

**Remarks by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.**

**to Edmonton Riverview Rotary Club**

**October 31, 2023**

I want to speak about the reasons for my hope that humanity can actually achieve a peaceful and just coexistence.

It is a great irony that I am speaking of peace at a time of scarring tragedy: the Ukraine war and the massacres in Israel and Gaza. In the world today, hundreds of thousands have been killed or wounded, millions displaced, the use of nuclear weapons threatened, famines worsened, and the global political system thrown into turmoil. How can we get to a place of hope after that?

We can get there by realizing that a new agenda for peace and a blueprint for sustainable development are actually in our hands.

Never before has the world had such an abundance of knowledge, technology and resources to succeed in ending poverty and saving human habitat. Never before have we carried such a responsibility to implement a bold set of actions.

A new chapter is beginning in the story of humanity's long journey to live in peace. All the factors to build common security are in place: the political framework, the scientific and technological capacity to meet human needs, the communications between peoples everywhere who now understand that survival demands that we work together. This accomplishment is itself a prime reason for hope.

But what about the violent conflicts continuing to take a heavy toll on human life? This harrowing question pulls us back to everyday reality. This doesn't mean denying the news. Rather, it means lifting up our vision and seeing the structures to build and protect peace, already in

place, needing more public, political and financial support to be fully effective. These structures stand on the base of the United Nations, created after World War II to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The United Nations is the indispensable political body to build the conditions for peace, yet today, it is being swept aside in the crucible of war. Canada must do more to strengthen the U.N.

Peace is a global issue. Thus, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently published “A New Agenda for Peace,” which addresses a myriad of challenges the international community faces today. He sets out a comprehensive approach to prevention, linking peace, sustainable development, climate action and food security. Guterres says that in order to protect and manage the global public good of peace, we need a peace continuum based on a better understanding of the underlying drivers of conflict, a renewed effort to agree on more effective collective security responses, and a meaningful set of steps to manage emerging risks. This is a holistic approach to peace.

The New Agenda for Peace is buttressed by a new effort made by nations attending last month the U.N. Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 development goals have a 2030 target to eliminate the worst forms of poverty. The target now seems out of reach. So the summit was a rallying call for action to regain the lost ground on the SDGs from the twin blows of the pandemic and the Ukraine war. The summit was designed to reinvigorate the sense of hope, optimism and enthusiasm that characterized the adoption of the SDGs in 2015.

The central concept of my thinking — and what I have expressed in my book — is clear and decisive: the world is fractured today, and the dangers of further risks of the annihilation of humanity are now so great that only a burst of cooperation among nations will get the world back on track towards peace.

The recent G20 meeting in India feels the same way. It spoke enthusiastically about “One Earth, One Family, and One Future.” The political order is starting to understand our togetherness on the planet. When we speak this way, that means we are realists for peace. We may be able to save the ecosystem from collapsing, eradicate the worst forms of poverty, and prevent the destruction of huge areas of the planet from nuclear warfare – or we may not. Human beings have never been so well equipped to determine their own future as at this moment. But the challenges to global security – our very survival – are greater than at any time in history. It is the knowledge and the structures for peace already in place that give me hope for the future.

Hope is rooted in our spirit. It is not a tangible thing we can put on the table to bargain over. Hope is a vision of the future. I do have this vision of a future without nuclear weapons, without global warming, without extreme poverty – and so do the millions of persons in civil society movements on disarmament, development, environmental protection and civil rights, who have developed a global presence that stimulates, encourages, reprimands and otherwise pressures governments to implement forward-minded global security policies.

I feel this strength within me. I feel it when I look at a map of the world and recall all the beautiful places I have seen through decades of travel. I feel it when I read the history of the world and see how far humanity has travelled. I feel it when I see the benefits of science, medicine and technology. I feel it when I see the face of an infant, knowing the challenges that lie ahead for the baby. I feel deeply about the development of this new human being – and all human beings – in a world at peace.

