

Building a culture of peace and development in a globalized world

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Thank you for inviting me back to this wonderful peace conference, BRIDGES, and for allowing me to visit this wonderful land of Malaysia, a land of a great and productive people, the number one exporter of micro chips to the United States, laptop and cell phone manufacturing and so much more.

It is a window to the world of what Malaysia has to offer to the world.

How wonderful it is to be in Southeast Asia as trading partners, not as warring adversaries. Trading partners: That is the substance of things hoped for. It is an honor to be with you.

We want to expand our partnerships and our sense of social justice and fairness...we want to show we lead by the power of example, not by the example of our power.

Let us take a moment of silence, for prayer or reflection. A moment of peace and reconciliation.

Let visions of Dr. King and Gandhi fill your minds. They used nonviolence to struggle for peace and justice. They believed, as I do, that a better world is possible.

Tears of Joy & History

Two weeks ago, I traveled to the United Kingdom and to the Netherlands, and everywhere I went, people asked me about our new President, Barack Obama. They

asked me about the television image from Grant Park in Chicago on election night, where I had tears streaming down my face.

Those were tears of joy...and the journey we traveled to get us there. They were also tears of history.

I was so happy that night. My country had regained its moral authority in the world, willing to lead by right, not just lead by might, opening doors and seeing new vistas.

America had chosen a true leader, a smart teacher, an agile politician, a man raised with a multi-cultural, international background. America had overcome its own original sin, a nation founded largely by slave owners, 400 years of slavery & segregation & apartheid.

America had matured. It began to make peace with its destiny, a nation made more secure by hope, and less by fear.

With President Obama and Secretary Clinton we witnessed a giant step beyond race and gender barriers. Using Dr. King's theme "REDEEM THE SOUL OF AMERICA" – a civil rights movement I have spent my life working for, was experiencing a redemptive, transformative moment. I was so happy.

At the same time, I thought of those who had not made it quite as far down the freedom road. I thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., taken away from us at such a young age. I wished he could have been in Chicago that night, if only for a few moments, to share the joy.

I thought of Nelson Mandela, 27 years of his life wasted in a South African prison.

I thought of the young man facing the tank in Tien An Mien Square and of the massacre at Sharpsville in South Africa.

Those moments converged in my heart and head in that singular moment in global history.

Then I thought of Goodman, Chaney & Schwerner – two Jews and a Black – three young people murdered in Mississippi during Freedom Summer in 1964, just trying to register African-Americans to vote—and now those same African-American voters had transformed America's politics.

I thought of Medgar Evers, of Stephen Biko from South Africa, of the masses of nameless, faceless, brave and dignified marchers who had built the civil rights movement in America's South. And the tears came rolling down.

Tears of joy. Tears of history. And yet this is a moment full of anxiety. While it is mid-day in our politics, freedoms and successes in elections, victories we could only dream of not long ago - - - we are now sitting around the round table discussing the course of the world.

Though mid-day or high noon in our politics, it is midnight in our global economy. The creeping shadows and darkness threaten to steal the rays of hope and joy.

The U.S. moral ethical meltdown, full of corruption and greed in high places, has nearly driven nations to its economic knees. It sent a virus of economic de-stabilization around the world. As manufacturing plants are closing, the gun violence is increasing – driven by our appetite for drugs – and has made these times ever more dangerous and perilous.

Too often economic violence and oppression leads to street violence and rebellion.

Yet, through all this chaos, we are now rebounding from nearly ground zero in our global economy, because we realize even when we are down, the ground is no place for a champion. So we must rise.

Everybody wants democracy, in theory, but too often resist the checks and balances that make it work, that make it beneficial, for everybody.

We are blessed to have in these troubled times, President Barack Obama. His victory is a result of fifty-four years of struggle in America to tear down the walls of legal and racial and cultural segregation:

In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court, after 58 years, ruled apartheid – or American segregation – to be illegal.

For the next fifty-four years the many marches and many martyrs and jail cells, the protests and sacrifices - produced a result born of suffering, character and faith.

President Obama is a result of these fifty-four years of change in modern history, a result of bridge building.

And it sends a powerful suggestion that abounding hope can occur around the world.

President Obama has several significant characteristics that have broad application.

1) He has vision and sees the world through a door and not through a keyhole. In his formative years growing up in Indonesia and Hawaii as well as America – experiencing and building relationships in multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious settings – helped to inform his world view and bridge building capacity.

2) He has a bank full of “trust” capital; he is believable. It’s hard to lead, even if you are elected, if you have a trust deficit disorder.

3) He is intellectually competent.

4) He is a coalition builder across lines of religion and region, gender, race and age.

5) He makes apparent that hope and confidence are weapons of change.

During this season of crisis, we've seen too much war; too much waste; too little will to forgive, redeem and move on.

We cannot go forward looking backwards – we must not be prisoners of ancient wrongs and pain. We must go forward by our hopes and not backward by our fears and, too often, painful memories.

Ultimately right is might. The notion that might is right is an equation that will never have a successful end.

Bridges Peace Conference 2003 – Today: Changing World Climate

As I flew across the Pacific Ocean, I thought back to an earlier trip to Thailand, almost 6 years ago, when I spoke there in the fall of 2003, the year that George W. Bush and Tony Blair invaded Iraq.

We spoke of the need to build the global peace movement, to find reconciliation, to make a way for lions to lie down with lambs.

All these years later the occupation in Iraq is not yet over.

All these years later the war in Afghanistan is heating up, not cooling down.

All these years later the pain in the Middle East grows.

Our global peace movement has not yet succeeded. We have elected a new President, a symbol of change, a wise and thoughtful leader, a bright candle in a dark world. He recently met with the President of Russia, and together they pledged to work on a treaty

to eliminate thousands of nuclear weapons from their countries' stockpiles. That is very good news indeed, and I congratulate President Obama for his vision.

But otherwise the global war machine rolls on. Old hatreds still dominate new hope, the global arms trade flourishes, mercenaries and drones are fully employed, wars and rumors of wars still plague our world.

We have not yet learned to live in peace.

We are trying to offset the years of unnecessary wars, greed and exploitation, through a new global stimulus – we are pouring lots of wine in old wine skins, and we hope it works. Failure that could lead to global depression is not an option that people will surrender to willingly.

Dr. King's Last Birthday

When I spoke in Thailand in 2003, I told the story of Dr. King's last birthday. When I was young, I had the honor of serving with Dr. King, one of the greatest peacemakers who ever lived. I was with him on his last birthday. Let me share with you how he spent that day, his 39th birthday in 1968.

We met together to make plans for a 3-point agenda:

- (1) to pull together a multi-racial coalition with a commitment to mass action to fight a war on poverty in the United States;
- (2) to make sure civil rights laws were enforced and funded, and justice was done;
- (3) to end the war in Vietnam, choosing containment and negotiation over endless bombing and confrontation, to give peace a chance.

Four decades later and Dr. King's agenda remains a blueprint for action. The world is trapped in a global economic downturn, and the masses of those who live in poverty, on the edge of hunger and despair, will be hurt the worst.

I am sad to say that my nation remains involved in two wars at once, trying to get out of one while increasing its direct involvement in the other. Inequality between rich and poor has grown in America and throughout the world.

The North-South walls are driving new forms of rebellion and warfare – sometimes called terrorism. Walls leave a few in the ray of sunlight and too many in the shadows. Behind the walls you will always find ignorance, fear, hatred and violence – the stuff of which terrorism is made.

Too many people remain trapped in poverty. Too few people make the decisions for the whole world, and the masses of people remain outside the circles of power. Too many people are caught up in the violence and devastation of war.

Dr. King's 3-point agenda unfortunately remains unfulfilled, both in my nation and in our world. A better world is possible. But we are not there by a long shot.

The Moral Center

Dr. King often spoke of the “moral center”—the idea that change could come in moments of crisis, if we acted with due respect for the moral center.

We live in a time of crisis. The question for us is—where is the moral center of our crisis? The question for us is—what would Dr. King or Mahatma Gandhi do in this time of crisis?

There are three questions he would often pose:

1) Vanity asks the question “Is it popular?” We all have some need to be accepted.

2) Politics asks the question “Can I win.”

3) Morality and conscience asks “Is it right?” It may be neither popular nor politic, but it remains the haunting question. Is it right?

We know what they would do—they would stand on the side of the poor, the disenfranchised, the despised, the disinherited.

We know what they would do—they would speak truth to power, demand that we beat our swords into plowshares and ask us to study war no more.

We know what they would do—they would demand that the riches and resources of the world be shared with all the people of the world. They would fight for the principle that those who had the global financial party of the last decade be the ones to pay the costs to clean up the mess.

They would struggle to prevent the imminent damages of global climate change from being visited on those who did least to cause it, places like Africa, Asia, the world’s island nations.

Dr. King and Mahatma Gandhi taught us to keep our eyes on the prize, focus on the moral center and fight fiercely and nonviolently for what is right rather than what is expedient—then we can truly change the world.

At certain pregnant times history pauses at the crossroads.

We live in one of those change moments.

Globalizing Human Rights

Our crisis comes, because we have globalized capital, but we have not globalized human rights. We have not globalized workers rights. We have not globalized rights for women, rights for children, environmental protections.

Capital can move quickly, seek out poverty wages and slave labor and leave behind devastated communities and unfathomable pain. Finance can circle the globe at the click of a button, and trillions of dollars in wealth can disappear in moments. Jobs vanish at the whims of a small elite of corporate and financial “bank-sters”.

Nations are played off against weaker nations. The gap between the wealthy and the destitute has grown to unimaginable magnitudes.

But the crisis has now hit hard. It turned out our financial geniuses were faking it or were con men. They pretended to understand the future, but they had not learned the lessons of the past—there is no free lunch.

Greed never resolves its own contradictions. A globalized capitalist system is not magically self-correcting.

Now is our chance for a change moment. Now is our chance to globalize human rights and workers rights, protect women and children, save the global environment.

Culture of Privilege, Culture of Pain

We have built a world where a small fraction of the globe enjoys a culture of privilege—yachts and Lear jets, multiple mansions and exquisite foods, expensive health care, fancy wines, bottled or sparkling water. What I call a “surplus” culture, where the suffering comes from obesity, overindulgence, overdoing and overdosing.

At the same time the overwhelming masses of humans live desperate lives in cultures of pain. They live their lives on the edge of extinction, stalked by hunger & disease & filthy water & bad or no schooling & a lack of the basic necessities that make live tolerable, much less pleasant.

Our job is to heed the words of Jesus: to feed the hungry, heal the sick, shelter the homeless and the refugee. Our job is to end the arms race and end the arms trade.

Our job is to build an economy that works for everyone. Because there can be no peace without justice. And because building a better world for everyone, a bottom up economy, is both smart economics and a moral imperative. Change will come bottom up – lifting the boats stuck at the bottom – and not top down, building a strong foundation at the base.

Real Development

The wealth of the world must be shared with all its people, not just the privileged and powerful few at the top. All the world's great religious leaders and ethicists have taught us that sharing, community, the common good are the keys to prosperity.

All our moral teachings make it clear that for privilege and poverty to exist side-by-side is just plain wrong.

We need debt relief and debt cancellation for the world's poorest nations, nations such as Haiti, where women are eating mud pies to try to make it through the day.

We need clean water and vaccinations for Africa, inexpensive changes that would vastly improve the lives of billions of our poorest neighbors.

We need fair trade under a newly regulated economic system open to all nations.

We need to stop wasting our precious resources on wars and preparation for wars, spending it instead on feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, providing medicine for the sick, building schools and clinics for the despised, focusing our development in this century on those Jesus called “the least of these” around the world.

Far too often my country places itself on the wrong side of the power equation.

Far too often in recent decades America, though founded in revolution, has found itself on the side of the privileged, the powerful, the status quo, the arms merchants, the greedy and unkind.

Far too often real development has been displaced by political power, morality has been set aside for expediency.

It’s time for a real change.

A better world is possible.

We need to build it bottom up, not top down.

A Revolution of Values

Two weeks ago I spoke at a forum at New York City’s Riverside Church, after a march opposing our wars in Iraq & Afghanistan, on the 42nd anniversary of Dr. King’s dramatic April 4, 1967, speech opposing the Vietnam War.

I reminded the audience that Dr. King spoke then of the need for “a revolution of values” to change the misguided direction of our world.

Dr. King taught that “we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property

rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

Dr. King went on: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies...A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth

...A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies

...We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation...We still have a choice today: non-violent coexistence or violent co-annihilation

...We must find new ways to speak for peace...and justice throughout the developing world.”

Dr. King spoke these truths more than 4 decades ago. He may well have been killed for speaking so clearly. And his words still find our hearts today, they still fit our times, they still guide us in the present crisis.

A New Foreign Policy & a New Economic Policy

When I came to BRIDGES in Thailand in 2003 I spoke in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I was focused on the need for a new foreign policy, based on the 5 fundamental principles I had articulated when I ran for President in 1988:

- (1) Respect for international law;
- (2) Human rights;

(3) Self-determination;

(4) Economic justice;

(5) Consistency—measuring by one yardstick.

(6) Leadership, the sixth principle, for which there is no substitute. Leaders must have the will to risk for reconciliation and keep us on the edge of peace, not the edge of war.

Those who have been blessed to be strong must bear the infirmities of the weak. Those who know better must do better. The blessed of us must reach out to the rest of us.

President Obama is reaching out to Cuba – it's the right thing to do. Cuba is a factor in hemispheric peace and global security.

It would be right to reach out to Venezuela. Let light invade darkness and hope invade fear and joy replace sorrow. Let the words of embrace in our diplomacy replace words of fear and anger.

It would be right to reach out to Iran. A young journalist – Roxana Saberi - is now in jail on espionage charges. We need all those that have a voice, to help us appeal to Iran to please let her go.

Iran has so much to offer the world. It's people. It's resources. It's strategic positioning. It's history. Leaders of wisdom must not allow this young woman to be a pawn in a bigger debate and lose focus on so many possibilities.

If our voices are heard in Iran today, I would be anxious to travel with a delegation to Iran, if we are permitted, and make an appeal for her freedom.

Whenever we've brought people out of captivity, whether in Syria, Cuba, Iraq or Yugoslavia or Liberia, it's always opened a diplomatic door to reduce tensions.

I believed then, and I believe now, that all nations must play by one set of rules. And now we find that the same idea holds true in international economic relations.

To reconstruct our world we will have to rebuild our international foreign and economic policies, rebuild our international institutions to make them more inclusive and cooperative, rejoin the international treaties the previous Administration had abandoned and expand them to include more people, more protections, more nations.

We need a global economy based on human rights. We need a world economy based on one set of rules for the privileged as well as the poor. We need a G200 meeting, not just a G2 or a G20 conference.

We need to reconstruct our international economic institutions so that they work for everyone on earth equally, not just for those with access to education, power or privilege. We need one set of rules for everybody on earth.

We must build a new green economy to create jobs, create wealth, protect the earth and sustain our species. This is not only the moral way to go—it is smart economics. If we direct our reconstruction to those at the bottom, their pent-up demand will drive the global economy and stimulate our global recovery. After all we will either live and grow together as one world or die apart as fools.

A Rainbow World

The world is a rainbow of people. Part of the reason that Barack Obama was elected is that even the U.S. is becoming more diverse with each passing year.

Remember: When President Bush and Prime Minister Blair got together a few years ago to decide to invade Iraq, that was a minority meeting.

When the big financial institution heads get together in New York or London, that's a minority meeting, too.

The U.S. & the U.K. together represent only 5% of the world, one out of every 20 people. As all of you know, half the world lives in Asia with half of them in China.

A billion people live in India, next door to their foe Pakistan—and both are armed with weapons of mass destruction.

One-eighth of the world lives in Africa, 1/4 of them in Nigeria where AIDS, hunger and disease are devastating the continent.

The United States is not a majority in its own hemisphere where more people speak Spanish than English, and almost as many people speak Portuguese.

Here's a fact that must be clearly understood: We live in a Rainbow world. Most people are yellow, brown, black, non-Christian, female, young and don't speak English. Languages may separate us, but the message of common survival must unite us. For too long we have survived apart, now we must do a more difficult thing, learn to live together.

Technology and speed has made our world house smaller, closer and more accessible. Ironically, religion must play an increased role in peace. We need peace in the many names of the Creator and not war.

No religion has its name attached to the micro-chip, a plasma screen or the cure for cancer or AIDS. All religions share in the results of aeronautical science as we traverse

the world. We willingly accept the results of medical research, no matter who led the breakthrough.

We live in a world that is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic. As we fine-tune the world, Malaysians, Chinese, Indians, Hindus, Islam, Christians, Jews, we all function together under the rays of the sun of our solar system. Despair should not undermine the beauty of our living.

Don't let the God of our common creation be used to promote demonic hateful behavior toward one another.

The world is a Rainbow.

The world is young and female. Too many are poor.

You never know within the pits of some slum might be the genius in some child's mind that can cure cancer or find the cure to AIDS or put forth a formula for world peace. Jesus was born under oppressive conditions, in a slum, outdoors in the winter time. But the slum was not born in him.

Left to Rome's political calculations, we would have lost the genius of Jesus.

Mandela was born in an impoverished zone, under an apartheid system. That mean system put the contribution of his genius at risk.

Dr. King, born behind the walls of legal, cultural segregation. His bud was never supposed to blossom into the global flower for peace.

We should never run the risk of losing genius, because it's born in the mind of a poor person. Governments distribute resources. But God alone distributes genius. He distributes it everywhere, often in the strangest of places among the poorest of people.

If we do not begin to live in peace, develop from the bottom up and take seriously the limiting capacities of our fragile globe, we will not make it as a species to the end of this century.

We must find common ground.

Common ground leads to coalition, to cooperation, to reconciliation and redemption.

As I said in Thailand almost six years ago and in Malaysia today, the Golden Rule has not been repealed—do unto others as ye would have others do unto you still works for neighbors and for nations.

We must love enough – love ourselves, our religion, our country, our world enough to build bridges.

And the proverb Dr. King often used still prevails: “The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice.”

The profundity of the writer of the chronicles remains today a formula for healing and hope, so....

If my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will forgive their sins. And they will hear from Heaven, and I will heal their land.

It's healing time. It's hope time. It's peace time.

Keep hope alive.