



Dr. of Letters

9-10-86

by JOHN HUME, MEP

It is a great honour for me to accept this honorary degree from an institution of such standing and prestige as the University of St. Joseph in Philadelphia. It is a very special and moving honour for me, coming as I do from the city of Derry in North-West Ireland, to address a university convocation in the historic city of Philadelphia. It is moving because it was from the port of my city that so many of the immigrants to this city and to the United States came in the old days of the sailing-ship when my city, the nearest in Ireland to North America, was the port of exit for so many thousands of people, many of them your own ancestors, who came to build a new life and a new country.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address a group of young Americans, not only in an important week in their own lives and in this university, but at an important moment for the world which is your oyster. The world, as Chernobyl so tragically demonstrates, is a very small place in the late 20th Century. Conflicts, whether they are local, regional or global, are - in the end - about human relationships, and all have their roots in the same human fears or failings. I, like many of you, have come from a minority community. Minorities have deep experience of conflict and the reasons for it. I would therefore like to talk to you about conflict and human rights, born of my own experience of a society in conflict, but also as fellow citizens of this small planet and of the challenges that we face today, not alone to heal the wounds in our own societies, but to help to build a more peaceful, stable and just world.

I serve as an elected representative in Northern Ireland. I represent in the Parliament at Westminster a constituency named Foyle, after the local river, which comprises the towns of Derry

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and Strabane. Also, as one of three representatives for the whole of Northern Ireland, I am a member of the European Parliament, which is directly elected by the citizens of the twelve Member States of the European Community. In Northern Ireland I am the leader of a political party - the Social Democratic and Labour Party which was born sixteen years ago out of our own civil rights movement.

Let me speak to you first today, however, as someone who was once a teacher and whose friends still accuse of being a teacher at heart. Not an entirely insulting accusation, I hope! At their best, education and politics have as their purpose the same high goals of excellence and improvement. The search for excellence and improvement in the individual provides in turn the basis for the broader quest for excellence in society as a whole. It is important in that quest for excellence that those in both education and politics have the realism and humility to recognise that there are few final solutions. Both should be aware that their challenge is growth in understanding; to be always sensitive to new considerations and ideas; and to have the self-confidence and honesty of mind to change and to tolerate difference. When those in education lose sight of those values, we do not have learning, we have dogma. When it happens to those in politics, we do not have democracy, we have totalitarianism.

I am confident that St. Joseph's University, with its tradition of Jesuit education, will help you to develop not just your own knowledge or intellect, but also your sensitivity to others' needs and to their ideas, to develop your personality, to develop your humanity. A university should not be a qualification factory. The education system should not be seen as just an assembly line, producing professionals! Students, as well as lecturers, should remember that the purpose of a university is learning rather than teaching. This university's testimony is that it abides by that simple premise which has all too often been forgotten elsewhere when the process has become one of assimilation rather than stimulation.

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This Inauguration Week has hopefully given you pause for thought, on the university's role and the opportunity and responsibility which studentship here has given you. It should allow you and the community at large in Philadelphia to find a perspective on the university role in the development of this city and state, and the contribution it has made to the wider world in its 135 years.

This historic city saw the signing of your country's Declaration of Independence. It has also, but without public witness, seen, through this university, many find their own independence of mind. Such independence of thought has helped to give vitality to many of the ideals which inspired the Founding Fathers. The innovation and understanding which it generates have helped to shape much of the progress of this society.

That Declaration of Independence represented and inspired what we would now recognise as basic tenets of democracy, justice and freedom. Its radical novelty lay not so much in the separation which it announced from an empire, but in the values and principles of a new political foundation, a new democratic order which is proclaimed. That Declaration was inspired by the thinking and values of the diverse groups which were populating the New World at that time. These groups come from different European countries, had different cultures, different religions and different skills. In the main, they had been minorities there, often persecuted or frustrated by circumstances in Europe from expressing their own particular values. They had been persecuted simply because of their difference; they found themselves alienated because they challenged established thinking, or were unable to conform to the standards required by their old societies, or their old societies refused to accommodate theirs. Some came because they were starving.

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Together this "flotsam and jetsam" of Old Europe fashioned the basis of a new political order. Their shared ideal owed something to the experience and values of each of them. It represented a synthesis of their confidence, their innovation and their aspiration. From their hardened diversity, they created an unbreakable unity of purpose and principle. They created the cement of your democracy.

That unity in diversity is still the cement of your society in America today. You have consensus, fashioned from rich and broad difference. Your nation enjoys structures which accommodate difference and ensure stability. It would be easy but tragic for people to take this for granted or to ignore its essential value. Written on even your smallest coin is your message of greatest value - E PLURIBUS UNUM - FROM MANY, ONE.

As I have often said, and it is worth consistent repetition, the essence of unity and the essence of democracy is the acceptance of diversity. Never forget that, for it tends to be taken for granted in stable societies. The tragedy of divided peoples everywhere is that they have not learned that lesson, and the essence of conflict in most troubled parts of the world lies in the refusal to accept difference and diversity and in pushing differences to the point of division. That is true of virtually every country or region in the world where there is conflict today. It is certainly true of my own country, the country of many of your forefathers - Ireland.

What has happened in Ireland is a clear example of what happens in any society which fails to accommodate difference and where one segment of a society seeks to hold all power in its own hands without regard to either the interests or the rights of anyone else.

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Ireland is, of course, not the only area of conflict in today's world. But its lessons are applicable elsewhere for human beings are no different no matter where they live. They have heads, hands and hearts. Human conflict everywhere derives from the refusal to accept difference and diversity, from the need to dominate, from the failure to recognise that the greatest richness of this world is its diversity and from the failure to accommodate it. The accommodation of difference is the challenge to local, regional or global peace in the world today.

Martin Luther King once wrote to a friend in South Africa: "Injustice anywhere threatens justice everywhere." All of us have a responsibility to apply our compassion and our reason to the many injustices, sufferings and tensions in today's world. That is particularly true of your young people, citizens of the most powerful nation on earth, for while you may be justly proud of the strength of the nation that has been built from such humble origins, you must also be aware of the awesome responsibility that you have.

At present much attention is focused on South Africa. Your Congress last week adopted strong sanctions in a bid to shorten the reign of Apartheid. As someone who has voted and spoken in favour of sanctions in the Westminster Parliament and in Europe, I applaud Congress' stand. Apartheid is a crime against democracy because it denies power and expression to a people. It is a crime against justice as it subjects people to poverty, cruelty and exploitation. Apartheid is a crime against humanity because it brutalises people because of the colour of their skin. Why trade with South Africa if it only buys time for Apartheid?

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I can appreciate the anxieties about sanctions which some have expressed. However, and such an issue demands frankness, I find glaring inconsistencies in the position of some who have opposed sanctions against South Africa. Some of these people have been willing to impose sanctions against other countries and regimes regardless of the impact on the ordinary people there. On occasions, such as in the Falklands situation, the issue has been about territory, about lumps of earth. Yet when the issue is a glaring crime against humanity sanctions are proclaimed immoral. If a major economic summit can address its mind to devising ways of curbing terrorism by exercising economic discipline then why not Apartheid? We were told after the Tokyo summit that the message to Gadaffi was, "You have had it, pal. You are isolated!" Why would it be immoral to say, "Botha you have had it pal. You are isolated!"?

If South Africa is to avoid massive violence with raging bloodshed it is incumbent on democrats and peace lovers throughout the world to use every non-violent resource we have to expedite change there. We cannot put the needs and demands of Black South Africa on hold while we conduct business talks on the conference line with the profiteers and financiers of Apartheid. The words of Martin Luther King are apposite: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step forward toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concerns of dedicated individuals. Without persistent effort time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

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But we must be honest with ourselves in our indignation against Apartheid. We find Apartheid abhorrent because it concentrates power in the hands of a minority. We object to Apartheid because an exploitative minority controls the lands and resources which are the rightful possession of other people. We are outraged by Apartheid because while bestowing affluence on some it inflicts poverty, malnutrition and ignorance on many. These same contrasts and contradictions mark the global political and economic situation.

I do not propose that we should distract ourselves from the urgency of breaking Apartheid. I do urge that we recognise and address the structures of world poverty and hunger with the same concern. Can anyone argue with the fact that world economic structures create separate development? The blacks of South Africa are far from the only people denied the basic necessities and dignities of human life. If our opposition to Apartheid is truly principled and not simply a conscience-trip for the liberal western world then we must seek to ensure world development in the context of a new international economic order. One of the points used by opponents of sanctions which angers me is the claim that they are immoral because it might make black people unemployed or poor. Quite apart from its fallacy even in the South African context, this argument begs the question of why are these people happy to sustain an international political and economic order which consigns the majority of the world's people to ill-health, hunger and illiteracy; which has seen millions starve for want of food in a world of plenty.

But those of us who support sanctions must also face the inherent inconsistency between seeing trade mechanisms as part of the apparatus which keeps Apartheid going, but failing to recognise

~~our trade mechanisms as the lock and chains which keep most of~~
this world underdeveloped. -8

Some celebrities have quite rightly compared the glamour of Sun City with the degradation of Soweto to show their abhorrence of Apartheid. But the criminal contrast of Sun City and Soweto is no worse than would be a contrast of Las Vegas and Lalibala in Ethiopia. The geographic proximity of Sun City and Soweto is not what makes the difference between them immoral. The fact that they come under the same state government does not make the essential human issue which they portray any different from the issues at the heart of a comparison between a casino in Atlantic City and a Kebele slum in Addis Ababa.

It is too easy for us to blame underdevelopment on climatic and geophysical causes, or to say that hunger is the sad result of overpopulation in developing countries. It is also untrue. Quoting figures on "Aid" is equally misleading, given that so much aid has strings attached in terms of trade or political allegiance that it sometimes has more to do with exploitation than assistance.

Just under a year ago I said in a speech in the U.S. Senate Building, "Ireland knew famine in the last century, it is for that reason that our country has been so moved by the present suffering of Africa. We know that our famines were not simply natural disasters. History shows that Irish people were starved or forced to leave their native land because of unjust distribution of land, poverty, and extortion which forced the production of cash crops for the wealthy abroad instead of food for the hungry at home, trade structures which knew no morality and unequal power relationships between countries. These are the same injustices and absurdities which crucify Africa today."

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Our famine brought the starving to America. May the present famine bring America to the starving."

World hunger demands change not just charity. It is your challenge to help shape that change. Do not wait for change to happen. Do not wait for others to start. Change starts with you. In this city of "brotherly love" you can find ways of helping to improve the lives and prospects of people whom our world has ignored and abused. You can learn more about world development needs to help ensure greater public and political awareness of the issues involved. You can get involved in sponsoring particular development projects, whether it be sinking a well, building a classroom or supplying a health clinic. My own town of Derry has, despite its own troubles, high unemployment and poverty, contributed generously to development programmes. It has contributed per capita for several years twice the average Irish contribution and Ireland's contributions per capita are the highest in Europe. Our city council has "twinned" the town with a slum in Addis Ababa and raises money for specific improvements in that slum, nothing spectacular, just very basic amenities to allow an impoverished and hungry community build a slightly better life for themselves. Philadelphia and other American towns and cities or even campuses could do likewise.

The crisis in the world challenges us to use the same ingenuity, muster the same confidence, make the same commitment to valued human principles and dare to make change in the same way as America's founding fathers set out to do. Just as your federal nation was founded on novel structures and commitments, so too does the world need political structures which allow a more equal power relationship between its peoples. We need to create an international economic structure which does not by its nature

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sponsor mass poverty but which meets the real task of economics - to match resources to needs and to match opportunities to talents.

It is surely wrong that the "Meeting of the Seven" as in the Tokyo Summit should be much more powerful in the world than is the U.N. or any of its organs. The need for a better world political framework is essentially no different from the need we can easily recognise for countries and nations to have frameworks which protect people's rights, develop resources, provide stability, yield change and ensure order based on justice.

Intrinsically interlinked with these issues is the arms race. The awesome stockpiling of nuclear arms threatens us all. The arms trade is a criminal diversion of resources both economic and scientific from our real task of improving our world. Dwight D. Eisenhower said when he was retiring as U.S. President, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in a final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, from those who are cold and are not clothed." Over a quarter of a century later that message is no less true but ever more urgent.

On this one day, as in every day of the year, the world's governments will spend more on arms than 2,000 million of our poorest people will earn this year. The money spent on arms in the last minute could support 2,000 malnourished children for a whole year. When I fly to Ireland the world will spend on arms during the time of my flight home enough money to completely eradicate malaria from the face of the world. The world does not have to be this way.

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Civilization should be about being able to dispose of weapons rather than making them more sophisticated. If we cannot believe that we can use human reason and feeling rather than brute violence to safeguard our rights in the world then we are voting no-confidence in our own humanity.

The resolution of global differences must be amenable to the same principles of non-violence as are the problems of Ireland or anywhere else. We cannot go on speaking with forked tongue about violence - condemning "terrorism" in one part of the world but eulogising and funding similar atrocities elsewhere. If we are against violence our position has no principle if it depends solely on the source and scale of that violence. It does not take an etymologist to tell us that terrorism and deterrents are in the end, which is all they promise us, about the same things force and fear.

Human beings are no different wherever they live. In dealing with human conflict, whether in Ireland, Central America or in the divided globe, we know that it is the building of mutual trust and not mutual threats which will resolve our problems. Just as in Ireland we have sought a framework which meaningfully embraces all dimensions of our problem, so too must we enhance the means of international dialogue and exchange globally. It is quite distressing to see so many of the organs and programmes of the U.N. starting to come apart. It is frustrating that the U.N. has not been allowed to develop in such a way that it can effectively help address the global challenge. It is shameful that it is the powerful developed nations who are to blame for this.

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Your President and Secretary General Gorbachev will meet soon in a preliminary, hopefully, to a future summit. Hopefully this meeting will contribute to a better mutual understanding and developing meaningfully some of the positive soundings from "Stockholm". Some have criticised the President for agreeing to the meeting, pointing out unfulfilled conditions and possible problems. That happens to people who want to talk in any conflict situation. We must remember that leadership is not just about being able to stand up to others, it is also about being able to sit down with them. But we must sit down with the weak as well as the strong, with those whom we threaten as well as with those who we believe threaten us.

I hope that in outlining these challenges I have not left you depressed about the world you inherit from my generation: I hope instead that you think responsibly about the world which you are borrowing from your children and appreciate the role you can play in improving it both in your personal relations and your political undertakings. Respect not just its people but its natural resources and the balance of its environment. H.G. Wells once wrote, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Make sure that you use your education here to develop the powers of reason, the tolerance of difference and the sensitivity to feelings which must prevail against the blind destruction of our planet and its peoples. These resources of our humanity can avoid the "catastrophe" and create instead not a utopia - as I said there are no final solutions - but a fairer, safer world with better breaks for happier people. In the powerful words of Andrei Sakharov, "Only the equilibrium of reason - not of fear - is the true guarantee of the future."