

***Jorge Sampaio***

Former President of the Portuguese Republic  
Former UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations  
Former UN Special Envoy to Stop Tuberculosis

UN NELSON ROLIHLEHLA MANDELA PRIZE AWARD CEREMONY

United Nations Headquarters  
Trustship Council Chamber  
New York, 24 July 2015

Mr. Kutesa, President of the General Assembly,

Dr. Helena Ndume, honoured laureate

Ms. Susana Malcorra, Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of the Secretary General

Distinguished Members of the Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize Selection Committee,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- No words can begin to express my heartfelt thanks for this high honour.
  
- However I feel this award was not given to me as a man but to the work that I and so many others have accomplished together throughout our lives.
  
- Indeed I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Helena Ndume, a fellow laureate, on her receipt of this honour.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- This award is only mine in trust. This is why I should like to stand up and speak out for all the people I have met around the world with whom I had the privilege of working – individuals from all walks of life as well as from organizations in many fields, women and men whose hard, sometimes harsh, work, dedication to their jobs and sense of responsibility for their fellow citizens and the common good make them the true nominees of this Award and Nelson Mandela's companions on the long walk to freedom and justice.
  
- Let me use this opportunity to pay tribute to millions of ordinary, nameless people across the globe who never gave up their dreams and hopes, never asked what they could get, never surrendered, but rose up against all odds.

- I am thinking in particular of the countless volunteer community health workers whom I have met in my field missions as the UN Envoy to Stop Tuberculosis, one of the world's top infectious killers. They are women and men, often illiterate, who provide primary health care services in the many under-served areas – urban slums, remote rural areas, refugee camps, areas that are in conflict or post-conflict – that exist in old and new bottom billion countries, home to the most deprived populations. They are those who visit TB and often simultaneously also HIV patients to care for them through their long treatment, making sure that they take pills on time, that they do not give up their medication at the first – deceptive – signs of recovery, that TB symptoms are not ignored and an early diagnosis is made.
  
- I am also thinking of all grass roots movements, civil society organizations throughout the world at global, regional and country levels, including NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations, indigenous peoples' movements, foundations, think tanks, universities, activists and many others that together are increasingly influential actors and powerful change makers.
  
- As the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, I was privileged to get along with a good number of admirable people fully engaged in and committed to building inclusive, tolerant and pluralistic societies. Cultivating the values of tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view, developing citizens' skills to work with one another to solve common problems are key conditions of democratic life and peaceful societies.
  
- Today we are facing troubled and dark times. Major achievements of humankind seem at risk. Our joint journey to universal recognition and the realization of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world seems threatened.

- This is a time when we see such great discontent and discredit over politics and democracy looming large in many developed countries, namely in Europe; when in many other societies change seems blocked, reforms on hold and new, more subtle forms of authoritarianism are emerging; when new destructive terror wars grow more violent and divisive by the day with rising retaliatory violence, sectarian killings and creeping fundamentalism, such as in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, to name just a few; when terrorist threats and terrorist attacks are killing people anywhere at any time, beyond any limitation to brutality or to group for which immunity may be claimed; when old protracted conflicts resemble each day an entrenched, pervasive deadlock with no other tangible result than an ingrained hatred of any compromise for a solution as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; when, in spite of all progress made in realizing basic human rights as spelled out in the MDG Agenda, millions of people are still living below the poverty line; when large numbers of refugees, displaced populations and migrants are facing all kinds of atrocities – abductions, rape, execution-style killings, torture, ethnic cleansings.
  
- As we are witnessing all these alarming and tragic developments, we have to recognize that we, our governments and the international community, have failed to act properly, to step up, to prevent and lead the way forward to protect those in greatest need.
  
- It does not have to be this way. As Nelson Mandela reminds us, “the greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall”. It is our collective obligation to stand firm and provide a shield for the defenceless. We have to stand up for human rights and for those caught up in the suffering of war zones, those at risk, those in vulnerable situations. There is no other option but to have the United Nations leading the way.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- All human beings need role models, especially when they are still young, where orientation is greatly needed. “So let me use this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women around the globe”, as once a writer put it. Let me urge them to adopt Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as their inspirational figure in life and make his legacy go viral.
  
- Once upon a time, when a few (long...) decades ago I was a university student in my country, Portugal, we were living in fear, under suffocating repressive control and a repressive political regime. We were a backward, undeveloped society because of the colonial wars, brain-drain and huge migration out-flows. At that time, Portugal was isolated, diplomatically banned from European organizations and other democratic forums.
  
- Yet, in 1974 we had our democratic revolution and major changes were introduced bringing hope and a brighter future to the Portuguese people.
  
- Forgive me for this more personal, national evocation. But I should like to dedicate this acclaim to my country too as well as to my fellow citizens. The Portuguese are brave, generous, outgoing resilient people. They are tolerant, open-minded and cooperative. I have always tirelessly repeated that the best asset we have in our country is our people, men and women of hope, forgiveness and endurance.
  
- I am proud that half of the first UN Nelson Rohilila Mandela Prize speaks Portuguese. In doing so, it is not only Portugal that echoes in it, but also the many voices of the Portuguese language that resonates across the world making it audible in Brazil, Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, S. Tomé e Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau and East Timor. Let me pay tribute to all members of our big Portuguese-speaking family here today and praise our unity in diversity.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As Nelson Mandela's words and life remind us, "no one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background or religion. People learn to hate, and if they learn to hate they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite".
  
- I really do believe that what our 21<sup>st</sup> century is missing is this vision, this optimism about humankind, grounded in the extraordinary power of the soul that makes men and women capable of compassion, hope, resilience, pride and sacrifice. This is what we need to do to build hope in the future - to infuse public life and international relations with a bit of magic, that which comes out from our common humanity.
  
- I wish we could all together say here today with Nelson Mandela: "I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter. I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb".
  
- Many thanks