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ROME

Address by Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate, to Rome Conference on NATO. Friday 29th January, 2016.

Dear Friends,

I believe we, the human family, have no less a task before us, than transforming our thinking and mind-sets of violence and war, and moving to a demilitarized Europe and World. Einstein once said that everything has changed but our thinking. However, there is hope as indeed our thinking is changing and there is a growing consciousness that violence, whether it comes from State or non-state actors, is wrong, violence does not work, violence is not the way.

However, around the world, we, the people, are in danger of being overpowered and dis-spirited by increasing violence, militarism and war. Many people can see that many Political Leaders can no longer imagine a just peace, and under the guise of allegedly ‘just wars’ and unbounded preparation for war, they are leading us into repeated cycles of violence profoundly counter to the spirit of love and friendship residing in the heart of humanity. But there is Hope and it resides with the People, who are great and are mobilizing and uniting across the Globe to bring about much needed change, and rejecting violence and war.

The World health organization has said that ‘Violence is a preventable disease’ and people are not born violent, rather we all live in cultures of violence. This can be changed through nonviolent peacemaking and the persuit of ‘just peace’ and nurturing of cultures of peace. Using active nonviolence, based on love of enemies and nonkilling, can bring about a real peace that is just, inclusive and sustainable.

In Northern Ireland we faced Violence from all sides, for over thirty years, as we lived in a deep ethnic/political conflict. This violence only ended when everyone acknowledged that militarism and paramilitarism could not solve our human problems, and only through unconditional, all inclusive dialogue and negotiations could we reach a Political Agreement based on nonviolence, forgiveness, compromise and co-operation. We spoke ‘to our enemies’ and made peace with them, because we recognized that without Peace nothing is possible, and with Peace, everything is possible. We also began to tackle the root causes of our violence, by making painful policy changes. Today in Belfast, it is good for all its citizens to live in a City at peace, but we all acknowledge that our Peace process is a work in progress and we continue to work on justice forgiveness and reconciliation.

We meet at a time when, I believe, Europe is facing a cross-roads and hard choices regarding Policies and Priorities have to be made by all. Today’s refugees, migrant challenge, has shown the best and the worst of European values, via television beamed onto our screens to the world. The best have been the compassionates response of some Spiritual Leaders such as Pope Francis and the people of Italy, Government Political leaders, such as Germany’s Chancellor Merkel, and millions of ordinary citizens across Europe, moving to help in any way they can the refugees, and migrants who have arrived from war torn countries, seeking safety in European countries. The worst has been the fearology fuelled by negative forces which has resulted in an increase in racism, islamophobia, hate crimes, and fascism in some European cities, hitherto known as Cities of Cultural diversity and tolerance. More refugees/migrants from Africa, Middle East, Asia, will come to Europe, and the question is: what is the role of the E.U. and its citizens? I hope that Europe will continue to host those who are so desperate they have to flee all they love in order to save their life, or get a better life.

Also, I hope Europe will take a honest and truthful look at the roots of the problem, and do all it can to change its policies which are and have contributed to make the lives of many of those fleeing ‘a hell upon earth’ in their own homelands. I have just returned from Syria, after my third visit there, where our delegation of International peace activists witnessed the terrible suffering of the Syrian people, brought upon their country by mainly outside forces whose aim is to destabilize Syria and bring down its Government.. Thousands of Jihadists Foreign fighters, well trained equipped and funded by outside Governments, were let loose on the Syrian people, resulting in the deaths of thousands, and millions fleeing internally and from Syria for fear of their lives. We could not enter Aleppo as it was under siege by the Jihadists. We did get to visit Maaloula, one of the oldest Christian villages in the Middle East where some of the people still speak Arabic, the language of Jesus. The Catholic priest explained how many people had been killed, the churches and homes burnt and how they were under siege by IS fighters until liberated by townspeople and the Syrian Army. Our delegation had to quickly leave Maaloula as IS snipers were operating around the town. Other Syrian towns are still under siege from foreign fighters, who are terrorizing,.,killing and refusing to allow food sent in by Syrian Government and Aid agencies, to get to the people. (Contrary to western media war propaganda, and demonizing and blaming President Assad and the Government whilst ignoring the terrorism of Foreign fighters and militants, which the Syrian Government and its people have been facing for over five years.) The urgency now to save the people of Syria and their country is through dialogue and diplomacy with President Assad (elected by 80% of Syrians) and the Syrian government and people as the people are tired of violence and killing in their country.

The consequences of NATO/US policies of invasions and occupation is the destruction of Iraq, Libya,, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, to name but a few. A real question now to be asked by Europeans is: Do you want to continue being part of the perpetual wars of USA and its most belligerent states of U.K. Israel, etc.? and the militarization and nuclearization of Europe to continue?

All across the European Union, young Europeans are travelling to other EU countries and further afield, trying to find jobs, and many continue to immigrate overseas. Austerity cuts, imposed by many EU governments, are driving people into poverty. In spite of this lack of jobs and increase in poverty for many families, Political Leaders insist on Governments policies, supporting foreign wars instead of human security of EU citizens, health care, education, environment, etc., The British Government has implemented austerity cuts which have devastated social services and many poor families and it is currently promising the renewal of the UK nuclear trident missile (the control of these nuclear weapons, although on European soil, are in the control of the USA Government) at a cost of £31 billion of the tax payers money. This is all done in the face of millions of citizens protesting nuclear weapons and calling for a nuclear weapons free Britain and World.

Many Governments in Europe are in denial that they are in a crisis but unless courageous policy reversals are implemented and more funding put into Human security by dealing with unemployment and poverty (in UK the unemployed get £60 per week to live on, !) things will not change for the better for our societies in the forseeable future. But we do not need Austerity cuts, we live in a very rich world its just we have got our priorities wrong!! Billions and billions of Euros spent by NATO and Europe hosting War exercises, increases fearology, prepares people mentally for enmity and war, and lines the pockets of the rich, of arms manufacturers and war profiteers. In November, 2015, while the worlds Political leaders, and media, focused on the Refugee crisis and the violence of illegal groups of Daish (Islamic state) and other fundamental Islamic extremists, almost unknown to the civil community, as it was little reported, one of the great threats to the survival of humanity was taking place in Northern Europe, across three European states. Some 36,000 military troops, 200 fighter aircrafts and more than 60 warships carried out NATO’s biggest war games in 13 years. The military troops were from over 30 states. Along with NATO member states seven more partner nations participated: Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Rep. of Macedonia, Sweden and Ukraine. They were carrying out war exercises preparing to fight together in battle groups (including UK/ Ireland) if necessary in a war, which should it come to pass, would be a horror of horrors and one of the greatest crimes against humanity, a nuclear/conventional war on European soil, and spreading quickly across the world. The NATO (led by the United States of America) since 9/ll has fought many illegal wars. They argue that it is necessary to fight terrorism and that it must defend its members from threats from the Middle East and North Africa. They point to failed states like Libya, exporting terrorism and yet it was exactly NATO’s wars which led to the strengthening and recruiting of Jihadist fundamentalism and for every person killed by NATO bombing ten more Jihadists are born. It was NATO which created a failed state in Libya, and who are destroying countries, with its strategy of permanent war, which directly or with proxy wars have destroyed or destabilised many countries. Italy as part of NATO must allocate $65 million a day (and rising) and hosts Nuclear weapons on Italian soil. The cold war propaganda against Russia continues and NATO by its expansionist and aggressive strategy has brought Europe to a situation similar to that of the Cold War causing a new dangerous confrontation with Russia. Italy violates the Non-proliferation treaty which it has signed and ratified. I believe not only that Italy should leave NATO but also that NATO should be abolished as it should have been when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. The Irish Government also participates in NATOs battle groups, and has facilitated fifteen years now with the American military as it collaborates via Shannon Airport by American military plans in the US/NATO led wars.

I believe Europe (and indeed the world) must now ask the hard questions and make hard, brave and courageous choices: ‘Do we continue down the road of re-arming Europe and the World, and building a culture of militarism and war, creating enemy images and demonizing other countries and their leaders, implementing ‘regime change’ through bogus ‘right to protect’ military intervention, or do we choose to start disarming our conscience, hearts and minds, dismantling our weapons, ending militarism and war and implementing International law?’ The World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureate Charter for a world without violence, in Chapter 13, called upon all to work together ‘towards a just killing-free world in which everyone has the right not to be killed and responsibility not to kill others’. Europe and the World needs a New Vision of Unity and Demilitarization of Regions, with power devolved to communities where people feel empowered and true democracy can be established. A demilitarized world is something we can all work together to build. It is not an impossible dream, but begins with each one of us, choosing to live lives of nonkilling and nonviolence and building friendships between peoples and regions in order to co-operate as the human family on the problems we all need to deal with such as environment, poverty, etc., We have imagination and genius and with confidence and trust in ourselves and each other, we can move away from nationalism and war, towards Regional solutions built on demilitarized societies of peaceful co-existence – we can and we must learn to live together in all our diversity. Peace Demilitarized and Devolved Democracy is possible and a human right for all.

(Peace, Salam, Shalom)

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