

IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

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Distinguished colleagues, honorable speakers, dear students, ladies and gentlemen.
I would like to start by thanking Rector Kholod, Vice Rector Zadoya and Dr. Proshin for inviting me to this prestigious conference. It is an honor and privilege to be here today and to give this talk about peace

As we all know, statements can be very effective. Some of the words of former world leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Winston Churchill, Daisaku Ikeda and John Kennedy have had a profound impact on human history acting as catalysts to provoke a change, a watershed in human history, a paradigm shift in values and attitudes in the readers and listeners.

It is sufficient to recall the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King «I have a dream», Ronald Reagan's «Tear down this wall», Winston Churchill's words «We will never surrender» and Kennedy's «Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country» to realize their impact upon humanity in shaping attitudes and values.

How many of us have not been touched by these immortal words of Mahatma Gandhi. «An eye for an eye and soon the whole world is blind».

One of the greatest issues today, as it has been for the past centuries, is the one of peace between nations and I would like to remind you of the words of one of the greatest US presidents, when he spoke many decades ago on this subject:

«What kind of peace do we seek? Not a *Pax Americana* enforced upon the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children--not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women--not merely peace in our time but peace for all time. I speak of peace because of the new face of war». These words by John F Kennedy ring as true today as they did then.

Violence remains virtually everywhere today, not only in this country. There is violence in injustice; there is structural, institutional and cultural violence; violence in the enormous chasms that divide the world in terms of wealth, health and knowledge; and there is the ultimate violence in the million lives lost this and every week around the world, due to poverty and diseases and finally the most violent of all: *war*.

Going back in time, one of the great tragic events for the world has been the rise of terrorism, often sponsored by nations outside the countries national borders. It has resulted in a deep trauma for many nations, it awakened them from their relative complacency and feelings of invulnerability, it has had a major impact upon the geopolitical world situation. It has led to the wars in Afghanistan, in Iraq and many African countries as well as in this beautiful country.

How do we react in case of human suffering caused by wars as well as other reasons? Well, this depends on the distance. Often it is «Oh that is really terrible» and you give something to the Red Cross or your favorite charity to alleviate your feeling of guilt and to make you feel you contribute to the well-being of society.

The Golden Rule of the Bible says, do unto others what you want them to do to you. A simple rule and easy to follow, yet, throughout history, mankind has been phenomenally efficient in wreaking havoc upon his fellow man. Cro-Magnon versus Neanderthals, Romans against Barbarians, Protestants against Catholics, Nazis against Jews, communists against capitalists, Israel versus Arabs, the history repeats itself endlessly and dismally. Jealousy and hatred for others are frequent values, which often unscrupulous politicians use to promote their own and selfish goals.

The awful fact is that in the 21st Century, well over a hundred million people, most of them civilians, have perished in wars. But war alone does not account for violent deaths. Do you know how many people are killed every year due to other forms of violence? According to a study made by WHO over 1.6 million lives are snuffed out every year.

My point here tries to illustrate one great problem, of mass media induced indifference to suffering. You simply can't get involved in all the catastrophes and deaths announced every day in the media. The news of an earthquake causing 130.000 lives, leaves most of us unmoved if it occurs halfway around the globe. A case in point is the current stream of refugees towards EU from the North African states and the Middle East across the Mediterranean. How does the public react to see images of several hundred adult refugees drowning in the water? From an emotional standpoint usually not with any particular involvement. At the same time a picture of a drowned child lying face down on a beach evokes worldwide sympathy and even anguish.

One probably needs to experience violence first hand to really become involved personally. As an example of this, I did not particularly consider the cost of violence until my son came home in Stockholm one night severely beaten up and bleeding after he tried to stop a group of youngsters of setting fire to a car. But my real engagement started when I was in Miami to give a speech. I met the chief of police of the town who told me about a 12 year old girl who the previous week had shot another 11 year old girl point blank in the head after an argument about a boyfriend. Her classmates disapproved afterwards, less of the shooting as such but that she had kicked the girl in the stomach who was lying on the ground. They felt that that was excessive violence.

That strongly motivated me to start to do something active. We formed *the Non-Violence Project* and we reached over 1.2 million teenagers in schools on four continents to teach them conflict resolution and abstinence from gratuitous violence. What have been its effects? I do not know the statistics but I was informed there had been up to 33 % reductions in incidents in the schools that were exposed to our programs.

We cannot afford to be complacent about our persistent culture of violence. The cost of it in our communities is staggering. A *Business Week* report on crime in the US set the direct and indirect costs to Americans of poverty and violent crimes at over half a trillion dollars annually. And the lifetime costs for all persons aged twelve and older who are injured due to rape, robbery, assault, arson and murder in a single year in America are estimated to be \$180 billion with nearly 50 % of these in medical and health related costs. Do you know how many violent crimes in the US? Last year, in the US alone, there were 6.2 million rapes, armed robberies and assaults, only half of them ever reported to the police.

Every sane person wants peace. It is unfortunate that men and women in power so often seem to make decisions, which lead to more violence instead of less. And the decision makers are helped by the escalating arms outlays. Around the world, the yearly expenditures on arms and munitions are over 1.6 trillion US dollars. You could get a lot of schools and hospitals for that. Against this figure, the annual budget of the United Nations, whose ultimate mission is world peace, is but 4 billion dollars.

It simply doesn't add up. Our priorities must change. We must apply the lessons learned through community building, that is, to SHARE WITH OTHERS. We must try, as Mahatma Gandhi instructed, «to understand violence».

In each of these phrases we can see the seeds of action that changed the world. But inspiring words and well formulated speeches are not enough in themselves. They need to be

followed up by concrete actions, by substantial and sustained efforts to educate and to change peoples' attitudes and behavior.

Conferences and meetings are necessary but not sufficient in themselves. Community building, by its very nature, demands grassroots action on the part of many people. Each of us needs to know that we can and do make a difference. World peace through community building in the Daisaku Ikeda, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King tradition demands a global outreach to engage the empathy and understanding of ordinary people, to identify and reinforce their value systems and to induce them to take action.

An example of a community action is the International Peace Day which takes place annually on the 21st of September around the world. It encourages cease-fire, non-violence and bringing individuals together for resolution of conflicts. The organization «*Peace One Day*» attempts to raise activities and awareness on that particular day.

Following are some figures related to that day: 9 % of the world's population out of 7.3 billion or 657 million human beings were aware of the IPD, 10 million people which is the number of the entire population of Sweden were thought to have behaved more peacefully on Peace day. 2 million people took part in synchronized meditation around the world to mark the peace day. 1.4 million children were administered polio vaccine in Afghanistan in 2007 due to the Peace One Day ceasefire that year. Rather impressive figures, don't you agree?

Peace is a very elusive goddess. But does this mean we should abandon her pursuit? Of course not, it would be like saying we should stop cancer cure research because 50 % of those who get it die from it. But we need hands-on, concrete actions. Understanding and acceptance of the other party, requires communications. And communications between individuals, organizations, companies and countries is the key. Also self-interest is a powerful motivation factor. If the other party owes you money or his activities will produce profit for you it makes it so much less tempting to inflict harm on him.

Cases in point are the Nordic Vikings, with fearsome reputes for inflicting plunder, rape, pillage and other forms of mayhem upon their poor victims in England and France. In reality, research has shown most of them most often to be peaceful traders since it is easier to make a profit with someone who is still alive the next time you come around.

The Bible says; man does not live on bread alone. However, large parts of the world's population has no daily bread. Most people on this planet today are basically scrambling to find their daily means of subsistence and a roof over their heads. They are concerned about their basic safety, freedom from aggression and from slavery, whether economic or political, to ensure the survival of themselves and their family.

When you do that, other forms of activities pale into insignificance. You do not normally paint or write poetry if you and your family are starving in the ghettos and refugee camps. You risk becoming aggressive, violent towards your fellow men when you lack hope and perceive the society to be against you and your values but you can't make your voice heard. We must recall Dr King's profound remark: «Violence is the language of the unheard». Negative human values, frequently leading to violent behavior, are not restricted to any one country. They exist in all modern societies. The reasons for this are many. Growth of the global drug trade, a far too easy access to firearms, a breakdown in traditional family and community life values, a huge and growing gap between the «haves» and the «have-nots», the anxieties occasioned by congested big city life, are only some of the factors in some countries. Religious and racial divergences are powerful incitements for violent and antisocial behavior, the possible shock-cushioning effect of violence in movies and on TV are other potential contributors to this state of affairs.

Aggression against others is thus caused by many factors – social, economic, political, ethnic and psychological – but the propensity to resort to violence is most frequently instilled in people during childhood or youth. It is usually during these crucial formative years, when lack of parental love and guidance, powerful negative peer pressures, keenly felt unjust deprivation of social privilege or material possessions, the baleful influence of older wrong-doers and lack of mature judgment can cause the greatest damage to self-control.

And many of us are not setting good examples for our children. Up to the age of 7 or 8 years they are similar to computers without application programs. Their values, attitudes and behavior are copied primarily from the parents and other adults. Only in later years do they acquire their affective and cognitive value system from their peers. It is up to us adults to ensure that a proper example is set early and we often fail dismally at that.

We must ask ourselves what we can do. Well, of course there are no quick and easy solutions. And yet, there are too many truly good men and women in the world to dispute the horrendous view of man as a predator, too many examples of kindness and selflessness to simply accept violence as a natural human characteristic.

One only has to think of the millions of people whose lives are devoted to teaching children life skills, to fighting pain, disease and poverty, to protecting lives and property and to promoting ideals of morality and truth. Also of the millions of ordinary men and women bringing up their children to be good citizens and of those many singular individuals who set glittering examples of tolerance and understanding for others to follow.

One has to remember of the remarkable changes in Europe, where two world wars and a cold war divided the continent, and yet before the century was over, a new democratic union was formed, with open borders and a common currency with former mortal enemies living in peace and harmony.

These, rather than barbaric exceptions are, surely, the ones who reflect the true nature of Man. These are our hope and salvation even if the good that they do is so often overshadowed in the media by the evil done by a comparatively few others.

You who are here today, you who belong to the fortunate few percent on the top of the world's population pyramid that have jobs and education and financial means, what can you do? Well, you can help a lot. You can contribute with your work, your funding or your spirit.

My great grand uncle Alfred Nobel believed in the global community when he created the Nobel Prizes. He wanted to reach out, to make the prizes available to everyone on earth, not only to Scandinavians, as proposed by the King of Sweden. He felt the prizes would help to form a link between nations, people and individuals, and this would serve to promote and accelerate the peace movement. His values were humanistic, to better the development of mankind.

I believe we are put on this earth to help our fellow man. Some Western religions like Christianity believe that every day you slice a loaf of the bread that is life. Of course if reincarnation really exists you might get some more chances. But when you look back upon your life, when you are at the end of the road, you must be able to say to yourself: «I really tried to make a difference». It does not matter if you did not succeed as long as you tried your best and it does not matter if the impact was not great, not everyone can be a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Honored colleagues and students thank you very much for your attention.