

Bread Not Bombs: Social Justice in a Fractured World

Senator Douglas Roche, O.C.

It is commonly said that the terrorist attack of September 11 has changed the world. Has it changed our thinking? Will this tragedy wake up society so that, finally, we rise up and make of God's planet the peaceful, just home for humanity that so many long for? That is the essential question I want to address tonight. But first I must deal with the war now being waged in the name of fighting terrorism.

Of course, the terrorists who committed these terrible acts must be hunted down just as the police capture a criminal in our own neighborhood. It will take military action to do this, but the action must be proportionate, so that the culprits are caught without inflicting more death on innocent civilians. In fact, the number of deaths of innocent civilians is mounting. The relentless bombing of Afghanistan is worsening an international catastrophe in one of the most desperate and vulnerable regions of the world. Thousands fleeing the bombs are massing at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. UNICEF warns that the crisis "is threatening the lives of millions of women and children," and that "1.5 million children may not make it through the winter." The starving population of Afghanistan was not complicit in the terrorist actions of New York and Washington, yet it is they who are suffering the "collateral damage" from the bombardment.

Canada should now take the lead in calling for cessation of the bombing and the commencement of a comprehensive program of aid to the suffering civilians of Afghanistan. We must use this terrible period we are passing through to think and act beyond the immediate crisis to find an enduring solution to

Douglas Roche, Order of Canada, is a member of the Senate of Canada and former Member of Parliament (1972-1984).

This article was originally presented as the Wintermeyer Lecture in Christianity and Public Policy at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, on October 26, 2001.

terrorism, not just one that momentarily gives us the satisfaction of responding in kind to an attack.

During the worst days of World War II, the Allied leaders met to plan the ways to lift the world away from the scourge of war. The result was the birth of the United Nations — now the recipient with Kofi Annan of the Nobel Peace Prize — to provide a strengthened basis for peace, development, equity, and justice. That was a turning point for the world, which saw for the first time that the common management of problems was a better route to peace than reliance on militarism.

Now the world is at another turning point when aggressors have found a new way to attack humanity — not on the battlefield far away but in our offices and institutions at home. We must find ways to end forever this aggression. Shocked as we are at the horrific attacks, we must — just as was done in the midst of World War II — lift ourselves up and recognize something more than bombing and the other methods of warfare is necessary to build human security.

It is not good enough for the Government of Canada to send our armed forces, ships, and planes into military action in the perceived battle zone surrounding Afghanistan. It is not good enough for the government to introduce anti-terrorism legislation and spend more than \$280 million in an effort to make Canadians safer from the ravages of terrorists. It is not good enough to rush through a bill tightening regulations dealing with immigrants and refugees in the hope that this will make our borders secure against the incursion of unwanted people.

What is also called for today, at this moment of trauma for the world, is an all-out attack on the causes of terrorism. It is not just the criminals who perpetrated these heinous acts who must be caught and brought to justice. It is the de-humanizing economic and social deprivation that terrorists exploit that must be stamped out. Let it not be said that I am insensitive to the victims, their families, and friends who suffered the horrors of September 11. I went to New York and saw with my own eyes the tangled wreckage of the twin towers and the grieving of the people who stood silently watching the firemen and policemen trying to find survivors. Let it not be said that I am falling into what is known as “moral equivalence,” in which the actions of the terrorists are explained away by the injustices of the world. The September 11 terrorists are

criminals guilty of attacks against humanity and do not deserve the comfort of those who seek to understand them. Let it not be said that I do not understand that it is only the power of militarism that can make us safe. I understand all too well that the instant recourse to warfare in the name of curing aggression has in the past, and will in the future, only lead to more violence and more suffering.

Terrorists can potentially come from anywhere, live anywhere, and strike anywhere that opportunity exists. Their cover lies in the society in which they live; their weapons are tools taken from everyday life, and their targets are the people and institutions of society. Their power is to disrupt through fear, to provoke repression, and to sever the links of peaceful commerce, setting state against state, nation against nation, race against race, and people against people. Living among their victims, they present targets that cannot be eradicated with the firepower of conventional armed forces. Other means must be explored.

The road ahead must be trod with great caution with respect to reliance on the military approach. Much greater emphasis must be placed on non-military measures that will lay the foundation for a world free of the terrorist threat.

What we need is a global initiative to deter and punish terrorist acts in the present and future. This means developing an effective system of international criminal law in which individuals are held accountable before an impartial tribunal such as the International Criminal Court. A prosecutor with strong powers of investigation and prosecution will be needed. It also means strengthening international treaties dealing with terrorism and developing the machinery for their effective implementation according to the due process of law. This will require a strengthening of the United Nations and its ability to define and shape the actions which are taken for the enforcement of international law, and to monitor and verify these actions so that they are done proportionately and in accordance with the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.

* * *

Terrorism, the epitome of hate, feeds on the hatreds and resentments that have been built up in the rest of the world against Western society. We do not like to hear this, CNN does not broadcast it, the political processes do not

want to deal with it. Nonetheless, more conflict is coming because people who are downtrodden are rising up against a West they perceive as rich, arrogant and powerful. Anyone who has traveled widely, as I have, through the villages, teeming cities, refugee camps, and slums of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America knows these words to be true.

It's time for Canada to listen to a high-level panel of experts, headed by former President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, who issued a UN Report on Financing for Development in June 2001. The panel said that half the world's people are still living in abject poverty, with 80 percent of the global population living on less than 20 percent of the global income. Too many people in too many countries lack the freedom to take advantage of the new opportunities of modern technology and are consequently left on the sidelines of the globalization process. People lack freedom when they lack food, education, training, health, basic human and political rights, security, and employment opportunities. Increasing polarization between the haves and have-nots has become a feature of our world, the panel said. And then this sobering warning:

Reversing this shameful trend is the preeminent moral and humanitarian challenge of our age. For people in the rich world, elementary self-interest is also at stake. In the global village, someone else's poverty very soon becomes one's own problem: of lack of markets for one's products, illegal immigration, pollution, contagious disease, insecurity, fanaticism, terrorism.

We fool ourselves if we rely on militarism to curb terrorists and do not take a gigantic step to "reverse this shameful trend." The high-level panel issued a list of recommendations ranging from making the World Trade Organization more equitable to recommitting the donor countries to the international target of 0.7 percent of GNP for official development assistance to an international tax organization to benefit the development process.

It is not only individual measures, important as they are, that are called for in the present crisis. It is a whole new strategy for the survival of humanity. This is what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is calling for. Commenting on the anti-terrorism resolutions already adopted by the Security Council, the Secretary-General said:

To defeat terrorism, we need a sustained effort and a broad strategy to unite all nations, and address all aspects of the scourge we face. The cause must be pursued by all the States of the world, working together and using many different means — including political, legal, diplomatic and financial means.

How much better for peace and security in the world it would be for governments to put their full weight behind such an effort.

If we are worried about developing proper relations with Islam, if we are worried about how to cure the hate and racism that feeds evil acts, if we are worried about our own safety inside the borders of Canada, then let us act today to raise up our society and its political discourse to project out into the international community the values that have made Canada a great country. These are the values that the Catholic Bishops of Canada recently called for in promoting interfaith dialogue in a common reach for international peace and justice for all.

* * *

An honest dialogue must pinpoint the double standards in political priorities today.

- Governments plead that they have little money for social programs, yet they are currently spending \$800 billion a year on military expenditures, which is 80 times more than the \$10 billion they spend on the entire United Nations system. Half of the world's governments spend more on defence than health care. There is always money for war. In the 20th century, known as "the century of megadeaths," at least 110 million people were killed in 250 wars, six times as many deaths per war as in the 19th.

Having said in 1990 at the UN Summit on Children that they had little money for the children's agenda, governments the next year found \$70 billion to prosecute the Gulf War. Last year, international arms sales jumped 13 percent to \$37 billion, with the United States accounting for half of all sales. The "legal" arms trade spills into illicit channels feeding guerilla armies, networks of terrorists, and drug traffickers. In the 1990s, 65 percent of world arms deliveries were sold or given to developing nations, where lingering conflicts

and societal violence scare away potential investors. In 2000, 40 armed conflicts were fought on the territories of 35 countries. There are 500 million small arms in circulation around the world, which kill 500,000 people each year.

- There are now more than 22 million refugees looked after by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These are migrants forced out of their homes by armed conflict, political persecution, or environmental disasters. An equal number are known as “internally displaced” because of armed conflict or persecution in their own countries. These numbers have never been higher, yet UNHCR has been forced to cut its budget, shed staff, and close offices (including seven in Africa) because governments have cut back on their funding. Similarly, Official Development Assistance (ODA), despite a time of unprecedented prosperity in the donor countries, has dropped to an all-time low of just 0.24 percent of GDP, a long way from the 0.7 percent target set by the UN decades ago. Meanwhile, developing countries continue to lose up to \$150 billion annually in potential income from trade as a result of protectionist measures by developed countries.

- The planet’s over-arching problem, nuclear weapons, continues even though the media seldom focus on this threat to civilization itself. More than a decade after the end of the Cold War, there are still 30,000 nuclear weapons in existence, 5,000 of them on “alert” basis, meaning they could be fired on 15 minutes’ notice. The world’s nuclear arsenals have so far cost \$8 trillion, and the United States still spends \$100 million a day to maintain its 10,500 nuclear weapons, most of which are many times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. The major nations refuse to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons even though they are legally obliged to do so under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Weapons of mass destruction are spreading. The threat of “nuclear” terrorism is real. The coming U.S. missile defence system will undermine existing arms control and disarmament treaties, and is the first step in the weaponization of outer space.

Of course, there have been positive gains for humanity in the past few decades. However, those who enjoy the gains are for the most part those who are already strong, and the gap between them and the dispossessed grows wider. It ill serves truth to gloss over the immensity of the violations to social

justice, which are breeding grounds for future conflicts.

U.N. Secretary-General Annan has issued a dire warning:

The century just ended was disfigured, time and again, by ruthless conflict. Grinding poverty and striking inequality persist within and among countries even amidst unprecedented wealth. Diseases, old and new, threaten to undo painstaking progress. Nature's life-sustaining services, on which our species depends for its survival, are being seriously disrupted and degraded by our own everyday activities.

The world's population will increase by two billion over the next 25 years, and 95 percent of that growth will occur in lands that are already weighted down with poverty, wars, and environmental deterioration. The rich-poor gap, the proliferation of weapons large and small, the ethnic hatreds, the environmental destruction, the forced migration of peoples — all this is not sustainable. We must understand where these negative trends are leading. They are leading to more conflict, calamitous suffering, widespread social disorder, and ruination of whole sections of the planet.

* * *

For me, this assessment of the world and its future is not just a matter of statistics and abstractions. My view of the world has been shaped by my experiences. I have walked through disease-ridden slums and shantytowns of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. I have held a dying Indian baby in my arms. I have seen the gaunt bodies, despoiled lands, the wreckage of Hiroshima. But I have also been in villages of Bangladesh where child deaths were wiped out by UNICEF's oral rehydration program. I have been part of international negotiations where inch-by-inch progress towards disarmament was made. I have been lifted up by the soaring rhetoric of world leaders calling for a better world, only to be deflated by the absurd skewing of governmental priorities that emphasize preparations for war while starving the processes of peace.

So there is within me an outrage at the political duplicity of the powerful, who espouse equality and peace while using military means to maintain control over the resources of the planet. I am critical of the hypocrisies that justify a

political and economic system that spends countless sums on endless wars but cannot feed and put every child in the world into a classroom. It is not right to spend \$60 billion on a needless and unworkable missile defence system, when that same amount could provide adequate water and sanitation to the two billion people who have neither.

Railing against injustice does not accomplish much. But what accomplishes even less is closing our eyes to massive discrepancies and assuming that the status quo is sustainable. Our attitude to the status quo must change, for peace is not possible in a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

* * *

A distinguishing feature of our time is that morality and pragmatics have intersected. What we have long known that we *should* do for our brothers and sisters on the planet, we now know we *must* do if we are to survive without the most wrenching dislocations in our lives. It is not news that moral teaching emphasizes the core values of respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, mutual respect and integrity. It is news that technology has brought us to the point where we all stand on one planet, breathe the same air, are affected by one another's problems, and possess the power to decimate all life. The physical integrity of all human life today demands political policies that enhance life, not diminish it. The common good requires policies that promote sustainable and socially equitable development and peace in all regions of the globe.

I want a world that is human-centered and genuinely democratic, a world that builds and protects peace, equality, justice, and development. I want a world where human security, as envisioned in the principles of the United Nations Charter, replaces armaments, violent conflict, and wars. I want a world where everyone lives in a clean environment with a fair distribution of the earth's resources and where human rights are protected by a body of international law.

I do not feel alone in such desires, for this is the precise agenda advanced by the People's Millennium Forum held at the United Nations last year. The rise of civil society groups defining their claim to a more just world is another sign of the times. The work of committed NGOs has undoubtedly strengthened

the UN's ability to develop programs of many kinds — education for all, better health and nutrition for children, protecting the environment, human rights, reproductive health, poverty eradication, the advancement and empowerment of women, human settlements, and arms control in several categories. Civil society has been instrumental in the Campaign to Ban Landmines and the development of the International Criminal Court.

When the Millennium Summit of world leaders was held, a Declaration was adopted, establishing priorities for the UN: to overcome poverty, put an end to conflict, meet the needs of Africa, promote democracy and the rule of law, and protect the environment. Governments alone will never fulfill this vision. The active partnership of informed civil society is essential.

The essence of the new agenda is to improve the conditions for human security, whose advocates have aimed their criticism at the globalization process. They want globalization to bring a new understanding of the world as a single community. Globalization must mean more than creating bigger markets. In short, globalization must use the sweeping power of technology to raise all of humanity to higher levels of civilization.

Do not doubt that the core of creative, active people working in their own ways for a better world is expanding. The Dalai Lama recently noted: "We are witnessing a tremendous popular movement for the advancement of human rights and democratic freedom in the world. This movement must become an even more powerful moral force, so that even the most obstructive governments and armies are incapable of suppressing it."

The best of civil society movements is to be found in such enterprises as the Hague Appeal for Peace. In 1999, 7,000 people of 100 nationalities gathered at The Hague to challenge the assumption of today's skeptics who have given up on the essential UN idea that succeeding generations can be saved from the scourge of war. The Hague Appeal launched a citizens' "Agenda for Peace and Justice in the 21st Century," in which citizen advocates, progressive governments, and official agencies work together for common goals.

* * *

The agenda I have described is the minimum requirement for a world of peace with social justice. A new global ethic of caring and sharing is required to

achieve it. No one religion can claim the agenda; it is the work of all. In fact, the holistic nature of religious teaching helps reinforce the understanding that solutions will be most effective if they address disarmament, development, and environmental protection together. The new ethic can be expressed sharply, succinctly, and irrefutably, as the World Parliament of Religions states: “Every human being must be treated humanely!”

This is what it comes down to. Do enough people care about the conditions of the world to demand change? Finally and inescapably, do I care enough? Do I love my neighbor enough? This is a spiritual question, because the world crisis we face today is essentially spiritual. It is not only human rights we need to address, it is also human responsibility. The great strategies, plans, proposals, and dreams will amount to little if I myself — and the millions like me — do not take some responsibility for the continued peaceful development of God’s planet.

At this transformation moment in world history, we must ask ourselves: Are disarmament, economic and social development, and environmental protection achievable? Is racism so entrenched in the human character (the recurrence of violence in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and African states are depressing examples) that it cannot be ended? Can the forces of power, greed, and corruption ever be overcome? Prayer, poetry, art, rhetoric, while all necessary to the full expression of our humanity, have not in the past spared the world from wars and catastrophes. What will actually motivate us to action for 21st century human security?

The New York/Washington catastrophe should serve to energize the political systems to provide social justice in a shrinking — and much more dangerous — planet. My own hope lies in the blossoming of intelligence about ourselves as a human community in a world that is inter-connected in every sphere of activity. This is an empowering discovery, capable of lifting up the public policy formation process. But we must first adopt an attitude that we *can* make a difference.

For me, hope is a verb. It must connote an active desire with the expectation of fulfillment. Hope cannot guarantee that we will get what we long for, but it activates us in the search and provides a pathway from vision to reality. Hope, weaving itself like an essential thread through thoughts and experiences that speak of the human condition, is the greatest motivation. The

bigger the dream for peace with social justice, the stronger must be the hope. Through hope, we overcome.

Note on Sources: The statistics I have used here are found in *Human Development Report 2001*, published for the United Nations Development Program by Oxford University Press; *State of the World 2001*, the Worldwatch Institute, W.W. Norton & Co.; *Vital Signs 2001: The Trends That Are Shaping Our Future*, W.W. Norton & Co.; *The Report of the High-level Panel on Financing for Development*, U.N. Report A/55/1000, 26 June 2001. I have also drawn on the analyses I presented in my book, *Bread Not Bombs: A Political Agenda for Social Justice* (University of Alberta Press, 1999).