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ARTISTS AS PEACEMAKERS

Dr Patricia Lewis, Director, UNIDIR
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On 11 July 2006, UNIDIR Director Patricia Lewis and Grammy Award recipient Herbie Hancock addressed Montreux Jazz Festival workshop entitled “Artists as Peacemakers”, organized by the International Committee of Artists for Peace.

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake¹*

In the space of 10 minutes is it possible to talk of art, of peace, of all that is most dear to our hearts?

In the space of 10 minutes it is impossible *not* to speak of that we hold most dear.

In the space of Montreux how can we not discuss peace? For it is here all around us through music, through art, through your hearts, your souls.

As artists, as humans, we create.

Creation is the gift of the Universe — it is for creation, for art, that we were all created. And yet, the greatest inequality in the Universe is that between creation and destruction.

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali, Where the mind is without fear.

The effort, the energy, that is put into creation is enormous. Think how long it takes to create a human being, a child, an adult. It has taken 29 years thus far to make my son who he is, my daughter has 14 years of creation to date and yet each of them could be destroyed in a matter of seconds by a bullet, a car or a nuclear bomb. How many children were killed today, just so quickly?

This building, how fast it could come tumbling down thanks to, say, an earthquake. Look at the Twin Towers of New York, the villages along the shores of Sri Lanka, the Bangladesh delta so precarious each time it floods, the Belfast Opera House, twice destroyed by bombs, twice restored with creative defiance.

It takes us so long in our labour of love to create beauty, it takes hatred so little time to destroy. So as artists, as humans with humanity in all its grace, we must be on a path of constant vigilance to nurture creation and prevent its destruction.

How can we do this?

How can art do this?

In the prestigious BBC Reith Lectures this year, Daniel Barenboim spoke of the magic of music, meeting in music and the power of music. He said

"... [W]hen you play music, ... you have to do two very important things and do them simultaneously. You have to be able to express yourself, ... but at the same time it is imperative that you listen to the other. ... the art of playing music is the art of simultaneous playing and listening."

"... [M]usic becomes the link, it is the language of the continuous dialogue. ... Music is the common framework, ... abstract language of harmony. ... nothing in music is independent. It requires a perfect balance between head, heart and stomach... . [W]hen emotion and intellect are in tune, it is easier also for human beings and for nations to look outward as well as inward. And therefore through music we can see an alternative social model, a kind of practical Utopia, from which we might learn about expressing ourselves freely and hearing one another. Music ... is not an expression of what life is, but an expression of what life could be, or what it could become."

"... Even the most powerful chord has to allow the inner voices to be heard, otherwise it has no tension, only brutal aggressive power. You must hear the opposition, the notes that oppose the main idea. ... Even at the moment when all the elements are unified, when everything comes together in a single chord, you still hear all the different voices."

"Let us consider for a moment the example of playing in an orchestra. When very powerful instruments, ... — trumpet and trombone — play in a chord where the whole orchestra is playing they have to play in such a way that they give a full sense of power, but that they allow the other instruments, who are less powerful, to be heard at the same time. Otherwise they cover them up, and then the sound has no strength, only power. See the difference? Therefore when you play in an orchestra everybody is constantly aware of everybody else."

“In my view this is a model for society. Leadership throughout history, and it is probably inherent in the human nature, has been based on the effect it can produce because of the weakness of the people, not because of their strength. How wonderful the world would be if it were ruled by people who understood this lesson from music, and understood the importance of combining transparency, power and strength.”²

What a vision. But why is it only a vision? How impoverished are we that we see power as power over others? That we see strength as the exploitation of others’ weaknesses? And that transparency is little more than a closed book?

Let us take the horror of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Along with thirteen others, I have just completed two years of work as a Commissioner on the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by Hans Blix. In our report we state that:

“Nuclear, biological and chemical arms are the most inhumane of all weapons. Designed to terrify as well as destroy, they can, in the hands of either states or non-state actors, cause destruction on a vastly greater scale than any conventional weapons, and their impact is far more indiscriminate and long-lasting.”

“Nuclear weapons must never again be used — by states or by terrorists — and the only way to be sure of that is to get rid of them before someone, somewhere is tempted to use them. Today, we are in a dangerous situation. There has been a third wave of nuclear proliferation. Proliferation has not been halted and serious steps to outlaw nuclear weapons have not been taken. Nuclear weapons are remnants of the Cold War. It is time to outlaw them.”³

Weapons of mass destruction have been used throughout the last century. They are the very worst of inhumane weapons. These are weapons that cause massive casualties in a single attack. Their effects last in the environment for decades or longer and they may cause health effects in subsequent generations.

Their horrific effects are indiscriminate. Think of the gassing of soldiers in the trenches in the First World War, the use of gas in the Nazi death camps in the Second World War, or the use of different gas cocktails to destroy Iraqi Kurdish populations over a month-long attack in 1988 and that is still having health effects on the people exposed and their children.

Remember too the children of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The long-term suffering of the *Hibakusha*. Pause for a moment to consider the plight of the Marshall Islanders who were subject to twelve years of nuclear weapons tests, the total yield of which was equivalent to 1.6 Hiroshimas every day over those twelve years. The Marshall Islanders

² In the Beginning was Sound, Daniel Barenboim BBC Reith Lectures 2006, www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2006/index.shtml

³ *Weapons of Terror*, the Report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, June 2006, www.wmdcommission.org

are not alone in suffering long-term health problems and forced migration due to the development of nuclear weapons. The Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk, the Aboriginals of Australia and all the children around the world of the 1950s whose age and birth place can be told simply by measuring the amount of strontium-90 in their teeth.

Outlawing nuclear weapons is not a utopian goal. It wasn't considered utopian to outlaw chemical and biological weapons. Rather than being unrealistic to pursue a world without nuclear weapons, I have come to realise that it is unrealistic to imagine that we can continue retaining nuclear weapons, developing them and encouraging their proliferation, without larger numbers of states wanting them and there being a nuclear war at some point in the future.

This is an urgent matter, and it requires our attention. It requires our creativity and it requires all of us in this room, in this festival, city, planet, to work towards a common vision of a world of peace, where nuclear weapons have no place.

Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons symbolise so much of what is wrong with our world. Created by some of the world's finest scientists and engineers, used in all their horror through out the last one hundred years. So shocking are these weapons that their use has become unthinkable. Or has it? Tens of thousands of nuclear weapons still exist. New biological weapons are on the near horizon and chemical weapons have been used in conflict in very recent history. We still prepare night and day for the eventual use of WMD — either by terrorists or by governments — or both. Such weapons are so horrific in their nature that they have no place in a civilised world. The fact that we as a species have developed them, have used them and will undoubtedly use them again, tells us more than we want to know about ourselves.

Yet know, we must. To quote Martin Buber:⁴

“There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget ... Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colours and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars — all this in its entirety.”

To deal with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, we must deal with ourselves, we must know ourselves, all of it, each discord, each harmony. This is where art has its place in peace. It is the art of the peace in you.

“The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. ... Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter. The Art of Peace is not easy. It is a fight to the finish, the slaying of evil desires and all falsehood within.”⁵

⁴ Martin Buber, I and Thou, Free Press edition, 1971

⁵ Aikido — the Art of Peace – Morihei Ueshiba, The Art of Peace translated by John Stevens, www-cse.ucsd.edu/users/paloma/Aikido/artpeace.html