

We Have a Dream

Three score years ago the western world carved out of the Middle East a country for the Jews called Israel to assuage their grief and shame over the horrors of World War 2. In doing so, they created homelessness and humiliation for another disenfranchised people—the Palestinians.

Now, today in the Middle East these two ancient and troubled peoples are still warring with each other, caught in an escalating spiral of death, destruction and desolation, fighting over a land they could share, choosing to die together rather than strive towards living together.

So we speak here today to dramatize this appalling situation.

We have also come here at this hallowed time to remind us all of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and forsaken valley of hatred, distrust and negativity to the sunlit path of justice, peace, security and dignity for all. Now is the time to open the doors of hope to these two groups of God's people. Now is the time to support both these peoples to shift from the quicksand of injustice and fear to the solid rock of partnership in a new order of peaceful relationship between them.

It would be fatal for the world to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination and need of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. This moment of Palestinian and Israeli legitimate discontent with each other will not pass until there is an atmosphere of freedom, safety and equality for both. Now is not an ending, but a new beginning. Those who hope that both sides will back down or that one side will 'win' will have a rude awakening if the world does not make known its support for the humanity and rights of both. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in the world until Israelis are recognized and feel safe and the Palestinians are recognized and feel treated as equal human beings.

The whirlwinds of warfare will continue to shake the foundations of the world's safety until the bright day of justice emerges. However, as a storm of destruction looms, both sides can choose to work together to strengthen the foundation of the one future they share. Or they can continue to undermine the other side of this floundering foundation until the whole structure collapses. In the process of gaining their rightful place, neither side can afford to be guilty of more wrongful acts. Neither side must allow itself to seek to satisfy its thirst for its dreams by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

Both sides must forever conduct this struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. Both sides must not allow our needs and demands to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvellous militancy of both sides must not lead us to distrust of the Other for many of those we currently call 'enemy' know that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom and their assurance of safety guarantees our safety.

We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march forward to a better world for all. We cannot turn back; we cannot repair the past; we cannot revive the

dead. We will not be satisfied as long as one Palestinian suffers, as long as one Israeli suffers. We will not be satisfied as long as one Palestinian dies, as long as one Israeli dies. We will not be satisfied as long as one Palestinian mother grieves, as long as one Israeli mother grieves. No! we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Palestinians and Israelis who have continued to work together in the midst of bitter conflict know that somehow this human tragedy can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. In spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, we still have a dream...it is a dream deeply rooted in our love for all humanity and our abiding belief in the essential good of all people.

We have a dream that, one day, these two peoples of this holy land will rise up and live out the true meaning of peace.

We have a dream that no more Israeli children and Palestinian children will die for a piece of land.

We have a dream that no Israeli or Palestinian will live afraid for their life or be deprived of their human dignity.

We have a dream that no more Israeli or Palestinian mothers, fathers, lovers, friends will grieve for loved ones dead from an act of vengeance.

We have a dream that all Palestinians and all Israelis will live in peace and harmony and will value, honour and respect the lives of one another as they do their own.

We have a dream that Jerusalem, Al Quds, the city of peace for Christians, Muslims and Jews, will finally have peace.

We have a dream that both these children of God will find safety, dignity, prosperity, a sense of belonging, completeness, justice and freedom.

We have a dream.

We have a dream and our dream is beautiful.

When we let freedom and justice ring, when we let it ring from every village and town, from every sector and nation, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Palestinian and Israeli, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others, lighter skinned and darker skinned will be able to hold hands, look each other in the eye and see in each other a partner, a friend, a beloved one joined with our self on the journey of life. And then we will all sing together: 'Peace at last! Peace at last! We all have Peace at last!'

Sylvia Laale

Jewish and Arab Women for Peace in the Middle East

For info, contact Tyseer Abounasr 613 291 3407 or Alma Norman 613 234 2581