

DRAFT

Not Destiny But Resilience

Achieving a Nuclear Weapons-Free World

**Address by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
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We are challenged to open this conference by considering “Nuclear Weapons and the Destiny of Humanity.” The title surely forces us to think anew about our work in nuclear disarmament. The human proclivity for the acquisition of power ingrained in us since Adam and Eve were in the Garden, are we destined to have nuclear weapons forever? Or does the maturation of humanity, evident in virtually every field of human activity, lead inexorably to the outlawing of all weapons of mass destruction? Are we doomed or are we saved?

The difficulty in answering that question, compounded by the fractious state of international relations, makes me, for one, nervous. The constant resistance of the powerful to doing away with the “ultimate evil,” combined with the political chicanery that has held back progress on the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty for nearly five decades, does not fill us with confidence that logic and love will in the end prevail. Yet the emergence of the new Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a very visible flagstone on the march to the elimination of these weapons and shows once again that ingenuity and unyielding commitment to the protection and extension of human rights can move humanity forward.

We are walking, at this moment, on a high-wire without a net below. We might make it to the other side safely without a nuclear weapon destroying large areas of civilization, and then again we might not. Those who take a mathematical risk factor approach to these matters are not optimistic.

This quandary suggests we examine more closely the word “destiny.” The word means a predetermined course of events that a person is unable to control. Are humans unable to control the continued existence of nuclear weapons? The answer to that

question must be a resounding no. In other words, human beings, precisely because we have intellect and will, have the capacity to free ourselves from the spectre of self-destruction. On the other hand, can we say that the destiny of humanity is a nuclear weapons-free world? In other words, is peace predetermined? Here again the answer is no.

Thus we come to the conclusion that humanity is not destined to retain nuclear weapons, nor is it destined to have peace. The only certainty we have in this life, beyond death and taxes, is the never-ending ability of humans to lift themselves up and proceed from one era to another. Humanity has moved from the Stone Age to the agricultural society, and then to the industrial society, which is giving way to the technocratic age with all its digital wonders. The biggest transformation of all in the human journey is the movement of humanity from a culture of war to a culture of peace. We would have to be blind not to recognize that a culture of peace is gradually developing in the world, and would move at a faster pace if governments merely lived up to the tenets of the United Nations Charter.

The emergence of a culture of peace is accompanied by great confusion and not a little back-sliding by the political systems, which have shown themselves quite incapable of implementing public policies guaranteeing social justice – of which the elimination of nuclear weapons would be predominant. Nuclear weapons are not just about armoury; they expose the essential question of our time: how are humans to treat one another in the globalized world where weapons of mass destruction and human rights are incompatible?

The word “destiny” is obscuring our vision. Not only can human beings affect what the future will bring, we have a grave responsibility to exercise our intellect and will to ensure that the one human family shares the benefits now attainable in the one world community. Vision is required to set this course. That is why we have conferences such as this.

Having dispatched “destiny,” I would now like to introduce another word more fitting in our search to climb out of the present dilemma of finding a way to have peace triumph over war. The word “resilience” springs to mind, for it speaks of the human capacity to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune and change. Resilience, when it is found in some individuals, is a magnificent quality. It enables us to come up on top of adversity, to deal effectively with misfortune, to express hope that progress can be made in elevating humanity. Resilience infuses our lives with zest to tackle the obstacles in our way. It is the handmaiden to courage, a quality absolutely essential to combating the wiles of the military-industrial complex, which maintains a stranglehold over the political system.

It is precisely because we are caught up in the machinations of political events playing themselves out that we need resilience to combat the weariness and discouragements of trying to break through to a nuclear weapons-free world. Those who led the humanitarian movement that has, despite the fierce opposition of the nuclear

weapons states, produced the new Prohibition Convention, have admirably displayed resilience.

Resilience nourishes us, it sustains us, it enables us to stay on the path opening up before us. Resilience beats back fear. It animates us, increases our confidence, and strengthens us to persist in developing the policies we want society to embrace. Fortified with resilience, we never waver from our core belief: the elimination of nuclear weapons is the foundation for an architecture of peace.

This central idea brought the Pugwash pioneers to Nova Scotia 60 years ago. Humble followers we may be, but we stand on giant shoulders and it is our duty, indeed I would say our privilege, to continue the noble and vital work of turning humanity away from self-destruction.

I see this work very much part of building the role of Canada in the world-wide search for peace. At 150 years, our country is not old, but young and vibrant and will find its place in history as it reaches out to exert an influence for common security. Nothing is destined, but resilience will spur us on.