

WCR Column/November 23/15

By Douglas Roche

I woke up this morning, realizing how close December 25 is yet unable to concentrate on Christmas. The news is filled every day with the “war on terrorism” and the huge numbers of refugees. I felt like I’m enshrouded in a cloud of fear and I’m gasping for air.

Then I thought more deeply about Christmas and realized that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were themselves refugees surrounded by hostilities. Joseph must have been terrified when he couldn’t get a decent place for Mary to give birth. Unsettled conditions, to put it mildly.

Somehow, out of that turmoil came the vision of peace that Christmas has come to stand for. But this is not the peace of Christmas presents under the tree in a cozy living room. We need to search for the peace of non-violence and human security and fairness, all of which are desperately lacking today.

The onslaught of TV punditry fills people with fear and the idea that “we” (meaning the West) have to attack somebody, somewhere in order to be safe. The terrorist attacks have revived the culture of war.

Bombs, atrocities, and fleeing refugees are what we see. We want it all to go away so we can enjoy the “peace” of Christmas. But that’s the point: the peace we seek can only come about by dealing with the turbulence around us. The hope of a Christian is not found in escaping from the world,

but in dealing with it as best we can. And only when we make that personal effort, can we find a measure of peace within us.

Cancel Christmas because the terrorists are committing murder and mayhem? Hardly. Be merry at Christmas and ignore the terrorists? No. We truly celebrate Christmas by moving the world, perhaps only a step at a time, towards the love that Christ represents.

So how do we make the effort? That question is being clearly answered by the unprecedented wave of Canadians across the country who have rallied to the challenge of settling 25,000 Syrian refugees in our midst. It is being answered by all those supporting the new government's decision to stop the bombing in the Middle East. It is being answered by those calling for a greater United Nations presence to bring a political solution to the extremely complicated crises in Syria and Iraq.

We need a few principles to guide us. First, there is no military solution to terrorism. Second, war is futile. Third, there can be no peace without development and justice. State these principles to our politicians, to the media, to our friends.

We need to keep standing up for international law and a social order that is fair and just. We need strong institutions for peace, such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. We need to put public money into the Sustainable Development Goals, designed to build a world of more equity.

These are just a few of the bases of peace already in existence. Why do we forget them in times of crises? The structures for a new world order are laboriously being built. Moving the world from the old culture of war to

a new culture of peace requires an enormous transformation in thinking. In so many ways, the world is achieving a rise in civilization.

Of course, evil remains in the world. But its most blatant forms, which we are witnessing today, should not paralyze us. Nor should we fall into a pit of despair. We need to pay less attention to the TV news and more to examining what each of us can do to make the world, starting in our own community, a little better place.

Taking an action for peace – join an NGO, write a letter to the newspaper, send a donation to the refugees – helps us to lift our eyes from the conflict at our feet and see the mountains of accomplishments dotting the landscape. Taking an action builds confidence in ourselves that we are not lonely outposts but part of a community of concern that is millions of times more powerful than the terrorists.

There are no easy answers to the social disorder today, but the Christian can take to heart Isaiah's words: "Peace, peace to the far and near, says the Lord, and I will heal them." And Canadians must urge the United Nations to play a stronger role in building enforceable law. Those are Christmas presents we can give ourselves and we may indeed taste some joy.