

Terrorist Attack on the Global Civic Community

Speech by Dr. Rosalie Bertell in accepting the Sean MacBride Award

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Although I prepared a speech for the Sean MacBride Award ceremony a few weeks ago, I feel that I need to update my remarks in view of the extraordinary events of 11 September 2001. Ironically, in the original speech I called for more dispersed demonstrations against economic and military globalization so as to avoid confrontation and violence. The current protests have been vulnerable to infiltration. Moreover, demonstrators are susceptible to being dismissed by media and political leaders as "hooligans"; their serious messages and voices are not being heard. Confrontational military and police with shields, mace and tear gas are useless against a dispersed civil society protest group which is well synchronized, relevant and having clearly articulated goals. Terrorists have also noticed that dispersion is a tactic not easily fought with nuclear bombs and missile defense.

I do not really believe in coincidence, and I think there must be some significance in the International Peace Bureau (IPB) choice of a North American peace activist in 2001. Although I was born and brought up in Buffalo NY, USA, I have lived in and strongly related to my Canadian inheritance for the past twenty one years. I am actually a fourth generation Canadian, and also a fourth generation American. I chose to live in Canada because of a long distaste for the U.S. Superpower mentality and constant escalation of the nuclear arms race. It was difficult to plan and work creatively for a peaceful and free world while constantly having to respond to the "next generation" weaponry. Today I want to re-assume my American heritage and speak to the suffering soul of this great nation which absorbed the blows to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the face of this terrorist attack it is incumbent on the global peace community not just to call for non-violent solutions, but also to flesh out some of the real life options and supports for peaceful resolution of these events. The American psyche has absorbed the shock, and is filled with compassion for the dead and wounded, and for their families. They are unclear about appropriate actions in the face of the obvious need for justice and the passionate calls for vengeance. Americans are also generally unaware of the international efforts already underway to curb organized crime, or of the United Nations conference on this issue held in Sicily this year. Publicly joining this initiative would be a logical beginning of meaningful response.

The terrorist attacks were well planned, and the targets apparently carefully chosen as symbols of international trade and military planning. The attacks were also clearly international in scope, transcending America. Nationals of eighty countries were victimized and the terrorists with their support groups were multi-national. The suicide tactic was not derived from Islamic law or piety, and even Muslim people are distancing themselves from these extremists. The struggle is not based in religion. Another disturbing dimension of the crime was the terrorist "insider trading" through which they placed bets that the stocks price of airlines, financial investment companies housed in the World Trade Center and insurance companies, would fall, thereby providing millions of dollars to fund their "holy war".

First I would like to witness to the heroism of the people of New York, Washington, the fourth hijacked plane and all Americans in responding to the trauma. There was an outpouring of love and selfless assistance to those caught in the building collapses, fires and chaos. Those in the stricken buildings used their cell phones to call home, and their messages were all the same: "I love you!" In prayer services, spontaneous gatherings and public media, "God bless America" was sung over and over. Crowds of people lined the

streets to cheer the fire and police officers who were risking their lives to rescue people. Organizations sent lunch baskets, sandwiches and even dog food for the police and their dogs trying to locate survivors. From hundreds of miles away from New York and Washington, socks and gloves were collected for rescue workers. The generous compassionate heart of America was broken.

Most people did not wildly hit out at local Muslims or persons of Arab origin. The overwhelming majority of Americans were both numb with grief and focused on helping in any way they could. There were however some attacks on Muslims, vandalism at Mosques and some harassment of Arab Americans, as I believe also happened in England and perhaps elsewhere. Such misplaced anger has no place in our search for viable responses.

It is generally agreed by most thinkers in both the peace and military communities that this is a new kind of attack and will spawn a new kind of "war". It seems to be also clear that an American wild western type of posse and lynching is equally inappropriate and counterproductive. Bombing the already devastated and suffering peasants of Afghanistan is cruel and unnecessary. Afghans are not the "enemy". In fact taking the law into one's own hand will do little but spawn more hatred and mass murder of innocent people. We do have an international civic society, international law, an international criminal court and a supportive global community. The clearest message which the peace community could deliver to the United States is: "DO NOT TRY TO GO IT ALONE".

What is called for is not an international coalition to support and back U.S. anti-terrorism policy decisions and actions. It is for the U.S. to step back and let the international community take initiative in the pursuit, prosecution and punishment of the criminals. A father whose daughter has been raped and killed should not undertake the pursuit and punishment of the perpetrator. This is a basic tenant of domestic law. None of us are exempt from the passion arising in response to so much pain. Far from losing face internationally, the true stature and maturity of the American Nation would be clearly manifested in this stepping back.

The American peace groups could help to educate the public of the United States on the wisdom of not taking the initiative. It is also an opportunity for education on the problems posed to development of international law by the failure of the U.S. to join with the global community on promoting some key international law concepts. There are several international agreements violated by the terrorists and/or needed to counteract terrorism, which the U.S. has not yet signed: The Human Rights Covenant's Social and Economic Rights sections, the World Criminal Court, the Landmine Treaty and The Rights of the Child. The United Nations 2001 conference against organized crime and its resolutions received little media coverage in the United States, in spite of long term U.S. ineffectual efforts to wipe out the Mafia and drug lords. The American public needs to be brought into market place discussions of these international instruments of civility, and the reasons for American dissent should be openly discussed and resolved.

There are other international documents which it would be well for the U.S. to reconsider in view of today's world. For example, the post World War II conditional decision of the U.S. Senate to join the World Court. The condition stated that if the U.S. was brought before the Court it would reserve to itself the decision as to whether the suit was "an internal matter", or in common parlance, none of the Court's business. This clause has been copied by other countries not wishing to accept international law.

This is not the time for isolation of this big hearted, freedom loving community across the ocean from Europe. It is time for symbolic hugging, reassurance and lifting of the burden of "Leader of the Free World" from its shoulders. The International community needs to assume the leadership, curbing that global criminal element which jeopardizes everyone's

security. Being a Superpower is no longer desirable or even possible in this new world without borders.

It is with humility that I accept the MacBride Peace Award from the IPB. I recognize the hundred year struggle of this organization to provide non-violent realistic options to nation states embroiled in disputes. Some have heard and appreciated this voice for peace with justice, and I will be proud to work with the IPB, especially with its North American members, to expand this moderating influence into North American culture. On behalf of my American family, I thank the global peace community for their helping hand and true friendship in this crisis. Let us all hope that faith in God, however described, will lead the global community to itself be the guarantor of security in a just and peaceful world.

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