

Peace Pole Ceremony--February 24, 1995

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We are gathered here in the name of PEACE--to join together in our commitment to work for peace, and united in our recognition of the hard work that this struggle requires.

We are conscious that it is 50 years from 1945, when the inexcusable fire bombing of Dresden occurred, when thousands of soldiers died struggling for the barren rock of Iwo Jima, when our country killed hundreds of thousands of civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and we understand the urgency of working toward peace so that these terrible events are never repeated.

But we also see that in our own times, battles continue, and the slaughter of civilians is unabated. In Bosnia, where the unacceptable crime of genocide has occurred; in Chechnya, where some 25,000 civilians have been killed; in Afghanistan, where the capital of Kabul has been leveled by the factional fighting; in Algeria, where the threat of a major civil war looms; on the border between Peru and Ecuador, where ancient animosities have flared; in the Middle East, where terrorism continues and hatreds fester.

Are we making progress, or is the world still governed by primitive forces that will lead to war after war?

Some good things have happened recently, some glimmers that historical feuds might be resolved. In Northern Ireland, a peace agreement is being developed that may allow that struggle to be waged in nonviolent arenas. In the Middle East, peace treaties have been reached between Israel and Jordan and Israel and the PLO, and a dialogue that was unthinkable until recently is occurring.

ALSO, the World Community is taking more seriously its responsibility to identify the norms that govern conflict-resolution, and is finally building mechanisms to provide peaceful forums where complaints can be brought and considered.

The greatest accomplishment of the past generation has been the articulation of the basic norms of HUMAN RIGHTS that govern all humans. This process began with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948. Then in 1966, the General Assembly promulgated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This seminal treaty has now been ratified by more than 115 nations, including the United States. It establishes a Human Rights Committee which receives reports from all the contracting parties and receives complaints from individuals from the more than 60 countries that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. This Human Rights Committee is issuing opinions regularly on a wide range of topics, ranging from torture and prolonged arbitrary detention to indigenous rights to the rights of gay persons to engage in sexual activities with consenting adults of their own sex.

The United Nations has also appointed a High Commissioner for Human Rights (Jose Ayala Lasso of Ecuador), to give all the human rights issues greater visibility and to allow greater flexibility in addressing these issues as they arise.

The Human Rights Commission at the United Nations has been a cumbersome, slow-moving body, but each year it appears to be more focused in its actions. During its 1994 session, for instance, it formally condemned anti-Semitism--the first time any UN body has done so--and established a Special Rapporteur on the Global Problem of Violence Against Women. This development is important because the Special Rapporteur will be looking into domestic violence and community violence as well as violence by the state, thus expanding the view of Human Rights, and recognizing that Human Rights can be violated by individuals as well as by governments.

Also of enormous importance are the War Crimes Tribunals now investigating the atrocities that have occurred in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. Just two weeks ago, the Yugoslav tribunal issued a formal indictment for genocide against Zeljko Meakic, the Serbian who ran the notorious concentration camp in Omarska in northwestern Bosnia.

The U.S. courts have also provided a forum to seek vindication for these abuses, and a jury here in Hawaii has awarded the victims of torture and murder during the Marcos regime in the Philippines \$2 billion for the suffering they have received.

Perhaps also worth mentioning, is that the UN Law of the Sea Convention is now in effect, and several tribunals and commissions are now being established that are designed to allow countries to challenge each other vigorously, but in nonviolent ways.

Here in Hawaii, we are facing a special challenge presented by the Hawaiian Community's demands for an autonomous Hawaiian Nation and the return of substantial amounts of Hawaii's lands and resources. These claims are justified based on the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian nation and the uncompensated taking of Hawaiian lands 100 years ago. How we deal with these just demands will mark the extent to which we are truly an enlightened and mature society here in the islands.

As we enter into these issues, it is instructive to note that native peoples are gaining substantial rights to lands and resources all over the globe, and that the claim of the Hawaiians is not unique. A federal court in Seattle ruled in December 1994, for instance, that the Indian tribes in the Puget Sound area were entitled to take up to half of all the shellfish in the Puget Sound, which is one of the nation's top producers of oysters, crabs, and clams.

Similarly, in New Zealand (Aotearoa), the Maori tribes of the South Island recently received title to the largest commercial fishing operation in the country (valued at \$75-\$100 million), and the Tainui tribe on the North Island received a land and resources package valued at that same level to give it an opportunity to participate as a major player in the economy of the region. In Australia, the High Court has recognized in the Mabo decision the rights of the aboriginal people to title to the lands they have traditionally held, and the federal and state governments of Australia are now enacting legislation that gives formal recognition to the rights of the aborigines to land and resources. The Native Hawaiians have similar rights, and similar solutions must be developed for them.

The Quest for Peace is an Ongoing Effort, requiring creative solutions and hard work on a daily basis. We can be proud that the substantive norms governing human rights have largely been identified through the efforts of the past generation. Now the procedures to protect these rights are being built. If we contribute to these efforts, the opportunities for the next generation to live in a peaceful world will increase. We must continue to engage in these activities, both here at home, and throughout the globe.

Thank you....