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By Douglas Roche

When the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Tunisian group known as National Dialogue Quartet for “its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy,” the news landed on the back pages.

*The New York Times* put the story on page 6, *The Globe and Mail* page 22, the *National Post* page 14, the *Edmonton Journal* page 9 of the second section. Not front-page news, to be sure.

The Quartet, a coalition of Tunisian unionists, employers, lawyers and human rights activists, was set up in 2013 to help prevent the Arab Spring from descending into revolution, as occurred in other Arab countries. It brokered talks between the different forces, resulting in a roadmap of compromises on the constitution, a technocratic caretaker government, and an independent election commission.

In making the award, the Nobel committee said, “The quartet paved the way for a peaceful dialogue between the citizens, the political parties and the authorities and helped to find consensus-based solutions to a wide range of challenges across political and religious divides.”

In short, the Quartet of important national figures practiced intensive dialogue to preserve democracy. Houcine Abassi, head of the Tunisian General Labour Union, one of the Quartet members, said, “This prize is a message for our region to put down arms and sit and talk at the negotiation table... It’s a message that dialogue can lead us on the right path.”

Although there is still sporadic violence in Tunisia, the Arab Spring generally has stayed peaceful in contrast to the collapsed states of Libya, Syria and Yemen and the return of military rule in Egypt. The Nobel committee clearly wanted to shore up democracy in Tunisia and thus promote peace in the Middle East, north Africa and the rest of the world. At the very least, the Quartet has spared Tunisia from civil war, terrorism and economic crisis.

Isn't all this worthy of front-page attention? Ironically, Tunisia's Arab Spring started in 2011 when a fruit vendor lit himself on fire in a public square as an act of despair that resonated throughout the Arab world -- and that did get primary news attention, especially on TV. Violence always gets top news coverage, but the processes of dialogue to build the conditions for peace are considered too dull by the news editors.

Had the Nobel committee not recognized the value of the National Dialogue Quartet, the rest of the world likely would never have heard of them. So at least we can draw inspiration from the Nobel award.

But the real lesson here is how dialogue and reconciliation need to be given far more attention throughout the world. While the dialogue in Tunisia has been between secular and Islamist parties, all religions and cultural and ethnic bodies benefit when parties with different views sit down and work problems into solutions.

Unfortunately, some in our society dismiss dialogue as "appeasement." This mentality reflects the militarism that still infects the world, as if every problem requires the deployment of military strength. It is dialogue that gets to the core of conflict. Last Sunday, I heard former U.K.

Prime Minister Tony Blair admit on TV that the 2003 war on Iraq, which he supported, led to the extremist chaos we are witnessing today. Those who wanted dialogue to avert the Iraq war were shouted down. The lessons of history are bitter.

A few years ago, the U.N. began promoting a “Dialogue Among Civilizations,” to focus on cultural and spiritual divergences and on the interdependence of humankind and its rich diversity. This would lead to a new global ethic, one founded on the primary principle of non-violence. Many groups throughout the world are participating.

The Dialogue Among Civilizations sends a signal that diversity is not a threat; it is an essential wealth the world society has yet to fully discover. Religions ought to be at the head of the line of those who advocate the ethical responsibility of individuals to expand their circle of concern to encompass people of other faiths and cultures and nations.

Bridging ideological barriers shows us the oneness of humanity, and that is a spiritual goal in its own right. But dialogue should not just be a high-minded pursuit. It is essential to find workable solutions to the human security agenda. Whether we are dealing with constitutions, resources, land or the dozens of other subjects people have fought over for centuries, we now know that war doesn't provide solutions. Dialogue is the route to human reconciliation.