



CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

Introduction by Sir Jeremy Greenstock

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently

2016

I am delighted to have been invited to join the Civil Courage Prize Advisory Committee and applaud the Train Foundation for its championing of civil courage in today's threatening world.

The Prize is distinctive and necessary, itself displaying moral courage of a significant order, because the world is too full of institutions and individuals whose rhetoric is not matched by adequate action, and too full of gross behaviour whose perpetrators believe they can escape with impunity.

May I pay my own tribute to 'Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently'. I voted for RBSS in this year's examination for the Prize for two principal reasons: no group resisting violence and tyranny today is exposed to more lethal risk, as the facts show; and the organization they are confronting is one of the world's most significant threats to decent civilized life.

I hope the names of those who have sacrificed their lives for this resistance will be long remembered and cherished.

I raise my hat, too, to the two other candidates considered for this year's prize. Organized crime in Mexico and corrupt governance in South Africa threaten to derail economic and social progress in two of the most promising emerging economies. We will all be the poorer if either of them gains ground.

Let us come back to rhetoric not matched by action. At the United Nations, where I served in my final diplomatic service posting as UK Permanent Representative, official speeches were full of it: on peace and security, on human rights and humanitarian abuse, on commitments to development assistance, on the environment.

The Charter of the UN, and the treaties, conventions and declarations that give further expression to it, are unimpeachably accurate in laying down the right principles for a stable, growing world. But action to realize and enforce those principles is sadly deficient. Most governments have other, narrower, priorities.

This is why it matters.

Since 1945, we have enjoyed a long period of relative global peace, in terms of the avoidance of war between major powers. No previous era of peace has ever ended in anything other than a catastrophic war. That is a tautology, but an instructive one. In this era, in the next two or three decades at most, the human race has to do something unprecedented in history if a great war is to be prevented. We have to agree - through debate, compromise and calculation of shared interest - that a collapse from competition into outright war is unthinkable.

There is one advantage we have that previous eras did not possess: the existence of the United Nations. We are committed by treaty to the right principles, and we have a forum where the habit of talking before shooting is well entrenched. But the accelerating trend towards identity politics, part of the strong reaction to globalization, is breeding nationalistic subjectivism and the assertion of local priorities. The global system is being eroded.

So the other change we need from earlier times has to lie in the quality of leadership steering us towards the preservation of peace. The lessons of history are there to be learnt, and no-one can pretend that their warnings are inaudible.

So complex is today's world, however, and so seductive are the appeals to national and local interest - to the dream of a return to greatness of whatever tribe we belong to - that governments alone cannot be trusted to act in ways that ensure the primacy of international cooperation and the search for peace.

Citizens have to contribute. My generation - our generation, for many in this room - has to take some of the responsibility: we, the luckiest generation in history for the combination of peace, freedom and growing prosperity that we have enjoyed in our adult lives.

The Train Foundation is doing that. What about the other institutions and organizations that should be resisting the tendency towards extremism, towards systematic barbarism, in the region in which Raqqa is situated?

I have spent a good part of my career in this region. I was the last Assistant Judge of the Trucial States Court, as a Second Secretary in Dubai in the early 1970s, and - bizarrely, in a decolonized world - I ended my government service in 2004 as co-Administrator of Iraq in the Coalition Provisional Authority. I admire and respect the people of the Middle East, with their tough desert culture and their enormous contributions over the centuries to many aspects of civilization.

But modern standards of governance in the region are insufficiently high. That is why the Arab Spring exploded in North Africa in 2011, and that is why the people of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are suffering so grievously now. It is all part of the growing alienation between governments and their own people around the world, in democracies as well as autocracies, which is creating the most disastrous outcomes where standards of governance are worst. And

even where regimes are removed, the poverty of the institutions tends to create a dangerous vacuum.

In these circumstances, the excluded and the dispossessed turn all too readily to violent jihadism. But this does tremendous damage to the image of Islam as the religion of peace and submission. It must be resisted more courageously and proactively by the mass of ordinary, peace-loving Muslims. So must rotten government in Southern Africa; so must violent crime in Mexico - be resisted at the popular level. Individuals as well as governments, civil society as well as the political classes, must stand up and act on their rhetoric if the world is to remain a decent place.

WB Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction; while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

That is what RBSS stands for: real, courageous action by ordinary people, showing their conviction and taking responsibility into their own hands. I hope we can all match what they are doing. One day, otherwise, our children and grandchildren are going to have to pick up the pieces.

Thank you.