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Introduction

Excellencies, Family Wateler, distinguished members of the Board of the Carnegie Foundation, Chairman Bot, ladies and gentlemen, family and friends.

It is a rather humbling to be standing here on the occasion of the 2016 Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize. It feels as if I ought to be in the audience, listening to an august figure and certainly not giving an acceptance speech. However, at the end of the day, so many of us-you, our colleagues, UN peacekeepers and humanitarian workers or human rights activists work tirelessly to achieve peace, to realise a life of dignity for others. Many lose their lives in the course of duty. Only to be known to their family and friends. Therefore to me this award is above all recognition of their strive, commitment and a recognition of their crucial role. I am their colleague, and proud to be so. I am delighted to be here today.

The Peace Palace embodies our shared dream for peace; it reflects shared values. Its physically imposing stature lends gravitas to the message of peace but also the undeniable importance of norms and standards which are to accompany our quest for peace.

Dutch banker John Wateler was clearly a man ahead of his time. He became peace philanthropist when philanthropy was mostly associated with charitable affairs. In his legacy to the Carnegie Foundation, John Wateler undertook a personal commitment in supporting peace, peace efforts. In doing so, he singled out our personal responsibility to do what we can, when we can, within the means we are given.

I would like to focus my remarks tonight on my personal understanding of ways to realize international peace.

Challenges to peace - short of the cynical reaction that is for the naïve.

A realist would argue that global instability and unrest are simply the new norm, and ‘the new normal’: the fact is that we are witnessing a new historic period of instability and uncertainty. Millions of people have fled their homes, displaced by conflict. We experience a surge in violent extremism and terror, especially in Africa and the Middle East. The 2016 Global Peace Index shows that overall global levels of peace continue to deteriorate, largely driven by the intensifying conflicts in the MENA region.

On a daily basis we are confronted with human tragedy, suffering and unspeakable atrocities, the incomprehensible brutality of modern-day conflicts. The human toll is devastating, and even when political solutions are in reach and reconstruction may be an option, how do we heal the human soul; how do we help the millions of innocent civilians cope with the trauma, and loss especially when medical staff and facilities have become targets of war.

Stepping outside the region

We live in a world that is ever more global, integrated and connected. Yet, the space for dialogue seems to be shrinking. We know a better world is built upon a recognition of our shared humanity, but fundamental values of human rights and mutual acceptance are under threat. Realists would relegate their importance to the land of ‘real politik’. Peace and justice need champions to counter the narrative of the inevitability of conflict, strife and competing interests.

In discussing peace or peace-building, we know that peaceful societies are more than just the absence of violence. Affirmative peace or positive peace is defined precisely by values: tolerance, a desire for justice for ourselves and for others, and reconciliation. It is important to resist a populist rhetoric and tendency for “non-solutionism” that only contributes to fear, xenophobia and the prevalence of the lose-lose solutions. Instead we must nurture, promote and protect the values of peace. And unite behind policies that foster unity and inclusion.

Values of peace – peaceful societies

In my view, the values of peace - human dignity, justice, tolerance, empathy and forgiveness - are fundamental to achieving and sustaining lasting peace. It is the attitudes, as well as the institutions and the structures that create and sustain peace

and build peaceful societies. It is about our individual values, the role of government and the ability of the multilateral system to deliver on its promise. It is this trinity of attitudes, institutions and structures that provides the social fabric and cohesion of a society, a community. And it is this cohesion that in the end will determine if conflict is resolved through violent or through peaceful means.

Achieving peace requires a holistic approach that addresses the whole spectrum of development, power sharing, and security issues. It takes time, money and leadership to establish well-governed societies. But in the end, a comprehensive peace-building approach will be remarkably low on investment when compared to the cost of conflict. Peace must be nurtured with greater resources and greater abilities than those afforded to war. We need to invest early in durable structures that foster cohesion, human values, human rights structures, civil society, rule of law, countering violent extremism capacity. We see this everywhere in the Middle East and particularly today. Yet our attention span is only limited to the conflict, the parties and that TV moment. We often speak of Preventive Diplomacy, but then have to do it on a shoe-string. Even creating the circumstances of stability through peacekeeping is done with barely any flesh on the bone. Once the caravan moves on, only the proverbial dogs bark.

A joint effort is nowhere without strong and moral leadership

Peace can seem as an elusive and abstract promise, always somehow out of reach. Peace is possible, but who suggested it should be simple? From my own experience in negotiations, I know it takes time. It can only be won by patient, determined effort, by trial and error, and with the knowledge that setbacks will occur.

At times one only gets to deal with the crisis moments, precisely because one is unable to achieve progress on the hard-core issues. Consider for instance Security Council resolution 1701 of 2006, to help secure a permanent ceasefire and a long term solution to the conflict between Israel and Lebanon. It is critical to continue to seek out opportunities for confidence building measures, alongside compliance with resolutions.

Peace or peace enablers can rarely be won just through signing treaties or making deals. It is once an agreement has been signed, that the real work begins. I refer to the Joint Mission of the OPCW-UN in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the unprecedented nature of the Mission and its work.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Peace can only be won through commitment, courage and dedication. We all have a role to play; individuals, affected communities, civil society, politicians, member states, the multilateral system, businesses, and peace philanthropists. Not merely as recipients or providers of services and support, but as full partners. There can be no stability and development without owning the path towards peace and the paper it is signed on.

Women should be at the forefront of all efforts, as leaders, spokespersons and partners in implementation. Women are not a sector, or a focus group, but 50 percent of society. Gender awareness is good, but using the strength of diversity is better.

This brings me to the next point. Joint efforts will have less or no impact without strong and moral leadership; be it an organization or a person. Human values, diversity, restraint in the face of pressure, resilience and morals need to be at the forefront of not only the United Nations and its personnel, but of all the countries that make up this trusted organization. It is about the ability and willingness to act upon these values. They cannot be negotiated down for political gains. We need to be cautious in a time when fact-free politics appear to result in short term gains, but may undermine progress and peace in the long term.

But most importantly, I consider individual contributions to peace absolutely key. This is critical, perhaps even more so than those of institutions, systems, or their respective leadership. Wherever I have worked individuals make the difference; individuals taking responsibility, being creative beyond the call of duty, and embracing risks even if they pay the ultimate price. Individuals who continuously strive to lay the foundations for peace and security and to nurture belief in the art of possibilities – in peacemaking.

Actions

Looking at the world today, I believe the case for an international system of norms, institutions and access to justice is more pressing than perhaps ever before. But faced with the harsh reality of modern-day conflicts, the multilateral system and indeed the international community as a whole will have to move apace and adapt.

First of all, I reiterate the call made by UN Secretary-General designate Guterres, that there is a growing primacy for a political role of building consensus and

seeking solutions. Or ‘a surge in diplomacy’. We need to put much more effort into understanding the fragility that causes conflicts. This means choosing prevention and political solutions over military responses. And it means engaging in creative, modern diplomacy, involving a wide range of stakeholders and expertise at all levels. Diplomacy makes our planet safer and does definitely not receive the support needed. In our lifetime it has not been war but solid, dogged diplomacy, which established the global institutions that matters to us, and has forged landmarks in international laws and norms. The price of diplomatic inaction is simply too high and we can see the consequences around us.

Secondly, we truly need to draw lessons from past conflicts. This is not only for the academics, but it should guide policy makers, diplomats and it should inform our engagement in political reconciliation and reconstruction. Priority should be given to national or communal reconciliation.

Transitional justice can play a critical role in reconciling societies in the aftermath of conflict. Many conflicts end with a compromise deal, with impunity and continued injustice perpetuating grievances that might actually trigger renewed conflict. Justice can be a source of hope after unspeakable destruction and harm and can contribute directly to the prevention of the resumption of violent conflict.

Thirdly, we need to invest in development. The realization of human needs and fundamental rights should be our key priority. Global ODA may not suffice but it is catalytic. Also for peace and security. There can be no development without peace; there can be no durable peace without sustainable development; and no peace or development without human rights.

Finally, and this comes back to my central point, much more must be done to promote the foundational values of peace, locally and globally. We will need to work tirelessly on this, and we will need to be smarter about how to communicate it. We will need to back it up with real, tangible change for people: A global dividend for all. Peace is not for the naive, or the dreamers, peace is a fundamental requirement for our shared humanity.

Conclusion

It is my hope that the values of peace will continue to find their rightful prominent place and remain guiding principles for all our actions – as individuals, states or the multilateral system. Such hope might seem contrary to the facts of our time. But it is not beyond reach. Nor is it elitist or naïve. It is a choice. This starts with

individuals, who in attitude and action provide the building blocks for truly peaceful societies. Language of hate, exclusion and marginalisation of others needs to be annulled by a vibrant and credible alternative. Words are good, but actions speak louder than words.

Acknowledgements

I would like to close in thanking UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Director-General Ahmed Uzumcu, of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for their trust and guidance. I want to extend my sincere thanks to my former and current staff within both the OPCW and the UN for their brilliance, courage and humanity on this journey.

I want to pay particular tribute to Frans van der Lugt, or Pater Frans, the Dutch Jesuit priest who established a community centre and farm near Homs in Syria and dedicated his life to the betterment of people with disabilities and to seeking harmony among Christians and Muslims. He was shot dead in the garden of the community centre in 2014.

Special thanks to my husband Anis, and our four children Janna, Makram, Adam and Inas who often wonder what his wife/their mum is up to, but always support and never doubt!

Allow me to close with a quote by the late Jane Addams: “True peace is not merely the absence of war, it is the presence of justice”.

And I wish to humbly add: Nothing is impossible; politics is the art of possibility and compromise based on justice and our shared humanity.