

The Hope of a Realist for Peace

**Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
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I want to express my hope at the outset that humanity can actually achieve a peaceful and just coexistence. This may seem a fanciful wish, considering that we are living through a time of scarring tragedy: the Ukraine war, in which 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. 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.

Wait a minute, many will say. What about the violent conflicts continuing to take a heavy toll on human life? What about the starvation af-

fecting millions? What about global warming threatening to make huge areas of the planet uninhabitable? What about the continued modernization of nuclear weapons leading us to the edge of Armageddon?

These harried questions pull us back to everyday reality. They are in every newscast, and so, beaten down by the tumult and rancour around us, many have formed a distinctly negative view of the future of the world. They see only the clouds, but not the light waiting to break through.

We must shake off the bad news. This doesn't mean denying it. 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.

Western countries particularly have been negligent of the very instrument chiefly founded by two Westerners, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Starting in the 1980s, the West, led by the United States, has continually down-graded the U.N. as the principal instrument to preserve peace. It has assigned that role to NATO, a military alliance, which began its life in 1949 with twelve member nations and has now expanded to thirty-one. The expansion brought in states that surround Russia, whose war-minded leader Vladimir Putin reacted by invading Ukraine. It is easy to condemn the Russian attack on Ukraine, as I do, but it is harder to face up to the factors that set the stage for the invasion. George Kennan, the famous U.S. diplomat who first proposed the policy

of containment of the Soviet Union, called NATO expansion “the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era.”

Humiliated after the end of the Cold War, Russia increasingly felt vulnerable. That does not excuse Russia’s attack on Ukraine, but it helps to explain the new environment it found itself in, especially when the U.S. openly sought dominance in the five spheres of air, land, sea, space and cyber. The U.S.’s planned \$842 billion military budget for 2024 is greater than the next ten greatest military spenders combined; the U.S. has military bases or presence in more than 70 countries. In the process of NATO expansion and the rise of the military-industrial complex driving arms spending (and profits) to ever-new highs, the authority of the U.N. was weakened.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, Western military dominance became the creed to counter the rise of authoritarians. International confrontation replaced cooperation. Belligerence became the dominant characteristic of the post-Cold War world. Military spending soared to new heights while the poorest of the world were abandoned. The wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine all resulted from a clash of cultures, mis-readings of history, and a steady erosion of the United Nations as the principal guardian of peace.

The issue of peace in the world is far larger than the Russia-Ukraine disputes. Peace is a global issue. Thus U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is now preparing to publish “A New Agenda for Peace,” which addresses a myriad of challenges the international community faces today. He will set 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 wholistic approach to peace.

The New Agenda for Peace is buttressed by a new effort made by nations preparing to attend, in September, the U.N. Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 development goals have a 2030 target to eliminate the worst forms of poverty, but that target is now out of reach. The 2023 SDG Summit is intended to be 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 climate crisis of global warming is also a security issue because higher temperatures lead to famines and conflict over resources, tragedies in themselves but which then lead to higher refugee rates. The 2023 final report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says it will take a quantum leap in global action to hold global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

As World Federalists, we must stand behind the United Nations as the indispensable instrument for peace, and reject the odious and erroneous doctrine of NATO that more military spending will bring peace. Rather we must urge the Government of Canada to concentrate on the New

Agenda for Peace, the worrisome rate of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and the IPCC's stark warning on what must be done to stop the devastation of the planet. This multi-pronged effort to secure a just peace, in political, social justice and environmental terms, is unprecedented. These three themes, centering around global cooperation, must be addressed to move forward in attaining what is every person's birth right: the human right to peace.

Previous generations never considered peace as an actual right. It was seen, in the instances when armies were not slaughtering one another, as a sort of blessing. Thinking changed when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. Gradually, the frontiers of rights were expanded and, in 2016, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a document called "The Declaration on the Right to Peace." The vote was 131 states in favour, 34 abstentions and 19 opposed. Obviously, the world is split on the right to peace, but the very fact that this "right" is now on the global agenda marks the progress of humanity.

Just as it was necessary to go beyond the Charter in writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the proponents of the right to peace assert it is now necessary to wrap the issues of peace and security, development and human rights into a single framework called "the right to peace." Many states find this appealing because it reflects a holistic approach to peace, But several Western states (unfortunately, Canada among them) vigorously reject this idea, holding that there is no legal basis for peace in international law and that it is impossible to find a common definition of peace grounded in human rights. The drafters

compromised and wrote: “Everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized.” It is not a perfect phrase, but it is a step forward.

The Declaration on the Right to Peace lays the groundwork for a more secure world. Opponents doubtless fear that it will pave the way for a future comprehensive law against warfare. That, of course, is exactly what is intended. The development of public opinion to a higher level in opposing war is a necessary basis for legal prohibition of warfare.

The peace I am talking about is not the peace of the idealist, expecting a utopia in this heavily-burdened world. Rather, it is the peace of the realist, knowing that in the age of weapons of mass destruction and the globalization of life-and-death issues, such as climate change and pandemics, an acceptance of new rules for common security is essential. As U.S. President John F. Kennedy said in 1963: “In the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s futures. And we are all mortal.” Like Kennedy, I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, and the kind that enables people and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children, not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.

Nonviolence is a guiding principle for a peaceful world. Nonviolence has far more than a direct physical application: it applies to economic and social relationships and the relationship of humanity as a whole to the planet. It is a new way of thinking and it needs to be espoused by po-

litical leaders, not just by academics or religious leaders. That is why security and economic and social development and climate change need to be examined in their inter-relationship. That is what Secretary-General Guterres is trying to do, and we must urge Canada to back him strongly. Changing our attitude to reject militarism as such an important component of Canadian foreign policy – as Guterres has asked of all countries – would enable Canada to adopt a more holistic approach in pursuing a just peace.

We may not yet have reached sufficient maturity of civilization to enforce the right to peace. Governments, at least some of them, are still too strong and are able to overcome the wishes of those who have turned against war. But this situation will not prevail forever. It will give way to those who demand the right to peace, just as the forces of slavery, colonialism and apartheid gave way when the opposition became strong enough. That is why developing the elements of a culture of peace — education, sustainable development, respect for all human rights, equality between men and women, democratic participation, understanding and tolerance, free flow of information, and human security for all — is so important and hopeful. All this is the work of the World Federalist Movement in Canada.

Peace is a multi-dimensional subject. Those who came before us on this planet never faced the mix of dangers and opportunities that challenge the inhabitants of these first decades of the 21st century. Today we have a vision of what is required to secure peaceful coexistence on the planet. Our hope lies in implementing that vision.

