

Presentation at Convocation  
Bethel College, North Newton Kansas  
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When Dale Schrag first contacted me about the possibility of speaking at a Bethel Convocation, it was the first time I had been in direct touch with him for about 35 years or so. And the last time was when he was a counselor at summer camp at Camp Mennoscah. Actually he and his cousin Danny were both counselors. And I'm sure you know that counselors, who were usually almost finished with high school or were in college, were supposed to guide and supervise campers and keep them from deviating too much from the camp rules. Well, one of the activities that this particular counselor not only supervised, but actually initiated, was a confrontation—not a minor skirmish, but a real battle, between campers in different cabins. And this at a Mennonite camp!

Early one morning we got up, gathered on the banks of the Ninnescah River and the battle began. In fact, Dale memorialized, maybe even glorified, this particular battle in a poem he wrote later which began with the words: "At 6 am the warriors arose. In anticipation of heavy blows." We didn't fight with fists or sticks, but with hedge balls. Here in KS you know what these are. And some were huge hedge balls. And if you happened to hit your target with one of those projectiles, or if you happened to be hit by one, well, the blow could knock you out. I remember that a number of heavy blows were exchanged that morning leaving some of the campers having to nurse their bruises and wounds later that day. I don't think that Dale himself was hit with a hedge ball. But if anyone would have suggested then that this orchestrator of battles—perhaps the only Mennonite battle strategist-- would one day become the Director of Church Relations here at Bethel, well we would have been sure that that person had been walloped with one of those hedge balls and that it bruised not only his body, but also his mind. I guess it goes to show that, if Dale can hold that position after such adventures in his youth, who knows what lies ahead for any of you?

But the battle I'm here to talk about this morning is a different kind of a struggle. It's about doing our part to create a world in which every human being on earth is—in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights--born free and equal in dignity and rights. That is what the governments of the world pledged to create following the holocaust and the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW, nearly 60 years ago. And for most of the last twenty years plus that I have worked in the human rights field, there was a sense in Amnesty and other human rights groups that some of the most important human rights battles were being effectively fought and that progress was being made.

Over the past 50 years we have seen an impressive series of human rights treaties and agreements come into force, covering most critical areas of human rights--ICCPR, ICESCR, on Torture, children, landmines, and most recently, the ICC, to name just a few. We've seen the growth of human rights machinery at the UN, an explosion of human rights groups in every corner of the world, and an increasingly active and empowered civil society--international, regional, national and local. There is good human rights information easily available. There is a much greater recognition and awareness of human rights as rights, in virtually every part of the world. Human rights have come to play an important role in world affairs. And while there is still a long way to go, since Sept 11, more and more people are beginning—just beginning--to understand the link between respect for human rights and real security; between human rights and human development.

Historically the US has often played a critical part in these developments. And to many peoples around the world it has often—though with too many notable exceptions-- been seen as an advocate for human rights and civil liberties over much of the last 50 years—at least in word, if not always in deed. These ideals had resonance. They inspired people everywhere.

But no longer. Since Sept 11, we have seen a fundamental, even historic shift in what the US stands for when it comes to human rights. Just as with the backsliding on the environment, its long valued commitment to human rights and freedom has been and still is being downgraded and degraded. In many ways the US has already lost the moral high ground in the global human rights debate. National security is pitted against human rights. We are told we have to choose between human rights and our security. In too many respects, the war on terror is becoming a war on freedom.

Of course attacks such as those in NY and Washington on Sept 11, or the ones in Jerusalem last week or in Irbil in N. Iraq a few days ago—attacks like these are human rights crimes—crimes against humanity. Let me also be crystal clear. There can never be any justification for acts of terror against civilian populations. All of us must reject categorically the indiscriminate targeting of civilians to further political aims. Persons or groups who do this must be held accountable and brought to justice. In so doing, we have to take great care not to create more innocent victims or flush hr down the drain. Yet that seems to be exactly what is happening. And it will be counterproductive to winning this battle.

Around the world the last two yrs, from Australia to Zimbabwe, using new laws and old-fashioned brute force, governments are sacrificing human rights on the altar of antiterrorism. This ranges from indefinite detention without trial in Britain, to the increased use of military courts in Egypt, to mandatory death sentences for convicted terrorists in Uganda. Leaders around the world—dictators and democrats alike—are telling their citizens that they have to choose between security and freedom. But what we need to understand is that the real choice is between a world in which human rights are better and universally respected and one in which no one is safe.

Neither does a respectable human rights record seem to be any issue at all when it comes to building a coalition for the war on terror. Indeed the not so subtle trade off seems to be that, if you join this war, we'll keep quiet about your abuses. Let your military run rampant. Go ahead, smash your political opposition. Trample an ethnic minority. Crush the will of a people to determine their future, even individuals whose advocacy is strictly nonviolent. Do it in the name of fighting terror and you won't hear a word from us about it--Russia in Chechnya (or Chechens in Moscow), China in Xinjiang, Uzbekistan, Israel in the Occupied Territories. You can even be authoritarian and run a repressive regime, (even sell nuclear secrets) but if you are with us in the war on terror, those things won't bother us much. Just look at Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia.

What we should be aware of is that this strategy to combat terror may well be sowing the seeds of the next horrific attacks. The measures being taken at this very moment may be contributing to the hopelessness and despair of untold numbers, despair which can then be exploited, which then explodes.

Here in the US, we are in retreat on our historical commitment to civil and human rights, also on the domestic front. Over the past year or two, the pattern of walking away from international treaties, whether Kyoto, the ICC, landmines, the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty, or the Torture Protocol conveys that we are a law unto ourselves: that the rules that apply to others don't apply to us.

Consider for example that the US has created, in effect, a human rights free zone in Guantanamo, where today about 660 prisoners languish in legal limbo, many for more than two years now. They've been captured (most of them) in the Afghanistan war yet they've not been accorded POW status and Bush says the Geneva Conventions don't apply. Neither have they been charged with any criminal offence. And since the US courts have so far said that US law doesn't apply in Guantanamo they may be held w/o charge, w/o trial indefinitely. Gone are the basic human rights protections. Gone is the presumption of innocence. The US political leadership has in effect pronounced them guilty. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was reported saying that most wouldn't be released even if they were tried and found innocent. Finally, three children, 13-15 yrs old, were released last week, but other children still remain imprisoned there. Although some conditions have improved, dozens of detainees have attempted suicide--not surprising, perhaps, in light of the hopelessness they experience daily. Of all the measures taken by our govt in response to 9-11, none has damaged the country's reputation abroad more than the decision to hold hundreds of people as unlawful enemy combatants outside the protection of domestic law or the Geneva conventions. Guantanamo Bay is scandalous. This situation may be the most serious breach of the rule of law since the internment of more than 120,000 Japanese and J-A's during the second WW.

Or take the US Patriot Act, the "anti-terrorist" legislation, which passed overwhelmingly shortly after the attacks. Only one senator voted against it. This legislation has been described as the most radical assault on the US Constitution in decades, legislation which, if the AG considers them a threat, allows for indefinite detention w/o trial for non US citizens (that covers about 20m people now); which allows for wire tapping of your phone or internet communications, or a search of your house without your knowledge. The government can now require your internet service provider or libraries to turn over their records on you. And if the librarian at Bethel makes a request public or tells you you're a target, that librarian can be arrested. All this was legislated in our name almost with hardly a whimper of protest. And now there is the draft Patriot Act II, which proposes to make permanent some of those measures and expand others (such as secret searches or wiretaps). No, there is not much patriotic about the US Patriot Act. No wonder hundreds of communities—large and small—all across the country--have passed resolutions rejecting the Patriot Act.

And after 9/11, the US swept up over 1,200 individuals, mostly of Middle Eastern or South Asian background, on charges of minor immigration offences, like overstaying a visa. None were suspected of involvement in the Sept 11 attacks. These detentions were shrouded in secrecy. No names. No places of detention. Many had no access to legal counsel for months; some were held in solitary confinement for months. Conditions were often harsh and, even according to government investigations, some were badly beaten. Almost all have now finally been released or deported (after secret deportation hearings). And about two weeks ago the Supreme Court gave this secrecy their blessing, refusing to hear a lawsuit Amnesty and other groups had brought. Such secrecy is the hallmark of an autocratic or authoritarian regime, not one of a leading democracy.

Again, let me be clear. Of course, governments have to take steps to protect their citizens, and have an obligation to do that. But do it in a way which respects basic human rights. We can have both human rights and human security. But we cannot and will not have security without human rights.

The war in Iraq did not strengthen that security, the President's assertions notwithstanding. By almost any measure, it did the opposite. While the war did get rid of

one of the most abusive governments in the world, the reasons for going to war had almost nothing to do with human rights, which is mostly the justification now. You all know very well that the threats Iraq posed which Bush outlined in his state of the union speech a year ago—these threats were vastly overstated and some of the information was a lie, pure and simple. Yet he took the country to war and degraded the nation in the eyes of the world, not to mention sacrificed the lives of hundreds of Americans and 100s of Iraqis.

It is astounding and sad that just two years after the entire world stood with the US after the 9/11 attacks, polls show that today most people in the world consider the US Pres to be the greatest threat to world peace and have an unfavorable, if not downright hostile and angry, view of the country. And set aside the rest of the world for a moment, and take just Iraq. While few Iraqis want Saddam Hussein (SH) back, what kind of liberator of people is George Bush when he can not even let the Iraqis know—the very people he is supposed to have liberated—that he has been to their country until after he has departed it. Think of the great welcomes true liberators have received from liberated peoples in recent history—the 100s of thousands celebrating in the streets in the former SU, in Romania, Czechoslovakia... And then think of Pres. Bush as liberator—He did not dare even to meet the people he's supposed to have liberated, or to set foot in the streets of their capital. That's a strange liberation, indeed.

And is it surprising he was not safe and not greeted as a hero? Almost a year after the war in Iraq, it is estimated that 16,000 Iraqis have died, about 10k of them civilians, according to some sources. Before the war about 92% of Iraqis in urban areas had access to clean drinking water; today that figure is 60%—More than 33% fewer. Before the war about 55% of the Iraqi workforce was unemployed. Today some sources put that figure at 80%. Over 10,000 Iraqis are languishing in prisons run by the occupation forces and many families don't know where they are held or why. Security in parts of the country remains elusive as attacks still average nearly 20/day in Baghdad alone. And again, as you well know, the Bush Administration is shifting its rationale for going to war from WMD to human rights violations, a topic Dale asked me to elaborate on.

For those of us in Amnesty, we were only too familiar that the people of Iraq suffered systematic and widespread abuses for decades. Mass killings, systematic use of torture, political imprisonment, forced removal from communities—all this was commonplace and used by SH's Gov't to wipe out any and all opposition. Even tho we weren't allowed into Iraq the last 20 years, detailed info reached us constantly about what was going on. Sometimes it was too unbelievable to be believed, and yet these reports only scratched the surface.

Over the years, tens, even hundreds of thousands of people were killed by Iraq's security forces, lined up and shot in their villages, poisoned with chemical weapons and executed in prisons. Many were targeted simply for belonging to a community seen as opposed to the govt. The killing of 5000 men, women and children by chemical weapons in the Kurdish town of Halabja in March 1988 was just one example of mass extermination, made notorious only because journalists could reach the border town from Iran. But there were other methods: mass executions by firing squads, burning people alive, drowning in rivers, bleeding prisoners to death and targeted assassinations. One novel method we documented was calling prisoners and telling them they were to be released, and given a glass of yogurt or orange juice to drink before being let go. But the drink was laced with rat poison, and a day or two after release, prisoners would die. Many thousands disappeared, and most of their relatives are still waiting to find out what happened to their loved ones. Other families, notified that their relative had been executed, were then ordered to pay a fee to cover state expenses including the cost of the bullet used in the execution, in order to have the body returned for burial. No money, no body.

The cruelty continued unabated during the 1991 uprising following the first Gulf War. Victims were arrested, doused with gasoline and burned alive. Some were tied to tanks and dragged to their deaths. Others were bound, blindfolded and shot at close range in front of their families who were terrified. Women were forced to walk in front of tanks as human shields to protect the troops. People were dropped from aircraft. Some bodies had been mutilated with the tongue, ears or hands severed before execution. These abuses led to the massive refugee flows after the first Gulf War, which some of you may remember seeing.

Torture was systemically used against political detainees and their numbers included almost anyone: security officers suspected of opposition, Shia and Kurdish political activists, and relatives of suspected opponents. Methods included gouging out of eyes, severe beatings and electric shocks. Government decrees prescribed judicial punishments—orders of the court—amputation of hand and foot, branding of the forehead and cutting off of the ears for various criminal offences. Army deserters were particularly targeted and many suffered ear amputation. At Amnesty hundreds of reports like these flowed into our offices every year. And while we were not allowed into Iraq during this period, we finally established a presence there last April, and I was able to see first hand—scenes I'll never be able to forget—some of the mass graves, the torture chambers, the detailed files kept by the secret police, and to speak with survivors.

Despite these horrors, the uncomfortable truth is that the world's governments didn't care much. They seemed oblivious to the plight of Iraq's people. You'd never guess from what we hear now, but twenty years ago, Iraq was an ally of the US. Ironically, Donald Rumsfeld himself was charged first by Reagan, then Bush to strengthen ties between the US and Iraq. And these relations not only continued, but actually intensified throughout the 1980s. During a period when, according to newly declassified government documents, SH was using chemical weapons "almost daily." Battle planning assistance and other military and intelligence support was also supplied at that very time during the Iran-Iraq war.

And incredibly, after Iraq used chemical weapons against the Kurds in Halabja, the relationship grew even closer. Before that attack, the US was providing Iraq about \$500m in agricultural credits; the following year that amount doubled to \$1b. In light of these facts, the BA's current justification that it invaded to bring down SH's repressive government rings hollow. No question Hussein was a tyrant, but if ever there would have been a time when intervention was justified, it would have been in the late 1980s/early 90s when the abuses were at their worst. Instead though, our relationship with Iraq was strengthened.

While the war brought an end to SH's abuses, now the occupying forces are responsible for abuses of their own. Though not on the scale as SH's, they are nonetheless serious and increasingly widespread, and include mass detention, use of excessive force, and ill-treatment of suspects. And the more widespread the violations, the more widespread the resistance is likely to become.

The failure of American leadership on human rights comes at a time when, we see, unfortunately, more need for it than ever before. There are continued grave abuses of human rights in every corner of the world. One in three member states of the UN hold prisoners of conscience; nearly 2/3rds have tortured or ill-treated prisoners in the last year. People still disappear in dozens of countries and are executed without any judicial process in scores more. As armed conflict has spread, the victims are overwhelmingly civilian, and mostly women and children, not only in Iraq, but everywhere. Rape is often

used as a weapon of war. So is food. With 1 billion people chronically hungry, hunger has caused more death in the past two years than were killed in the two world wars together.

Many of you are familiar with the figures. At least 1.3b people (about 1 in every 5 people) struggle to survive on less than \$1/day. 45% of the world's people, nearly half, try to exist on \$2/day. Today 40,000 children will die of malnutrition and preventable diseases—like yesterday and like tomorrow. Recent figures place the number of street children at 100 million. And many marginalized peoples have little hope for even slight redress--Condemned to a lifetime of forever being a have-not. Behind these statistics and many others are millions of individual human tragedies and especially given governmental negligence, the human rights movement has to better tackle these issues every bit as forcefully as it has tried to tackle torture or political imprisonment-- the right to food, water, to housing, the right to health care—the HIV/AIDS pandemic--the right to education. These too are basic human rights which all of us must do far more to realize and protect than we have--if for no other reason, then at least for our own protection.

What happens when people live day after miserable day, month after month, year after year, sometimes even generation after generation, in abject poverty, with gross injustice or massive human rights violations a part of daily life—life without any prospect of getting better, often only getting worse, while the rest of the world is indifferent. Seeming not to care. Where there is no reason for hope. Where the institutional violence takes its daily toll and where people grow desperate, no place to turn, with nothing to lose. Should we be surprised when some of it spills over into our world?

How do we explain a world that can spend billions of dollars a day on weapons and watch tens of thousands of children die from wholly preventable sources that only a fraction of those military billions could prevent? When the UN development program can say to us that for 31 billion of dollars a year all the poor people in the world can have clean water which will save millions of lives, can be made literate, and can have primary healthcare-- just 31 billion dollars a year. And we contrast that with the 400 billion dollars-400b--that the United States alone is spending this year on its military budget—more than the amount of the next 20 nations combined—and this doesn't even include the expenses for the Iraq war)--unimaginable amounts spent on sophisticated weaponry, missile defense shields, satellites and radar, weapons that—we're stunned to realize—could not begin to protect us against even a few desperate men with plastic box cutters that cost only pennies. And the only way this can be paid for (and a lot of it is deficit spending) is by robbing critically needed domestic programs. It is already happening. (By way of contrast, the next largest budget line item after defense is for education, and its amount?—\$55b-about one-eighth the amount for defense)

More than 80 countries had a lower per capita income in 2000 than they did in 1990. More than 80!—that's about 40%. There's a widening gap between haves and have nots almost everywhere. One report notes that the 300 richest people in the world have wealth equal to 3b of the world's poorest. What could be more obscene? Try to imagine what globalization (or should we say Americanization) what it can possibly mean to the half of humanity that has never made or received a telephone call; to the people of Sub-Saharan Africa, who have less Internet access than the inhabitants of the Borough of Manhattan in NYC.

And how can we explain, why the global system of rules, at the dawn of the 21st century, is tougher in protecting intellectual property rights than in protecting fundamental human rights? The predictable and almost inevitable consequence of this growth in poverty has been an escalation in violations of human rights including torture, “disappearances” and political killings and these are increasingly based on identity and

socio-economic status, particularly affecting women, children, minorities and the poor. And in these abuses the role of non-state actors—armed political groups, clans, companies, even families—is growing. Today you are less likely to be arrested for having ideas and expressing them. But you are more likely to be targeted because of who you are—your social, ethnic, sexual identity or economic status.

How can there not be deep-seated resentment among the majority of the world's population whose lives reflect these statistics? Or deep resentment at our government for breaking the international rules and doing so based on lies? Resentment which can be exploited and manipulated and which then can affect all of us—even here? We hear repeatedly that the Sept attacks were attacks on the American way of life but if at least an element of the attacks were assaults on these inequities, no amount of sophisticated star wars technology or missile defense shields can ever defend against a world order with such disparity. And no amount of Madison Avenue public relations spin can ever gloss over the disastrous and mindless unilateralism of this administration in the name of enhancing our security.

Now more than ever before we have to recognize the world as one global community. Our hopes and dreams are just like the hopes and dreams of the people of Iraq or Israel, Afghanistan or Palestine. Our safety, security, stability can and will never be assured as long as there are these discrepancies and exclusion, and indifference to injustice runs rampant. We should recognize now that the best protection against future acts of terror is to remove the conditions which breed such desperation. At its core, the struggle for security and safety is a struggle for basic human rights. The best insurance, the best protection any policy could buy, is one which has respect for human rights at its heart. This is not some soft pacifist idealism, as some would say. It hard headed realpolitik and it should not be difficult to understand. Our challenge is to translate that reality into public policy. The question is --will we rise to this challenge?

We do not have to accept human rights violations as inevitable. Unlike floods or earthquakes or hurricanes, human rights violations are perpetrated by people and can be stopped by people. We have a choice. Most of us here today still live in a country in which, despite concerns about our security, we have the freedom to act. Where civil society can mobilize and work to hold our government accountable.

And people are mobilizing and acting in ways never before possible. The rapid increase in the availability and speed of global news and communication gives unprecedented opportunities for activists to network and to publicize their concerns on a worldwide scale. There is a new coalition of protest movements; a growing community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), an international, grassroots movement of individuals coming together on issues such as child labor, the environment, poverty, 3<sup>rd</sup> world debt, landmines, civil, women's and human rights. And wherever we are, be it N Newton or New Zealand, we can be a part.

And finally here at Bethel today, I want to stress especially that students and faculty are critically important actors in building this movement. All successful social movements have had students at their core, and the human rights movement is no different. Most of Amnesty's activists are students and young people, just like the group here at Bethel. And because of this there is good reason for hope. We know that our past or even our present does not need to be our future. We are convinced we can build a better tomorrow. We can and we do see things change. We do see differences made in the lives of individuals. And while we may not be able to change the world, we can make a world of difference in the lives of individuals who so desperately need it.

Together we can even change the policies and patterns of human rights violations. It is happening. Though still too high, the number of countries holding prisoners of conscience is dwindling. We are seeing the death penalty in its final throes—in this country and around the world; now more than half the countries of the world have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice; and most of those that still have it, don't use it very much. In fact 3 countries—China, Iran and the US--account for over 80% of the world's executions. We see human rights law expanded; heads of state no longer immune from prosecution; Milosevic and Pinochet are only the first to be in the dock. The fight against impunity for human rights violations is gathering steam. The establishment of an International Criminal Court to try the worst human rights violators has become a reality. This has been achieved far more quickly than even the most optimistic dared to dream, despite US attempts to undermine it, even stop it.

Each of us here today has a choice. As free and privileged citizens of our world community we have a special responsibility to act, to not turn away. Doing just a little actually means doing a lot. People like you here this morning should be part of that first line of defense. Who will stand up for those in the front line? And I know that Bethel encourages you act on these responsibilities in the lives that you lead and the work that you will do. And that is why I'm honored and pleased to be here today. Because working together, we can and do bring hope and meaning and dignity---sometimes even life itself--to those the world so easily forgets.

As we struggle to protect human rights in today's complicated, rapidly-changing, often confusing and now sometimes terrifying world, I hope that all of us, individually and in our communities--will nurture a passion for justice that is stronger than ever, and that we strive even harder to create a future where all people are born free and equal and are able to live free and equal in dignity and rights. For by creating a more just world for more of the world's people, we are also making the world a safer place for ourselves.

Ultimately, it really is a matter of survival--our own survival. In an interconnected and globalized world, we are all neighbors, and our own welfare is inextricably tied to our neighbor's welfare. And when their hopes and dreams flicker and fade away, then our own hopes and our own dreams—and our own security--flickers and fades with them.