Driving Fear From Public Life

Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Downtown Rotary Club

Edmonton, April 13, 2015

A favorite hymn in my Church is "Be Not Afraid." In the first verse, we sing:

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.

You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way.

You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand.

You shall see the face of God and live.

It is a hymn that inspires courage in the face of adversity. Religion does provide a bulwark against fear. Unfortunately, I am not qualified to give a theological discourse on how faith, hope and love can sustain us through trying times.

However, my forty years in public life does qualify me to point to some political reasons to banish the fear posture that seems to have overtaken the political realm today. Suddenly, three decades after the end of the Cold War, fear is dominating international relations.

We are afraid of the terrorists. We are afraid the economy is sinking. We are afraid Iran is going to develop a nuclear weapon. We are afraid the international system created around the United Nations is not working. The International Criminal Court is not functioning as intended. The

Responsibility to Protect doctrine is pushed aside. Even refugee camps are being attacked by terrorists.

We fear all this. Fear is the dominant characteristic of the political process today. Fear is what has motivated the Canadian government to bomb ISIL terrorist targets in Iraq and Syria.

Of course, Canada should "do something," as popular parlance puts it, to counter the appalling and abhorrent crimes perpetrated in Iraq and Syria by ISIS -- the mass killings, sexual violence, slavery, forced displacement, and the destruction of holy and historic sites. But bombing, as I have argued throughout my public career, is not the answer to the deep problems of evil and injustice the modern world faces.

Bombing is designed to wreck carnage, and innocent people are inevitably killed or displaced. The military use of firepower against terrorists embedded in the general populace is ineffective. And as far as legality goes, in order to legally invoke self-defence under the UN Charter, an armed attack against Canada would have had to take place. A credible threat against Canada (other than the video mutterings of a jihadist) has never been shown.

The response to terrorism may have to include military action, but only as a last resort when authorized by an effectively functioning Security Council. There are many alternatives to bombing. The only effective way to counter world terrorism is not through bombing but to strengthen UN international partnerships to use all the political, economic, social and legal instruments available. That is what the Canadian government should be concentrating on. As Secretary-General Ban puts it: "The most effective tool to combat terrorism is by working to achieve the United Nations core goals

of strengthening peace and security, the promotion of human development and, above all, the observance of human rights and the rule of law."

The UN teaches that extremism and violence are spawned by tyranny, inequalities and bad governance. Few crises erupt without warning. They build up over years of human rights grievances and the denial of basic economic and social rights. Unfortunately, states are still reluctant to implement the UN's comprehensive response to terrorism. Every time a terrorist attack occurs, the first response of many governments is to call for military action. "Killing evil" becomes a mantra. Erratic political leadership panics with each new outbreak.

Our entire response to terrorism ought to be built, not on fear, but on utilizing the machinery of peace the world has been laboriously constructing since the birth of the United Nations seventy years ago. Unfortunately, just because some of this machinery is not working properly, some political leaders are giving up on building a culture of peace to replace the old culture of war.

In the present climate, we are forgetting the great gains for peace that have been made. It is estimated that about 100 million people were killed in all the wars of the 20th century. UN Peacekeeping, deploying more than 120,000 personnel on 16 missions, is at an all-time high. Since its inception in 1997, the Landmines Treaty has saved countless lives. A new Arms Trade Treaty, though far from perfect, will now regulate the $70 billion annual arms business. World military expenditures are slightly decreasing. Three-quarters of the nations of the world have voted at the UN for the commencement of negotiations to ban all nuclear weapons.

Of course, wars have 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 16,300 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 beginning to thrive 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. The common denominator is that people overcame their fears and started to build for the

future. New mechanisms to improve peacekeeping, peacebuilding and international justice, many under United Nations auspices, are now laboriously being built. But because they are not all working perfectly, many people, influenced by the negative news of the day, seem ready to give up on them.

I am reminded of what Senator Romeo Dallaire told me when I interviewed him for my book, *Peacemakers*. The transformation of the world from the insidious and deep-rooted culture of war to a promising culture of peace is so complicated that it may well take a century or two to accomplish. After several millennia of people slaughtering one another, do we expect peace to suddenly blossom?

We must keep working, thoughtfully and with determination, to drive violence down through building the mechanisms of international law. We cannot do this if we are consumed or driven by fear. Fear will cripple us. President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously told the American people: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."   Let us move from fear to hope – with some hard work thrown in.