



Jimmy Carter Speaks to Physicians

Jimmy Carter*

Let me say, first of all, that I'm very grateful for being honored in this way. I don't claim to be worthy of the honor, but I do accept it on behalf of the people who work with me at The Carter Center and the vast number of people who work much more diligently and effectively than I do at Habitat for Humanity.

I think you understand that quite often people in prominent positions get credit for things that other people do. I have benefited from this for a number of years in my life. This is partially balanced by things you get blamed for that you don't deserve There are . . . benefits to having been president and now the chairman of a wonderful group of people at The Carter Center, which is now headed by Dr. William Foege, who will address you tomorrow. There is a reason that you've asked me to speak here and I realize that, but I would like to say most seriously that there is no group of human beings on Earth who have engendered more respect among the people around them than the physicians in our society. It's because the people with whom you come into contact, patients and others, recognize that you have devoted your lives to the alleviation of suffering. . . . That is one reason I am glad to be here. Another one is that I don't know of any group, anywhere, which has a better ability to understand the societal structure—from the wealthiest and most

influential people to the most poverty stricken and hopeless, who perhaps have never experienced success in their lives and who have a feeling that they cannot, no matter what they do, control their future or their destiny. You know these people; you see them come in with abject hopelessness. They trust you. You understand what goes on in the world in a very incisive way. And in a way that's colored always by your oath as physicians to serve others.

Not too long ago, I was asked by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to write an editorial calling on physicians as a group to express their commitment to human rights more effectively. The basic example I used was this: in nations where human rights abuses flourish, torture is prevalent. But leaders of those nations don't want their prisoners to die. So quite often, when the torture is severe, physicians are called in to keep the abused prisoners alive and sometimes are coerced into concealing evidence of wrongdoing. You, as physicians, have access to regions where human rights abuses take place and have a vital role to play in alleviating injustice.

I was thrilled not too long ago when a group of physicians went to the West Bank and Gaza to analyze what had been done to the Palestinians. And recently, a group of physicians went in to look at the prisons of Haiti. That country was suffering the last stages of more than 180 years of oppression by dishonest and abusive leaders. I could go on and on talking about what happens in countries such as Sudan where physicians themselves have come forward to say "This is far enough." Even when physicians are not as elevated in social stature, for instance, as in our country, they still have a pro-

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foundly important and significant impact on decisions made by those who would take away basic human rights.

We have a wide range of programs at The Carter Center. . . . Although there isn't time to describe all of them, let me just tell you that we have 26 health programs currently underway. Dr. Rosen, Dr. Foege, myself, and others have gone to villages in Africa, home to the most isolated, most poverty stricken, most illiterate people perhaps in the world. Many have diseases that could quickly be corrected just by a modicum of sharing of technologies that we take for granted in this country. As you know from statistics and reports that have been issued habitually by UNICEF, 40,000 children die of preventable diseases every day. We don't have enough interest in these children to marshal the vast resources of our country to help them. It was mentioned a few minutes ago that the amount of money that was spent on weapons last year was 1,000 billion dollars. The United States annually has been spending about 300 billion dollars on weapons. The Soviet Union spends about the same amount, our allies spend about 200 billion dollars more, and other countries spend another 200 billion. A thousand billion dollars! I was hoping that with the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and with the end of the cold war, the United States would provide the leadership among all nations to say, "Let's cut down our defense budgets, maybe 25%." Last year when the president's defense budget went to Congress, it was with a substantial increase above the previous year. And lately we've heard statements from Washington that are very disturbing to me, such as, "Let's increase the amount of American weapons now to be sold around the world, including to the Gulf nations and others in the Middle East." Some have even called on Congress to approve the use of XM (Export/Import) bank funds, U.S. funds, to supplement arms manufacturing companies in our country to make sure ours are the ones that are sold. We are missing wonderful opportunities to make the world a better, more peaceful place.

Let me close my remarks by giving you just a brief summary of how The Carter Center is looking at the world's armed conflicts and wars. If wars are going on in a nation, it is impossible to expect human rights to be observed. During a civil war arrests are made without anyone condemning the arrest. Peo-

ple are incarcerated without a trial. They are tortured and imprisoned and are summarily executed by firing squads. And if there is a civil war in a country, then the rest of the world says, "Well, that's war." There is no way, as you know, to make deliveries of health care supplies or for people to have a decent home or to educate children or to keep schools open in the midst of a civil war.

When I became president, there were seven million refugees on Earth. There are now 30 million refugees on Earth who have been driven from their homes by various means. Some were forced to leave because of environmental depredation—the land will no longer support their families. Another reason people leave their homes is because of war. I'm not even including displaced persons who leave their homes, but don't leave their country. The Carter Center has undertaken a special role in trying to find peaceful resolutions to conflict, and we try not to duplicate the efforts of others or compete with anyone else. Every day, we monitor all the conflicts in the world. Yesterday morning the Director of our Conflict Resolution Program told me that there are now 111 conflicts in the world. On August of last year, the day before Iraq invaded Kuwait, there were 112 conflicts, so the number is pretty stable. Thirty of these conflicts are major wars. Thirty! We define a major war as one in which more than one thousand people have died on the battlefield. That is a fairly substantial war. Let me give another startling fact: of those 30 wars being waged today, not a single one is between two countries. Every one is a domestic war. These conflicts are horrendous in scope. The year before last, my wife and I spent 26 days negotiating what we hoped would be permanent cease-fires in Sudan and Ethiopia. In the Eritrean/Ethiopian war, one million people have already died. The war still goes on.* In 1989 in the Sudan war, 260,000 people died in one year.

These are not insignificant wars, but the world does not know about them. Rarely do we hear about them. These people are black, they are Africans, they don't have oil. They are not involved with the Soviet Union in a superpower struggle. So they are basically ignored. The tragedy is that the United Nations is precluded from dealing with these wars, except on rare occasions, because it is inappropriate

* The war ended in May 1991.

for an official of the U.N. to even communicate with revolutionaries who are trying to change or overthrow a government that is a member of the United Nations. U.S. and other ambassadors are also not able to help . . . So these wars . . . go on, and they are not addressed.

I know that all of you share with me a concern about war and the threat of nuclear war and a desire for a comprehensive and total test ban. We all hope for an improvement in the observation of the non-proliferation treaty, a decrease in the allocation of funds for military purposes, and a sharing of responsibility among nations that desire peace negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

In the last few years at The Carter Center we have found a way to circumvent the almost impossible impediments to resolving conflict. When people have been at war for 2 years, or 20 years, or 2,000 years, it is nearly impossible to induce them to sit down across the table from each other because of the hatred, the animosity, the memories, the harsh statements that have been made, and the fact that each side tends to make the other side subhuman. Why come face-to-face with a subhuman adversary? Many Israelis think that Palestinians are all terrorists and therefore subhuman. Many Palestinians have the same feeling toward the Israelis. There are more examples around the world.

One of the ways we have been trying to break this ugly cycle is by promoting free and fair elections that are internationally supervised by a trusted third party. The Carter Center was invited by Manuel Noriega to go to Panama to monitor the elections there in 1987. His candidates only got 22% of the vote, but international observers certified that it was an honest election. Today, those candidates who really won are in office because we exposed Noriega's plan to throw the election and discount the results of a free and fair vote. Later we were asked

by the Sandinistas to observe the election in Nicaragua. It was a fair election, and the Sandinistas lost. I just got back from Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas and the freely elected Chamorro government are cooperating. The country is at peace; 30,000 Contras have come back home; and all but 5,000 have their own land now—an average of 65 acres per farm. The other 5,000 Contras are going to get land.

We monitored another election last year in Haiti. For the first time in the history of that country, which is the oldest black republic on Earth and the second oldest republic in this hemisphere, Haiti has a benevolent, honest, and freely elected president. He is a young man—37 years old—named Jean Bertrand Aristide, who I believe has a chance, if anyone can govern Haiti, to be an effective leader because the people chose him.

Most leaders are willing to hold an election because of self-delusion. I have been guilty of it. Anyone who runs for office is guilty of self-delusion. You think that if you get into a race for Congress, for mayor, for city council, for the school board, or for the president of the United States, that people will vote for you if they have an honest chance to understand all the candidates. With two adversaries at war, each believes that if there is an honest election, he will be the next president. So this gives us at least one possibility (I want to leave on a high note) for the resolution of these horrible conflicts on the Earth about which we are basically uninformed and unfortunately, uninterested.

I am delighted to be here with you. I believe that the principles that guide us at The Carter Center are the same ones that guide you. So I come as a friend, as a grateful recipient of this prize, and I hope in the future we can work together to bring about an alleviation of suffering, the end of diseases that can be quickly eradicated, and peace to people who hunger for it. Thank you very much. ■