

Published on : 08-16-2003

THE DRIVE FOR A LASTING PEACE

JOHN HUME

Saturday, August 16, 2003

THE DRIVE FOR A LASTING PEACE

RECENTLY, I ATTENDED THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS IN DUBLIN ORGANIZED BY EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER. SOME 150 COUNTRIES WERE REPRESENTED. IF PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD CAN GATHER TO RESPECT AND CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR LEADERS CAN ALSO WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE MANY THINGS, PARTICULARLY A WORLD OF LASTING PEACE.

We are living through the greatest revolution in history - the telecommunications, travel, and technological revolution. As a result, the world is much smaller, and its leaders face major challenges. The most important one is to create a world in which there is no longer war or conflict.

Of course, that goal means that instead of sending armies to areas of conflict, we should send a philosophy of peace, accompanied by a large delegation of facilitators who would promote dialogue among conflicting factions.

I have always taken the view that no matter where conflict exists, it is always about difference, whether in race, religion, or nationality. The answer is to respect difference, not fight about it. That respect should be the first principle of any peace agreement.

When we think back on the foundation of the United States, a strong message comes across. The Founders, driven from their homeland by persecution, conflict, poverty, and famine, met to create a country in which none of these things could happen again. Their philosophy was summed up in E Pluribus Unum - from many we are one; the essence of our unity is respect for our diversity.

Their second principle was to create institutions that respect that diversity. The principle is central to the presidency, Congress, and each state because the diversity of the United States is fully represented in its democratic system.

Their third principle was that they worked together in their common interests - the socio-economic development and living standards of the people. They spilled their sweat together and not their blood, breaking down the barriers of the past and building trust and respect. As a result, the new America evolved. These three principles can be applied as a solution to any area of conflict in the world. These are the same principles at the heart of the European Union. They are also the principles at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. I have no doubt they can be applied to areas of conflict elsewhere.

The European Union is the best example of conflict resolution.

The first half of the 20th century witnessed two world wars and 50 million people killed. Who could have forecast that in the second half of the century people would come together and create a united Europe?

The first principle of the European Union is respect for difference - no victory for any country. The second principle is about institutions that respect those differences, including a Council of Ministers, a European Commission, and a European Parliament.

The third principle addresses the healing process. We Europeans work together in our common interest - economic development. We spill our sweat, not our blood. We are breaking down centuries-old barriers, and the new Europe is evolving.

Those same three principles are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland.

Because of my own experience in the European Parliament and my party's involvement in shaping the Irish agreement, I know we were inspired by our European experience.

The first principle in the Good Friday Agreement is our respect for difference: no victory for either community and total respect for both identities.

The second is institutions that respect those identities - an assembly elected by an electoral system of proportional representation that ensures that all sections of our people are represented. Similarly, the assembly proportionally elects the government of Northern Ireland so that all sections are represented.

The third - the healing process - will come when institutions are fully in place, and representatives of all sections of our people will be working together in our common interests - our solid economic development. We will be spilling our sweat, not our blood. The distrust and hatreds of the past will be eroded and a new Ireland based on agreement and respect for difference will evolve. The institutions of that new Ireland will have the total loyalty of Protestant, Catholic, and dissenter - real unity.

It is clear that we must send that philosophy of peace to all areas of conflict. Think of the enormous strength of such a process if the United States and the united Europe were to come together to face that challenge.

What if the United Nations were given the role - sending teams of facilitators of dialogue with the philosophy of peace instead of armies? E Pluribus Unum.

MEMO: John Hume won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998.