



Social Choices in the Arms Race

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Friends, we have been called together to remember, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, an upright man. We are celebrating this occasion in memory of Albert Schweitzer, a man who dedicated his life and knowledge to the happiness of others. We are gathered here today to tell the world that Albert Schweitzer has not disappeared, that death could never be strong enough to eliminate one of the most brilliant and exemplary spirits of our time.

In honoring the memory of a man who made the struggle for peace and human dignity the most sacred mission, nothing is more appropriate than some reflections surrounding the threat that nuclear arsenals pose to life on our planet. We all agree that the destruction of these arsenals is imperative. Maintaining them means not only the waste of vast material resources, but an unprecedented example of foolishness: their destructive power is so great that one small fraction of their content would be enough to extinguish any trace of human life.

No effort should be spared in encouraging the powers that possess nuclear arms to totally destroy them, and to prevent other states from deciding to manufacture them. We can be sure that if Albert Schweitzer were alive today, he would consider that to be one of his most important tasks.

However, we can also be sure that this great apostle of human life and dignity would have taken the condemnation of the nuclear arms build-up to its logical conclusion. He would have condemned the arms race without reservation. The build-up of nuclear, chemical, or conventional arms constitutes a brutal aggression against life and civilization; we condemn it equally in all of its forms. The potential horror of the atomic and chemical arsenal is greater than any imaginable Hell, but conventional weapons have caused, and continue causing, death and destruction throughout those regions of the planet we have named the "third world." The use and trade of conventional weapons condemn millions of human beings to oppression, poverty, and death.

Let us speak, then, of disarmament, of disarmament in every sense of the word. Let us speak of peace, of change, and of development, benefits denied to the people of the third world by the manufacture, sale, and use of arms. Let us speak today of the enormous dividends that individuals and businesses in industrialized countries gain from the sale of arms—the sale of death. Let us speak of the social sacrifice that the purchase of those arms represents for the most destitute countries of the world. Let us speak of the suffering that war adds to this sacrifice. Let us speak of the moral responsibility that all of that poverty and all of that pain gives citizens, businessmen, and the leaders of those countries that base part of their prosperity on the infamous business of death.

Let us fear nuclear arms. Let us think of them when we speak of disarmament. For several decades, we have commemorated the holocausts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Every August, we remem-

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ber the fateful moment when, for the first time, a light brighter than the sun itself brought instant death or mutilation to hundreds of thousands of human beings. We must continually remind ourselves of that painful memory, so that our determination to put an end to the nuclear threat never yields.

Let us fear chemical weapons. Let us think of the possibility, now not so remote, of entire populations dying beneath clouds of poisonous gases, of children and old people, women and men, suffering the indiscriminate and heartrending effects of chemical agents. Let us make this fear an incentive to unite our voices to the outcry for the dismantling of chemical arsenals, and for the termination of that insane accumulation of substances, whose mere possession makes men and nations the enemies of humanity.

Let us condemn the build-up of nuclear and chemical arms, but not make the mistake of forgetting that the deaths in Angola, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and El Salvador have been caused by conventional weapons manufactured and supplied by the industrialized world. Let us not forget that almost all of the countries of the third world spend a considerable part of their resources on the purchase of conventional arms, resources that they should be dedicating to the improvement of their inhabitants' living conditions. There are developing nations that dedicate hundreds of times more resources to their military expenditures than what they invest in the areas of education and health. It is neither logical nor ethical for the prosperity of some industrialized countries, producers and exporters of arms, to depend on the irresponsible governments of the third world subjecting their people to poverty and oppression, or exposing them to the tragedies of war.

The arms trade, this business of death, is an obvious example of the hypocrisy and duplicity that often abound in the international community. States that manufactured and accumulated chemical weapons in great quantities, while proclaiming themselves the champions of peace and justice, condemned a third party because it employed those kinds of arms in a regional war and an internal conflict. We deplore the brutal use of chemical weapons against the Kurd[ish] rebels, but we also have the right to ask ourselves, what is the moral base of a condemnation arising from countries that manufacture and accumulate weapons with the ob-

vious purpose of eventually using them? What country that exports weapons has the moral right to deplore or condemn the limited wars or internal conflicts of other countries?

An enormous burden must weigh on the consciences of those nations and individuals who gather the dividends of war for their own material gain. I come from a country that has had a positive experience because of what we have called the dividends of peace. In 1948, under the inspiration and guidance of President Jose Figueres, the people of Costa Rica decided to completely demilitarize. Figueres opted for suppressing the army, and his fellow-citizens believed in the courage and viability of that option. In 1949, our legislators made that act a constitutional principle, and now we and our children enjoy the fruits of that decision. Today, international development agencies recognize that Costa Rica has a standard of living comparable to that of industrialized countries. It is universally accepted that the extraordinary advances of my country in the fields of education, health, housing, and social welfare are basically due to the fact that we do not dedicate our resources to the purchase of arms. The absence of an army has strengthened the Costa Rican democratic system to become the most consolidated one in Latin America.

These are the dividends of peace. These are the dividends that would be within the grasp of all third world countries if we did not dedicate a very important part of our resources to the purchase of arms.

We hope that our countries will see justice, and that as East-West tensions disappear, the industrialized nations of Asia, North America, and Europe will devote more attention and resources to the solution of the great inequalities that exist within the reality of present North-South relations. We hope that the productive capacity of the war industry will not be maintained at the cost of the blood and well-being of our peoples.

We have heard and read with astonishment and concern the complaints of certain sectors of industrialized nations for whom the advent of peace seems to constitute a misfortune and not a blessing. A few claim that, along with peace, disarmament will bring unemployment and poverty to many citizens of the industrialized world. The industrial-military complex is mobilizing to pressure governments against disarmament claiming that they can-

not condemn thousands of war industry workers to unemployment. We fear that powerful businesses manufacturing arms may attempt to delay disarmament and perhaps even encourage new wars.

Undoubtedly, the national economies that fell into the moral anomaly of depending on the sale of arms will have to subject themselves to difficult processes of readjustment that will demand short-term sacrifices. Entire societies will have to be submitted to limitations that will never be as serious or as painful as the ones that the societies of the third world have suffered for decades. Poor nations have had to deter many of their countrymen from the labors of peace. That has been our sacrifice. Rich nations must be willing to make the sacrifice of deterring many of their citizens from the labors of war.

Both sacrifices will require the consolidation of a new world that is more just, more secure, more humane. Unfortunately, the present events in the Middle East pose a serious threat to world peace. The leader of a totalitarian state has thrown his people into a repudiable [sic] war of aggression and has caused an intensification of the arms race in that region. In that escalate the only winners will again be the dealers of death. What may emerge is the intensification of an arms race spreading, from the Middle East to the rest of the world, like fire in a haystack. Such a tragedy could become the tomb of all of our hopes for peace, justice, democracy, and development.

Lessons can be learned from our past. An experience that has been onerous for the United States in Latin America may be repeated in the Middle East. The United States, the superpower that has always proclaimed freedom and democracy as indispensable requirements for the development of nations and for international coexistence, has too frequently supported dictatorial governments in which it has seen faithful allies willing to defend its economic and strategic interests. Thus they have lost credibil-

ity before the countries of Latin America, whose will has been alienated by an inexplicable contradiction. That contradiction allowed the United States to befriend Pinochet, a despot to the right, while financing a war against the Nicaraguan "Sandinistas," arguing that the country was governed by a dictatorship to the left.

Just as yesterday the United States' involvement with nondemocratic governments in Latin America alienated large segments of our populations, we fear that its alliance with autocratic governments in the Middle East today will scar its credibility as the primary champion of the struggle for democracy.

Friends, in spite of the storm clouds that darken the present, I believe that we live in a time of hope. It may be mankind's last opportunity to renounce its hatred and create a future whose struggles will exclude war. Many threats hang over human life; we cannot lose the opportunity to defeat the most absurd of them all: self-destruction.

From personal experience, I know that dialogue and negotiation are the best paths toward the resolution of conflicts. In Central America, this belief made possible a process of pacification that involved leaders of differing ideological leanings. It was dialogue, and not the power of weapons, that permitted us to put an end to the war in Nicaragua and establish the basis for a future full of hope for the young people of that country. Let us hope that in other conflicted regions of the world dialogue will open new paths for peace.

Now is the time to unite all peoples around obligations that have been ours from our beginnings: the wise dominion over nature, not to destroy, but to create suitable conditions for a greater number of our fellow men to know just and happy lives.

As Albert Schweitzer would have done, let us dedicate our efforts and wills to constructing peace and discouraging violence. Thank you. 