

## **AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE AWARD SPEECH - UPF**

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THANK YOU KINDLY JOHN AND TO THE UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION FOR THIS NOBLE PEACE AWARD. I AM TRULY HONOURED AND PRIVILEGED.

HONESTLY I COULD NOT HAVE WISHED FOR A MORE SUITABLY TITLED AWARD IN THE CONTEXT OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE EVENTS AND IN THE CONTEXT OF MY PERSONAL LIFE JOURNEY AND CONTRIBUTIONS MADE OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS. THESE CONTRIBUTIONS WERE MADE ACROSS BOTH COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS PLATFORMS TO PROMOTE PEACE, UNDERSTANDING, EDUCATION, AND ASSIMILATION TO PREDOMINATELY ENHANCE AUSTRALIAN ARABIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS. ALSO I CHERISH THE WORD PEACE BECAUSE BELIEVE ME MY DEAR

FRIENDS I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE AS A CHILD TO LIVE IN A STATE OF A MONSTER WAR (PAUSE)... YES, IT WAS THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR WHICH STARTED BACK IN 1975.

TODAY I HAVE AN EXCLUSIVE TRUE STORY TO SHARE WITH YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME. A PERSONAL TRAGIC STORY TO HIGHLIGHT THE INSANITY AND EMOTIONAL PAIN OF WAR WHICH HAS EVER LASTING HUMAN CONSEQUENCES.

ONE MORNING IN EARLY 1976 IN THE INNER WORKING CLASS SUBURBS OF WEST BEIRUT, LEBANON. I WAS AT HOME WHEN A LOUD MORTAR SHELL BLAST ROCKED THE NEIGHBORHOOD. I FROZE FOR A LITTLE WHILE, WAITED A LITTLE AND THEN SNUCK OUT OF THE HOUSE RUNNING TOWARDS THE DIRECTION OF THE BLAST FEARING MY FRIENDS WHO I REGULARLY PLAY MARBLES WITH MAYBE EFFECTED.

AS I WAS RUNNING UP THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OUTDOOR STAIRS, I WAS CONFRONTED WITH THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE SHOCKING SCENE. WHAT I SAW WAS PIECES OF HUMAN BRAINS WITH HAIR LOCKS ATTACHED SCATTERED ALL OVER THE STAIRS, THE SMELL OF DEAD FLESH AND BLOOD WAS OVERWHELMING. STUNNED, I STARTED RUNNING TOWARDS MY FRIENDS HOUSE NEARBY AND WHEN I APPROACHED THEIR FRONT DOOR THERE WERE PEOPLE GATHERED AROUND AND AS I ENTERED... MY WORST THOUGHTS AND FEARS WERE REALISED.

THERE WAS THE MOTHER OF MY TWO FRIENDS SOBBING AND WAILING HYSTERICALLY AND UNCONTROLLABLY "MY BOYS ARE GONE" SHE CRIED... "THEIR DISHES ARE STILL IN THE SINK.. I HAVEN'T WASHED THEM YET". SHE CRIED.... I WILL NEVER FORGET THOSE WORDS.

**MY DEAR FRIENDS (THE AUDIENCE) I ASK YOU IN HINDSIGHT:**

- ) HOW DOES A TEN YEAR OLD CONSOLE A GRIEVING MOTHER WHO HAD HER INNOCENT CHILDREN INDISCRIMINATELY BLASTED SENSELESSLY TO DEATH?
- ) HOW DOES A TEN YEAR OLD COMFORT HIS FRIENDS MOTHER FOR THE DEEPLY TRAGIC SWIFT DEATHS OF HER TWO SONS?
- ) HOW DOES A TEN YEAR OLD COMPENSATE HIS FRIEND'S MOTHER FOR SUCH A MONSTROUS CRIMINAL ACT?
- ) AND WHAT IMPACT DID THAT EVENT ON THAT DAY, THAT EXPERIENCE, HAVE ON ME PERSONALLY... HOW DID IT REGISTER IN MY CONSCIOUS, SUBCONSCIOUS AND DEEP IN MY SOUL??

THERE WAS NO CRIME SCENE SETUP, NO FORENSICS, NO INVESTIGATION, NO PHOTOS TAKEN AND NO CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OR COMPENSATION. REALLY SAD! IT WAS JUST ANOTHER BLAST WITH DEAD AND INJURED CASUALTIES AND THAT'S IT.

THIS WAS THE NATURE OF THE BRUTAL SECTARIAN TERROR HAUNTING THE SUBURBS OF BEIRUT AND LEBANON FOR 15 YEARS TO COME. I SPENT SO MANY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS LISTENING TO FALLING SHELLS AND ROCKETS, MACHINE GUNS FIRE AND SCREAMING STREET FIGHTERS FEARING THAT THEY ARE GOING TO BURST THROUGH OUR FRONT DOOR AND SHOOT US. MANY NIGHTS WERE SPENT IN OUR BUILDING UNDERGROUND SHELTER.

JUST 30 MINUTES WALK FROM WHERE I LIVED, THERE WAS DOWNTOWN BEIRUT WHICH SAW ONE OF THE MOST FEROCIOUS INSANE KILLINGS AND DESTRUCTION A CITY COULD ENDURE. MANY ATROCITIES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY TOOK PLACE HERE AND THERE WAS HARDLY A BUILDING LEFT STANDING. IT BECAME THE BATTLE GROUND FOR MANY FACTIONS AND MILITIAS WITH HEAVY MACHINE GUNS AND MORTAR FIRE EXCHANGES.

IN ADDITION, PEOPLE WERE ROUNDED UP FROM THEIR WORK PLACE AND CITY OFFICES, LOADED ONTO TRUCKS AND DRIVEN TO THE PORT OF BEIRUT TO BE SLAUGHTERED INTO THE WATER, PEOPLE WERE LINED UP AND EXECUTED BY MACHINE GUNS FOR SECTERIAN REASONS, HANGED FROM BRIDGES, THROWN FROM BUILDING'S ROOF TOPS, DRAGGED ALIVE BY ROPE BEHIND CARS UNTIL DEATH, AND THERE WERE THE DEADLY ACCURATE SNIPERS THAT TERRIFIED DOWNTOWN AND THE SUBURBS OF BEIRUT. AS A TEN YEAR OLD I SAW, HEARD AND SMELLED THE NIGHTMARE OF WAR TOTALLY UNCENSORED AND OUT IN THE OPEN. NOTHING WAS OFF LIMIT.

WIND BACK THE CLOCK FEW MONTHS EARLIER AND BEIRUT WAS THE TOURIST ATTRACTION OF THE WORLD AS IT BECAME BETTER KNOWN "THE PARIS OF THE MIDDLE EAST". SO WHAT HAPPENED?

WARS MY DEAR FRIENDS SUCH AS THE CIVIL WAR OF LEBANON ARE REALLY HORRIBLE AND LEAVE LASTING SCARS. THERE IS THE DEAD, THE INJURED, THE DESTRUCTION AND GENERATIONS LIVING WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL INJURIES WITH INCALCULABLE CONSEQUENCES ON THEIR DAILY LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS. UNFORTUNATELY SIMILAR WARS CONTINUE TO OCCUR AROUND THE WORLD AS WE SPEAK.

I TRULY BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN NOT WIN OR STOP A MONSTROUS WAR BY BECOMING A BIGGER MONSTER. BUT INDEED YOU CAN BY REVERSING THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF WAR AND SEWING THE SEEDS OF TRUE LOVE AND TRUST, CONNECTIVITY, ENGAGEMENT, DIALOGUE, MODERATION AND LAST AND NOT LEAST EDUCATION. WE GENUINELY NEED TO GET TO KNOW AND RESPECT EACH OTHER MUCH MORE BY OPENING OUR HEARTS, MINDS AND INDEED OUR HOMES. WE NEED TO GET OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE, OVERCOME OUR FEARS AND OLD BELIEFS AND ENGAGE FOR A BETTER PEACEFUL JUST WORLD.

WE ARE MUCH MORE INTELLIGENT NOW THEN WE HAVE EVER BEEN AND IT IS COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE AND UNAFFORDABLE TO STILL SEE NATIONS IN STATE OF ENDLESS WAR LIKE THE CIVIL WAR OF LEBANON. AS ONE GLOBAL HUMAN FAMILY, TO WATCH SUCH KILLINGS AND DESTRUCTION IS NOTHING SHORT OF OUR OWN SELF MUTILATION. THE RESOURCES SPENT ON RAGING WARS CAN BE MUCH BETTER ALLOCATED TO ADDRESSING CONSTRUCTIVE EFFORTS AROUND THE WORLD.

TECHNOLOGY CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING US CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER AROUND THE GLOBE, SHARING KNOWLEDGE, LANGUAGES, RELIGIONS, VALUES, CULTURES AND COMMERCE. PERHAPS WE CAN PUT SYSTEMS, MODELS AND INDICATORS IN PLACE TO MAKE SURE WE ARE ENGAGING PEACEFULLY AND ADEQUATELY AND WARN US LIKE AN ONCOMING TSUNAMI OF EMINENT DANGERS OF AN ONCOMING CONFLICT.

IN CONCLUSION, THERE IS SO MUCH WORK TO BE DONE INCLUDING AMONGST OTHER THINGS ADDRESSING THE ONGOING CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD, ASSIMILATION, TERRORISM, REFUGEES, DRUGS AND GUNS VIOLENCE AND EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES IN GENERAL.

THANK YOU AGAIN TO THE UPF FOR THIS NOBLE AWARD AND TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO ARE HERE TODAY FOR THEIR WONDERFUL SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING OVER THE YEARS. LAST BUT DEFINITELY NOT LEAST THANK YOU AUSTRALIA FOR PROVIDING ME WITH SO MUCH PEACE AND PROSPERITY SINCE MY FIRST DAY OF ARRIVAL IN DECEMBER 1976, I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL. LET US PRAY AND WORK TOGETHER FOR LASTING GLOBAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY FOR THE SAKE OF OUR PRECIOUS PLANET AND CHILDREN.