

ERSKINE CHILDERS LECTURE 2009- ACTION FOR UN RENEWAL.

“SAVING SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS FROM THE SCOURGE OF WAR”
BUILDING A NONKILLING, NONVIOLENT CULTURE FOR THE HUMAN
FAMILY.

Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate

Dear friends,

I am very happy to be here with you. I would like to thank Vijay Mehta and the Action for UN renewal, for their kind invitation to give this Annual Erskine Childers Lecture for 2009.

Erskine Childers, UN diplomat and the son of the 4th President of Ireland in 1993 in London, gave a lecture on ‘Strengthening the UN’ in which he said ‘the UN must become root-cause directed, not merely responsive’. I feel this is a challenge not only to the UN, but to each of us. It seems we spend a great deal of our time responding to one crisis after another. This is important as when people need help, be it a natural catastrophe or human-made one, it is necessary they receive it. The UN deserves congratulations in many instances as its many Humanitarian bodies undertake and provide excellent help in many situations. However, the UN is a global non-partisan organization of 192 member states, whose Charter’s preamble states that war shall be abolished, and it is mandated to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

In view of this policy obligation to work for the abolition of war, it is incomprehensible to me why in September, 2008, a Joint Declaration on Co-operation between the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was signed by the Secretary-Generals of the two bodies. Both organizations are far apart, the UN’s mandate to Abolish War, and work for peace and disarmament, the NATO, a nuclear armed alliance of 26 member states with 70% of the world’s military expenditure, and expanding. I believe this Declaration should be cancelled and we should move to dismantle NATO. This should have been done when the Warsaw pact was dismantled, as NATO has no role now. NATO (USA is NATO) whose member states include Nuclear Weapons states, such as USA, UK France, who maintain Nuclear first Use Option, are indeed a danger to the world. The USA has Nuclear weapons in 6 states in Europe, and as USA and UK are updating their nuclear weapons they are endangering the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty and ignoring their commitments to disarm. If governments are serious about peace, we need to renounce war as an institution and disarm our world of all weapons of mass destruction. Steps should include 1) remove all US Nuclear weapons from Europe and US missile defence installations from the Russian border. UK/France/USA/Israel/Russia and all other nuclear states abolish nuclear weapons. Establish Middle East Nuclear Free zone, free from all weapons of Mass Destruction, and set up similar zones in other parts of the world. I believe we should replace NATO with a nonviolent European Common security Community. Establish the same in other world regions, and also an overall Global nonviolent Common Security Community.

Armies: I believe we should work to transform the culture of militarism into a culture of nonkilling, nonviolence and peace. Armies could be abolished (as has been done in countries like Costa Rica) and instead establish multi-national community unarmed

peacekeepers. Similar non-violent transformation and training could be used in Police, prison and security establishments. We have only to watch the TV screens to see the horror of wars and violence – the siege and bombardment of Gaza by Israel, the Allied forces ‘shock and Awe’ of war and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia’s Bombing of Chechnya, all of which broke International Humanitarian laws and were crimes against humanity. We all as the human family can work for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons as they are part of the root causes of much suffering and fear in the world, and both are well past their sell-by date in an interconnected, interdependent world. However, to do this we must disarm our own violence accepting mindsets, and begin to transform our violent cultures into nonkilling nonviolent cultures.

In December 2007 the Nobel Peace Laureates launched a charter for a World without Violence. This Charter sets out principles which are helpful in moving us all towards a new Nonviolent Culture for the Human family. It is hoped the UK and other world Governments and Institutions will endorse the Charter. In 2008 the Parliament of Calabria, Italy, and also the Parliament of the Basque country, endorsed the Charter. Calabria also set up a Ministry of Peace and in doing so joined a growing world movement which is seeking to find nonviolent alternatives to local and international conflict. There is a great desire around the world amongst people to find alternatives to war and weapons. In June I attended a conference in Tokyo where over 10,000 gathered to Protect Article 9 – the clause in the Japanese constitution which rejects war and militarism. If more Governments adopted such a Peace Clause in their constitutions we could move towards a world without war, and I would like to propose that the United Nations General Assembly discuss and adopt the Japanese Article 9 thereby encouraging its Member States to move away from war and militarism, towards nonviolent conflict prevention and resolution. The Charter for a World without Violence in Article 13 sets out the Principal that everyone has the right not to be killed and the responsibility not to kill others, as a step towards building nonkilling societies. To realize such a world it is necessary to establish or strengthen implementing institutions. We could consider a Nonviolent Security Council, to transform the current Security Council in which all member states have Nuclear weapons and are major arms exporters. We could also have a global Nonkilling rescue Service, a Global Council of Reconciliation and Restorative Justice. A non-violent Global Ecumenical Body and Ministries of Peace in every Government, in every country. Currently we have a NGO which is a Nonviolent Peaceforce, operating in several countries, and made up of people who believe that local and international conflicts can be solved without military force.

In this area of peace and international security the UN has the greatest potential to make an enormous difference, but it is also the area where the weakness of the UN is most acutely felt. There is a critical need to have international agreement on national boundaries and to have an international agency that has the ability to nonviolently enforce the protection of these boundaries if neighbouring nations are breaching them. This appears to me to be an obvious role for the UN.

I support the reform of UN Security Council. The UN Charter text could be changed to make the Security Council more Representative while at the same time making the UN more democratic. Increasing the Permanent members of the Security Council to include representation of Islamic/Muslim world (now a quarter of the world’s

population) and also India, which is one of the world's largest economic powers. Also removing the Veto would help to make the UN Security Council more democratic and representative, and allow progress towards disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

In taking Erskine Childer's advice to become 'root-cause directed' we each need to look into our lives, and root out violence. The World Health Organization says that violence is a preventable disease, and the Saville statement assures us we are not born violent. So how come there is so much violence? And how do we build nonkilling, nonviolent societies, where we live, and around our world? Is it possible? I believe the answer is yes, but we need to unlearn many of our ideas.

Why do we give our permission to our Governments to go to war, which is really a mass killing of civilians and a destruction of their environment and infrastructure? The idea we have in our minds that killing is somehow necessary, and in the name of National Defence we give our Governments permission to do so, has caused untold wars and millions of unnecessary deaths. If we are to abolish war (mass murder) we need to disarm our own mindsets and recognize that every human life is sacred and as we have a right not to be killed and we have no rights to kill others, not individually or collectively through wars or armed revolutionary struggles. We need to remove from Governments our permission for them to go to war and insist there are always alternatives. There are always alternatives to violent, and we elect our Political leaders to solve our problems through dialogue, negotiations. Politicians who take their country to war are failing to meet their legal responsibility to protect the citizens of both their own countries, and the citizens of other countries.

For example, during my visit to Gaza in October, 2008, with the Free Gaza Movement, we saw the terrible suffering of the people of Gaza under a two year siege imposed by the Israeli government. This siege, a form of collective punishment by the Israeli Government of 1 and a half million people, broke the Geneva Conventions and was a crime against humanity. We met with Hamas and representative of all political groups, who were keen for dialogue, but the following week the Israeli Government broke the Siege, and began an all out military bombardment of Gaza, killing 2,300 people, the majority of them women and children, thus committing war crimes and crimes against Humanity.

The tragedy is that this was preventable and the Political/Military Israeli mindset which continues to believe that problems will be solved through Militarism must be challenged. The Israeli/Palestinian problem, one of the root causes, of which are military occupation and apartheid policies of Israel, can be solved. I would encourage people to support the Boycott/Divestment campaign against Israel until they start to uphold their obligations under International law and give human rights and justice to the Palestinians. It is hoped that the Obama Administration will speak to Hamas and the Palestinian representatives and be more even handed and fair in its efforts to help find a just and peaceful solution the Israel/Palestinian conflict.

The United Nations has a major responsibility to protect all our Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated 60 years ago that 'a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief is the highest aspiration of the common people.' The UDHR is universal and indivisible and is the rich Heritage of

all the peoples of the world. It is the Magna Carta for humankind, and in every generation, in every place, we are called to uphold and protect our rights, and the rights of others. When Governments abuse these rights (or armed revolutionary groups) we must stand up to protect them. This will be a daily and ongoing task. For example when last week the UK Government deported a Dutch MP Geert Wilders denying him freedom of speech, when Israel denies Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli Nuclear whistleblower freedom of speech and movement, when the Iranian government this week puts on trial in Iran, peaceful leaders of the Bahai religion and imprisons Iranian women for campaigning for basic human rights, then we as members of the Human Community, must speak for the 'silenced' and support the United Nations and all freedom loving people to work for a nonviolent, nonkilling world based on human rights and freedom.

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18th February, 2009
London.
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