Lacombe Globe

It may be easy to get jaded by happenings around the world, but Douglas Roche believes there are signs more peaceful times are ahead.

Roche, an author, former parliamentarian and senator, and UN Disarmament Committee chair, was in Lacombe Wednesday night to deliver the first presentation of the 2018-19 Herr Lecture Series put on by Burman University and their Centre for Peace and Justice.

Over 150 people were in attendance at the Lacombe Memorial Centre for the lecture, "Hope not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World."

Based off his book of the same name, Roche's lecture was aimed at overcoming the skepticism of those who see global peace as an unachievable goal, and to a lesser extent, motivating all to work towards a better future.

"Unfortunately, fear predominates," he said. "Some use fear to describe the Trump White House, but I use fear to describe how many people are somewhat fearful of the future because the centre of the institutions we have built are in danger of falling apart."

Some of those fears and crisis included climate change, the potential of a nuclear catastrophe, the migrant and refugee crisis, cyber security and warfare, as well as disparity and inequality, which he says has led to intensifying ethnic nationalism and a rise in populism.

While all are understandable reasons to become cynical about the world and the direction it's going, he was clear it would be up to the younger generations to deal with it, and fix it – an echo of Ret. Gen. Romeo Dallaire's lecture over a year ago in the same building where he urged people to get up and do something about injustices in the world.

In order to do so, and get over their cynicism and skepticism so they can take action, he said people needed to see changes that are already taking place in the world today.

He began with the "War on Terrorism," something he said he was proud to stand up in the senate and condemn as a reaction to 9/11. Although the wars continued, there was a distinct difference in the world's reaction to them, as opposed to the world wars.

"The thing about that Iraq war, there were billions of people protesting that war even before it started, and so there is a reaction against war that has been seeping into our populous," Roche said. "We don't cheer when people go off to war.

"War is futile."

Roche joked that one of the ways he turned around his own depression about global events was that he stopped watching the American broadcaster CNN. He said they often discuss world issues in an antagonistic way, but a calmer, non-violent and creative approach is needed.

He referred to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela as figures in history who did just that.

"There have been great figures who did move history...We're not alone in our thoughts, what we're trying to do. We have guides, heroes to move us forward," he said. "Are we going to wall off people...or are we going to build a bridge between peoples?"

The "wall mentality" he said is one that has to change, especially at those on the "far right" scream for walls to be built because of fear, a lack of hope and a belief not in common security, but only security for themselves.

As a former UN chair for the disarmament committee, he, of course, plugged the UN for working towards changing that mentality through "one

of the biggest transformations in history," – moving the world from a culture of war to a culture of peace. While it could take 100 or more years to make that shift, he said it doesn't mean peace isn't worth working towards.

Stopping violence throughout the world is a fundamental task, he said, and the UN is working to do so through prevention, humanitarian intervention, and peace education.

However, he said, it's not a body taken as seriously in Canada as it is in other nations, partly because of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his government's view on it. Corruption, he said, was no reason to pull away from the UN, but more of a reason to step in and help reform it.

He said the UN reform could happen through enlarging the security council – which he gave kudos to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for seeking a seat on – and changing the veto system of those on the security council. An injection of cash, as there is currently disproportionate spending between UN support and military support, would help, as well as the creation of a permanent peacekeeping force to stopper violence and war before it gets out of hand.

In terms of what Canada needs to do, he said the country needs to support a UN emergency peace service, create an international training centre and sign a nuclear prohibition treaty. He also advised Canada push NATO to change its nuclear policies.

"We haven't had a world war since the UN began 73 years ago," he said. "Despite the doom and gloom of today, let's think about what has been able to be done as a reason for hope for the future."

The next Herr Lecture will be Nov. 4 and will feature Dr. Ronald E. Osborn as he discusses Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection in "Values

after Darwin." Three more lectures will follow in 2019.

The Herr Lecture Series is named after Burman University's retired professors Dr. Denise and Dr. Larry Herr. It provides feature presentations on issues of public interest. All lectures are open to the public and while admission is free, it's always wise to book tickets in advance.

For more information, visit www.burmanu.ca/herrlectures.