

The Politics of Hope

Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
to Dinner Given by Her Honour, Lois Hole,
Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta

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Thank you, Your Honour, for this lovely, unforgettable evening. Patricia and I feel immensely honoured. This is but one more instance of the largeness of your heart. If I had my way, Alberta would have Lois Hole as Lieutenant-Governor forever.

It is said that a man's riches can be measured in the quality of his friends. As I look around this room, I feel that I am the richest man in Edmonton. As Cole Porter would say, "You're the Top!" or perhaps, "I Get a Kick Out of You," or even better, "You'd Be So Easy to Love." I've always liked those songs, but of course my favourite is "My Way." That's an Independent Senator's theme song.

Some people, in their uncharitable moments, suggest that I took this Frank Sinatra standard too seriously. I don't know. There's another song that I also use as a guide, "Don't Fence Me In." Or perhaps that should be put in modern political parlance, "Don't Wall Me In."

I don't want any walls around me or around Alberta or around Canada. I want instead a series of bridges. Let's build a bridge tonight and "Fly Me to the Moon." Let our spirits soar. Let's cast aside the politics of fear that dominates so much political discussion; let's pick up the politics of hope

Let us imagine that we lived in a world of peace. What would it look like? It would be a world that is human-centered and genuinely democratic. It would build and protect sustainable development, equity and justice. It would replace armaments, violent conflict and wars with human security

measures based on the principles of the United Nations Charter. It would be a world with a clean environment, a fair distribution of the earth's resources, and a system of international law to protect all human rights.

I reject the notion that such a world is unobtainable. It is the politics of fear that makes such goals unreachable. This is the kind of politics that says war is necessary for peace; violence is necessary for freedom; exploitation of others is necessary for security. This is the kind of politics that uses the tragedy of September 11 to scare the public into believing that only gigantic amounts of weaponry can head off the terrorism of the future. This culture of fear, of exclusiveness, of superiority must be replaced by a culture of hope.

A new culture of hope is my message to you tonight. The culture of war that drags humanity down must now give way to a culture of peace. By a culture of peace I mean respecting the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice; rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social; sharing with others to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression; implementing the rule of law to address global security problems.

It is sometimes said that all this is mere idealism. Indeed the work that is going on in many corners of the U.N. and in civil society to build a new culture of peace is often drowned out by the drumbeats of war. But I think that those who engage in peace work are the true realists of our time, for they understand that new technologies are accelerating the spread of nuclear and

other weapons of mass destruction and, with them, the capacity to end life on earth. Today's idealists are those who think the status quo – the war culture – can be sustained without a world-wide calamity.

In my book, “The Human Right to Peace,” I describe the early work the United Nations has done to define how the peoples of the world have a sacred right to peace.

We must insist on this truth and let no one dissuade us from it by the false claims of “impracticality.” Nothing is more practical. Gandhi showed the power of non-violent resistance to social injustice. So did Martin Luther King. So did Nelson Mandela.

The time has come to resist the greatest social injustice – the institution of war. For war will kill us all. The only way humanity can survive is by overcoming the culture of war, which has brought us to the unacceptable state of now being the authors of our own destruction.

If, in previous times, it could be said that humanity did not possess the tools of peace but only the tools of war, that condition no longer exists. The U.N. gives us the base of the international law to resolve human conflict.

We have not yet 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.

A culture of peace will not only make the world a more human place, it will lead inexorably to the acquisition of the human right to peace. Future generations, when they have tasted the fruit of a culture of peace, will recognize almost intuitively that peace is their right. They will demand it. Our role, as the twenty-first century begins, is to nourish the seeds of peace.

The politics of hope can show us the way forward. The blossoming of intelligence is a chief characteristic of our time. So is the dramatic growth of civil society movements pressing governments toward progressive global security policies. The creative activities of countless people around the world, bonded electronically by the Internet, are another sign of the maturation of humanity now taking place.

Indeed, our world has become a human community inter-connected in every sphere of activity. This is an empowering discovery capable of energizing public policy

I maintain that the politics of hope is grounded in reality. Hope is best understood as a verb, connoting an active desire with the expectation of fulfillment: we long for something, and will it to happen. Hope cannot

guarantee that we get what we long for, but it activates us in the search, and provides a pathway from vision to reality. Hope is the great motivator. The bigger the dream, the stronger must be our hope. Through hope we overcome.

Yes, "We Shall Overcome!"

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome some day

And that song of hope has universal appeal.