

Opening Plenary Address
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Human Rights: The Real Cost of War
By Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

As a newly inaugurated president dealing with human rights problems and the world's conflicts, I was committed to making human rights concerns a fundamental element of our nation's foreign policy. I designated every ambassador who represented me in a foreign country to be my personal human rights representative. Every American embassy was designated by me personally to be a haven for those who suffered the abuses of human rights in their own countries and by their own leaders. Since being elected president, I have become increasingly familiar with the complexity of human rights issues and have continued working closely with the major human rights organizations in the world, such as Amnesty International. In particular, I have learned that if we rely exclusively on the media or our political leaders to identify or address human rights violations, we get a distorted picture.

We see a heavy concentration of attention given when one lawyer is arrested in Nigeria, or when a human rights activist is put under restraint, or when a Palestinian activist is put into exile. These are very disturbing events. But what we fail to recognize, including those of us who are involved in the human rights field, is the enormity of the human rights violations that occur in wartime. Wars multiply human rights violations a thousand-fold, or ten thousand-fold. The suffering and oppression fall primarily upon the poor, the politically weak, the defenseless, and the inarticulate. One problem is that when we know a nation is involved in a war, usually a civil war, we tend to forgive or ignore the tremendous human rights violations that take place.

War is bestial. It is inhuman. It violates basic human values and ignores laws designed over centuries, even millennia, that protect the rights of one person living adjacent to another. In a war, those who speak out are silenced by death. Tens of thousands of people are killed, almost without a murmur in the Western news media, either by direct result of weapons or by the deliberate withholding of food or medicine. The world tends to agree with oppressive governments that this is strictly an internal matter: a nation is at war, ten thousand people died last week, the combatants say that this is a part of conflict, and unfortunately, the rest of the world does too. The horrendous deprivation of basic human rights and the suffering of anonymous civilians persists.

Since the seventeenth century the number of wars has grown every year, accompanied by an increase in the technological capability of weapons to inflict Destruction. At the same time, a very disturbing but sometimes unrecognized fact

country's civil war and in Europe in world war I. Increasingly, it is not the soldiers and leaders who die, and certainly not the generals. The victims are civilians trying to protect themselves, their families, and what they have from a conflict they often do not understand. The 1980s witnessed the greatest incidence of war in the history of human beings, and the percentage of casualties among civilians approached a horrifying 80 percent. Applying the standard established by Uppsala University in Sweden, an institution with which we work very closely in monitoring current wars, there are approximately 110 armed conflicts going on now, 30 of which are defined as major wars with battlefield casualties in excess of 1,000 people. Imagine, then, the enormity of the civilian carnage.

The disturbing thing is that in too many instances, governments themselves and international institutions are prohibited from dealing with these wars. Those of you who have been involved with the United Nations know how difficult it is to get through the General Assembly and the Security Council—with all the other priorities that are pressing upon that institution—a resolution authorizing the secretary-general to go to a country and become involved in a dispute between an existing government and its people. It is totally inappropriate without an invitation from the government itself for a U.N. official, or an American ambassador, even to communicate with revolutionaries who are trying to change or overthrow a government that is a member of the United Nations or to which an American ambassador is accredited.

This leaves a horrible vacuum, and some of these wars are horrendous in scope. The war in Ethiopia, now in a tenuous peaceful stage that we hope will result in the call for internationally supervised elections, has cost a million lives over a 30-year period. In the Sudan, hundreds of thousands of people have died in one year—not because of bullets, but because of the withholding of food and foreign aid.

What are the costs of war? In the 1980s, the average annual worldwide expenditure for defense was one trillion U.S. dollars. That is a thousand billion dollars—two million dollars every minute. Two million dollars a minute is spent on war or the preparation for war. At the same time, there is a sense of hopelessness around the world that we do not have the financial resources to deal with basic problems of human beings.

Clearly we do. The problem is one of priorities and setting common goals. As an example, a couple of months ago, I went with Dr. William Foege, executive director of The Carter Center of Emory University, to the United Nations to commemorate the achievements of the Task Force for Child Survival and Development, which is headquartered at the Center. The Task Force decided to immunize the world's children against basic diseases such as polio, measles, diphtheria, typhoid, and whooping cough. Six years ago only 20 percent of the world's children were immunized. Last December, a little more than a year ago,

But it is not just a question of uniting around an attractive goal of immunizing children. The more daunting challenge, one that threatens our existence on this planet in innumerable ways, is a discrimination even larger than the racial and religious tensions that cause conflict within nations. It is discrimination among the rich, powerful, influential, prosperous, and fortunate people against those who have none of the advantages that we take for granted—who don't have a home in which to live, who don't have adequate health care, who don't have an adequate diet, who believe that no matter what decisions they make in life, it will not impact their own future. These human beings lack the self-respect that would encourage them to reach for and accomplish things that would give them hope their children will have a better life. This is a devastating reality, and the fact that we are expending our precious resources on war prevents our giving to those most in need.

Deliberately, inadvertently, or conveniently, we look the other way. Quite often we do not even acknowledge the existence of those who are so desperately underprivileged. In developing nations, there are eight soldiers for every medical doctor. It costs about \$30,000 annually, on the average, to support a soldier with training and weapons and so forth. This is 30 times more than is spent on the education of a child. Speaking of education, you can take one U.S. submarine and pay for twice the cost of educating more than 126 million children in the 18 poorest countries on earth. This tells us something. It puts things in perspective. These are terribly troublesome statistics, and I could go on and on. What can the world do about it? Are we going to sit here until the end of our lives and see another generation come along with an increasing number of wars going on every year? Shall we watch the deprivation of people, our next door neighbors or sometimes those in another country who don't have any of the aspects of a quality life?

The answer is that the world community can and must do something to break this cycle of death and destruction and deprivation. Our duty is to identify ways to make this happen. That is why this distinguished group has gathered at The Carter Center. This assembly of people, about 200 carefully selected experts from 150 different organizations and 40 countries, knows of this devastation and also knows what might be done to correct the problems. We want to explore this in the most complete way in the brief period of time we have available to us. What can we do to make sure that this decade and the next decade will see a steady decrease in the incidence of war?

The International Negotiation Network (INN) has been exploring this. Four years ago we invited some of the INN Council members and others to The Carter Center. The secretary-general of the United Nations was here, along with the secretaries-general of the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth of Nations, and leaders who have been effective in negotiating peace at the rare times when we have found peace. We analyzed the problem of conflict, and asked, "What can we do?"

After a day or two, these secretaries-general let their hair down and said they could not move more aggressively to address the problems of conflict because of political and institutional impediments. I remember U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, now a member of the INN Council, explaining how the United Nations suffers from lack of support from the superpowers. He described arrearages in dues by the leading industrial nations, particularly the United States, in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and bemoaned the absence of public acknowledgement from The New York Times and other media when the United Nations does something constructive. He explained the tortuous political process of getting authorization just to look at a country that is torn apart by war. Often, he said, countries, sometimes including parties from more than one side of a conflict, would like to find alternatives to U.N. mediation but don't know where to turn.

One such alternative might be the INN Council. The Council, which I chair, consists of a singularly distinguished group of eminent persons who seek to use their combined skill and influence to draw attention to major intra-national wars and bring about peaceful resolution to these conflicts. The Council might be called upon to act in an advisory role, as a third-party intermediary, or in some other constructive way, either publicly or in confidence. Joining me on the INN Council are Oscar Arias Sánchez, Olusegun Obasanjo, Lisbet Palme, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Shridath Ramphal, Marie-Angélique Savané, Eduard Shevardnadze, Desmond Tutu, Cyrus Vance, Elie Wiesel, and Andrew Young. Other Council members will be named later this year.

The INN has learned a lot in these last four years. One new principle of conflict resolution that bears great promise for the future is the holding of an internationally supervised election as an alternative to direct talks or direct mediation. People know in their own countries, if they are from war-torn countries, how difficult it is to sit down across the table in the same room with an adversary. Just think about the Israelis negotiating directly with the P.L.O.; this is not a unique situation-it's just better known than most. But it is increasingly likely that adversaries will say, "We cannot negotiate because we despise the other side too much. They have killed our children, they have raped our women, they have devastated our villages. But we can turn to an international body to come in, and if the elections are fair and honest and have integrity, we'll abide by the results."

There is a very good trick to this. I've been in politics. Politicians suffer a kind of self-delusion, because when you run for office, and many of you have run for office, you believe that if it's an honest election, and if people know you and know your adversaries, surely they will vote for you. This opens up an opportunity, as it did in Zambia, as it did in Nicaragua, as it did in other countries, to end wars or prevent wars, as we hope it will do in Liberia, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Let an international group, maybe the United Nations, maybe nongovernmental organizations such as the INN Council, come in and supervise the elections.

a time when wars are not treated as little nuisances or worse, ignored, but are elevated to their proper place as matters of pressing international concern. We know when war breaks out in Palestine. We knew when war broke out in Nicaragua, a war that was orchestrated and financed by my own country and resulted in 35,000 casualties. We knew when the Gulf war took place. But we know very little about Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique or Liberia. We want to make sure that the world knows about the devastation of these wars. We also want to understand how international organizations can be strengthened, how the impediments to their active involvement might be lessened or removed.

We also want to look at the problem of what we can do as private citizens, as heads of major organizations with a fresh point of view and with the hope of consistent and persistent dedication-not just in a transient phase of two or three days here in Atlanta at The Carter Center, but maybe as a renewed life commitment to say, "I believe that I can share what I have in life with others. I believe I can address the problems of poverty and deprivation. I hope that I can add some light to the darkness of persistent conflict among brothers and sisters, too often, in the name of God."

These are the challenges that present themselves to us in the next two to three days. I am grateful that you would come and help us learn more than we knew before, more than we know now, so that we can share the knowledge, not just among ourselves but with others, and work toward a time when we can breathe a sigh of relief and say that our world is now on the way, not to the suffering of war, but to prosperity and peace and happiness.