

Peace and Justice in the New Century

Dr. Oscar Arias, Nobel Peace Laureate and former President of Costa Rica delivered the following speech at the 6th annual Justice Lecture Series held on September 17th at the University of San Francisco.

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. It is an honor and a pleasure. San Francisco is one of my favorite cities and it strikes me as a wonderful place to work or study. I enjoy speaking at colleges and universities because the audience is always full of energy and dedication to both deep thought and committed action. It is my hope this afternoon to give you a few ideas about harnessing that energy and commitment, and channeling it towards positive change in the world.

This afternoon I would like to discuss what I see as the various aspects of peace and justice that need to be addressed in the world today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Of course, it can be difficult to speak of peace when so many of us are captivated by the images of increasingly horrendous acts of violence that seem to come in an endless stream through our television sets, newspapers, radios and the Internet. But this is precisely why we need to talk of peace now. Not because peace will be achieved immediately or easily, but because we need to have our minds set on a goal, something positive, a just and logical conclusion that lifts us out of the engulfing senselessness of war.

My friends, I stand before you today as one who believes in peace, not because it is easy, but because it is necessary. The events we have been witnessing in the Middle East, in Colombia, in Sri Lanka and in the Congo show us that reconciliation is a profound and difficult process that involves years of labor, setbacks, and perseverance. To believe in peace, it is not necessary to believe that negotiations are infallible. In fact, we know that parties are often intransigent, that leaders may fail to live up to their obligations and responsibilities, and that violent dissenters can obstruct even the most popular commitments to peace.

Despite these obstacles to establishing peace, it is clear that the alternative is far worse. When tensions increase, it is better to accept the need for compromise than it is to accept the cynical belief that we must always live in fear. When pacts are broken, it is more sensible to return to the negotiating table than it is to endure a bloody battle which produces no victors and no solutions. And when faced with the roots of violence, which so often stem from poverty, hunger, and injustice, it is far more noble to address those issues than to keep pouring money into weapons.

In reality, there is nothing glamorous, naïve, or idealistic about peace. Peace is not a dream; it is hard work. It is a path that we must all choose and then persevere in. This means resolving even our small daily conflicts with those around us in peaceful ways. For peace begins not “out there,” but with each one of us.

We all have it within our power to do something. The poets must write peace, the

politicians must legislate peace. The warriors must lay down their weapons. The teachers must hand on the legacy of peace to our school children, and the parents must lead by their example. Our hope is in our children, but this does not mean that we should leave actions for a better future to tomorrow. The future begins today, with us, in our hearts and in our homes.

I want to share with you something written more than thirty years ago by Martin Luther King, which reminds us of the dangers in believing that through violence we can triumph over evil. He wrote:

"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate... Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that."

That is why I would like to see members of the U.S. government's foreign policy team showing their love for their country not by talking about vanquishing evil with tanks and missiles, but rather, by thoughtfully deliberating about the consequences of war and the requirements of building a true and lasting peace. The principle requirement is justice.

Peace can only take hold when it is firmly rooted in justice. President Dwight Eisenhower once said that peace and justice are two sides of the same coin, and he was right. In order to allow democracy and stability to take root in a country or a region, peace must be not just a temporary cease-fire, or a simple bandage over wounds and resentments that are bound to flare up again. Rather, the deepest causes of conflict must be brought to light, examined, and addressed.

I want to tell you this afternoon that the world is in crisis. Those who watch CNN and MSNBC are inundated with one particular crisis: that of terrorism and the war against it. But I want to remind everyone today, that there are many other crises in the world that do not capture headlines, but are equally as urgent. I tell you that it is a development crisis when nearly a billion and a half people have no access to clean water, and a billion live in miserably substandard housing. It is a leadership crisis when we allow wealth to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, so that the world's three richest people have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the poorest forty-three countries. It is a spiritual crisis when – as Gandhi said – many people are so poor that their only god is bread, and when other individuals seem only to have faith in the capricious "invisible hand" that guides the free market. It is a moral crisis when 35,000 children die each day from malnutrition and disease. And it is a democratic crisis when 1.3 billion people live on an income of less than one dollar per day, and are effectively excluded from public decision-making because of the wrenching poverty in which they live.

Justice demands that these people have their say. It demands that the twenty percent of the world's people that live in the wealthy developed countries take urgent action to alleviate the misery afflicting the other eighty percent of our brothers and sisters around the globe. The responsibility for doing justice for the world's poor must be shared between the developed world and the leaders of poor countries. In my view, several steps must be taken to improve the chances of our living together in harmony as a human race. These include utilizing the newly ratified international criminal court to try those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, putting some controls on the international arms trade, cutting military spending in favor of fully funding the health care and education needs of the poorest, opening first-world markets to third-world countries, and increasing foreign aid from wealthy countries to the developing world.

I begin my proposals today with the International Criminal Court, because it is obvious to me, and to much of the world, how useful this institution can be in light of the global struggle against terrorism. If those responsible for acts of terrorism are brought to justice in an international tribunal, they will not have anywhere to hide, and they will take their rightful place as outcasts from the international community – something extremists call upon themselves when they flout the most basic norms of humanity. Making use of this international legal body will also place the world's governments above the dirty business of violent retribution, and will demonstrate their faith in democracy and the rule of law, which most of us believe to be superior methods for achieving our goals.

The movement to establish the International Criminal Court began several years ago, and picked up momentum in 1998, when an overwhelming majority of delegates at a diplomatic conference expressed their support for the ICC. Since then, 139 nations have signed the Rome Statute and 77 have ratified it. Sixty ratifications were necessary for the treaty to take effect, and since that number has been surpassed, it entered into force on July 1st of this year. The International Criminal Court is expected to be fully functional by mid-2003. It is worth noting, however, that it has come into existence without the ratification of the United States, a country which has time and again shown its resistance to submitting its citizens to the authority of international bodies. But the events of September 11 have made terribly clear that the United States cannot afford to go it alone; it needs the international community. The world welcomed the spirit of partnership and coalition that was adopted by the United States in light of those tragic events. Many are hoping, despite recent indications to the contrary, that this attitude will not fade away with the end of the Afghanistan campaign, but instead will remain central to U.S. foreign policy from the present forward. It would be in the interests of the U.S., as well as those of the rest of the world, to continue to work together, not only against terrorism, but against the many other ills that plague humanity today.

Another important international effort that is underway is the struggle to put some limits on the approximately 30 to 35 billion dollars worth of weapons that are shipped internationally each year. Many of these weapons can literally be traced to their final destination of repression of dissidents and violations of human rights. At the end of 1997, weapons manufactured in the United States were being used in thirty-nine of the world's forty-two ethnic and territorial conflicts. In the 1980s, Western governments and

corporations played a significant role in arming Saddam Hussein's despotic regime in Iraq, and some have recently been advocating arming his opposition. Early in the 1990s, France provided significant military aid to the genocidal government of Rwanda. Until recently, the Indonesian military used British-made equipment against pro-independence groups in East Timor. It has been proven over and over again that no sale of weapons is "safe." Arms sold to today's allies often boomerang back on the country that supplied them when that alliance no longer holds. We know this is true because U.S. weapons have killed U.S. soldiers in Panama, Somalia, and Iraq, to name a few of these failed alliances.

I am afraid that the danger of military technology boomerang has not disappeared, and your government must evaluate very carefully the promises it makes to those who have allied themselves with the U.S. in the present war against terrorism. No one likes to point out that Osama Bin Laden himself, and many of the fighters in his Al-Qaeda network, were trained and equipped by the U.S. when they were fighting against the Soviet Union, but this is a fact that must be recognized – not for the purpose of assigning blame, but rather, to prevent history from repeating itself.

The current climate in Washington is lending itself to the removal of restrictions on sending arms to certain countries, such as Pakistan and Colombia for example, that are cooperating with anti-terrorism activities. Facilitating access to weapons for allies is promoted by the present administration as evidence of its good will and international cooperation. The problem is that in both of the countries I mentioned, and in others that are being or have been considered for such favored treatment, there has been no change in the conditions that originally brought about restrictions on weapons exports to those nations. Pakistan continues to be a military dictatorship, which on top of that is highly unstable and harbors extremist groups of its own, and the Colombian army continues to provide intelligence and support to the brutal paramilitary groups that have committed massacres of civilians and practice extra-judicial executions at will.

Sending more weapons and military training to these violent and unstable countries is a dangerous game, and I am afraid that the White House and Pentagon are not exercising measured judgment, nor employing a long-term vision in this matter. Instead, they are squandering the lessons of the past thirty years of armed conflicts, which teach us that human rights and other conditions on arms sales are vitally important. If the terrorist attack on the United States tells us anything about arms transfers, it should be that more conditions must be applied to transfers of military training and technology, not fewer.

Since 1997 I have been advocating for the adoption of an International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers, an initiative which has now been signed onto by 18 other Nobel Peace Laureates. The Code calls for a ban on transfers of weapons or military technology to governments that violently repress fundamental democratic rights, that are guilty of gross violations of human rights, or that commit acts of armed international aggression. The principles of this Code have now been transformed into a Framework Convention, which when ratified by the requisite number of countries, would become a legally binding piece of international law. This Framework Convention would prevent would-be

human rights abusers from receiving the weapons they need to carry out their deadly deeds. I am happy to say that the parliament of the European Union has issued a resolution calling for just such an agreement, to establish strict and legally binding controls on international arms transfers. An instrument like this one is needed today more than ever.

In global campaigns such as these, it is imperative that the large arms-producing countries take the lead in scaling back the volume of death that they peddle to the world. Ironically, approximately 80% of all transfers of conventional weapons originate with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. To my mind, there is something very wrong with linking security to large shipments of weapons. More arms do not produce more security, they produce only more fear, more violence, and more unnecessary deaths.

Small and poor nations must also exercise leadership in the fight for peace and justice. Many of those governments that are buying weapons today are in countries that are too poor to feed, house, and educate their people. This, of course, is a question of priorities. If Egypt can spend three and a half billion dollars a year on weapons, why can't it find the funds to educate the 45% of its adults that are illiterate, or properly feed the 12% of its young children that are underweight? And if Chile can spend \$600 million dollars on F-16 fighter jets, why can it not find the resources to provide safe drinking water to the one million people in that country that do not have it? The same could be said for many other governments in the developing world.

Those leaders who complain for lack of resources for development goals must begin by checking their arms procurement budgets. I want to quote my good friend, the late Mahbub ul-Haq, who was a pioneer of the human development school of thought. In his book on human development, he notes: "Sometime back, Tanzania's president Julius Nyerere asked in legitimate despair, 'must we starve our children to pay our debts?' It is at least as pertinent to ask, must we starve our children to increase our defense expenditure? . . . When our children cry for milk in the middle of the night, shall we give them guns instead?" I believe that all leaders of developing countries must re-examine the priorities of their national budgets and redirect resources from the military to the fulfillment of basic human needs.

While reducing military spending could free up a large amount of resources for such things as health and education in poor countries, I am realistic enough to see that such a move will not be enough. Countries in the developing world need rapid and significant economic growth in order to sustain themselves and keep ahead of the population growth that is creating ever more mouths to feed, ever more young minds to educate. In order for economic growth in the developing world to become a consistent reality, I insist that the wealthy countries must open their markets to our exports.

Although virtually all leaders of industrialized countries profess to believe in free trade, most often what they are looking for is the opening of other countries' markets, not their own. Today, industrialized countries provide more than \$370 billion dollars per year –

that is, more than one billion dollars per day – in different kinds of subsidies to their own farmers, while spending only about \$50 billion dollars per year on foreign aid. The creation of the WTO was meant to foster freer trade, but until such first-world protectionism is ended, free trade will not live up to its promise for poor countries. The fact is, farmers in the developing world could compete with their counterparts in industrialized countries, but they cannot compete with those countries' finance ministries. The leaders of wealthy countries with large domestic markets must understand that we, in the developing world, depend on trade for our survival. We must export or die, and if we cannot export our goods, we will have no option but to continue exporting our people.

I firmly believe that developing countries must find ways to integrate themselves into the global economy. However, I also believe that there is a danger in the emphasis we place today on economic competitiveness. We have created numerous indices of competitiveness that show us which countries or regions offer the greatest incentives for investment, and where the profit margins are the highest. While competition may create efficient economies, efficiency alone is not enough. Compassion and solidarity are necessary to temper the competition of our open economies, so that those who are unable to compete are not left out altogether. To the rural farmer who lacks roads on which to bring his produce to market, to the child who works instead of learning to read and write, to the young adult for whom a university education is only a fantasy, competitiveness means only one thing: losing.

What is needed today is a new Marshall Plan for the world's poor. From 1948 to 1951 the United States spent thirteen billion dollars to rebuild Europe after the war. What would it take to get governments – not only that of the U.S., but of all the well-off industrialized nations – to commit to a similar plan today, in order to rebuild the world's poorest countries, which have been devastated by centuries of colonialism, natural disasters, armed conflicts and poor governance? I propose that the countries of the O.E.C.D., or the G-8, plus some others, redirect a small percentage of their defense spending for the defense of the world's poor. We know that redirecting just 5% of what the world spends on weapons and soldiers over ten years would be sufficient to guarantee basic education, health care and nutrition, potable water, and sanitation to all of the world's people. If we focused only on funding a mandatory minimum of nine years of education in every country, that percentage would be even less. How quickly the great powers muster the political and financial will to bail out failing economies, but how slow we have been to act to stamp out illiteracy, disease, and hunger. The resources are there, what is lacking is the sense of solidarity.

Foreign aid in real terms has actually shrunk over the past twenty years, and it is the richest country in the world that has led the charge away from humanitarian and foreign aid. I often say that the people of the United States are very generous, but your government is one of the stingiest on earth. As a percentage of gross domestic product, Denmark gives ten times what the U.S. gives: one percent of its GDP, versus a mere 0.1 percent from the U.S. In per capita aid, the U.S. gives 35 dollars per American, one of the lowest amounts for any industrialized country. Compare that with the government of Norway's generous 276 dollars per Norwegian in foreign aid.

Each of the proposals I have laid out this afternoon has something to do with achieving peace and justice in the world. As I said before, true peace will only be possible when it is based on justice, in particular social justice for the poor. As I said back in 1987, when Central America was struggling to put an end to its wars, “arms do not fire themselves. Those who have lost hope fire them. Those who are dominated by dogmatism fire them. We must fight for peace without dismay, and accept, without fear, the challenges of a world without hope and threatened by fanaticism.” These words are equally true today. If we want to be free of the menace of terrorism, we must fight both the fanaticism of extremist leaders and the hopelessness of the poor masses that constitute their base of popular support.

I want to say a word about our values. The twentieth century was an extremely bloody one, and I believe that this has a lot to do with the values that dominated world politics that century. Those values were greed, cynicism, and a false sense of moral superiority. Rather than continuing in this track, I believe it is imperative that we discard these outdated values and replace them with their opposites: generosity, tolerance, and faith in humanity. It is our values that determine our priorities, and from these flow our actions. A change from violent actions to peaceful ones will only come about with a change in values and priorities. The world that I would like to see today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is a world with more solidarity and less individualism; more honesty and less hypocrisy; more transparency and less corruption; more faith and less cynicism; more compassion and less selfishness. In short, a world with more love.

All of us have a contribution to make toward bringing this world into existence. Each of us must act in our own capacity, beginning in our local environment, to – as Gandhi put it – be the change we wish to see in the world. I therefore challenge you, my friends, to support political candidates that will advance social justice, to speak out on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, to raise a cry for sane and sensible priorities in your government. I do not believe that the fate of this planet is written in the stars. It is written in the hearts of men and women, and hearts, unlike heavenly bodies, can change their course. In the world today there is much darkness: there is war, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and disease. Closing our eyes will not make the night go away. The only way to combat darkness is with light, as Martin Luther King said some thirty-five years ago. Make it your personal mission to light a candle. Any positive action you take brings more light and dispels some of the darkness. The world needs all the illumination it can get, and you, my friends, are the sparks that will light our way to a better future.

Thank you.