

# Nobel Peace Laureates Share Lessons for Today's Troubled World (02/12)

Nobel Laureates gathered in Nairobi to share lessons of different tools used to advance human rights, promote sustainable development and strengthen human security in the face of violent conflict in the 21st century.

The event, a panel discussion hosted by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) took place during the historic Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World. The discussion focused on the theme **"Linking Humanitarian, Development, and Disarmament Responses to War"**. The panel included five individuals and organisations recognized by the Nobel Committee for their extraordinary contributions to a better world.

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Dr. Jakob Kellenberger, initiated the discussion. The ICRC, whose founder was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, subsequently received the prize three times (1917, 1944 and 1963). Dr. Kellenberger, who just returned from a week trip to Sudan, including Darfur, noted the first response of the ICRC in disseminating international humanitarian law, monitoring its implementation and its respect is securing access. He drew lessons from his recent experience in Darfur on access issues as well as confronting serious violations of international humanitarian law. He noted that regular armed forces or armed irregular groups may show disregard for the body of international law, question its force or adequacy, such as in the war on terror, but urged participants to remember the human dignity of each human being. **"The respect of human dignity in all circumstances may be the best investment in long term human security."**

**Shirin Ebadi**, advocate for democracy and human rights from Iran and last year's winner, first addressed the issue of the rights of women. She noted that while the manner of discrimination may vary in different parts of the world, discrimination against women exists all over the world and we must defend the rights of women in all cultures. She also noted that fundamental human rights and justice are "the two pillars of peace." She highlighted inequality in the world today, where in many countries more than 80% of the population earns less than one dollar a day, while in other countries in the US and Europe, people spend more than \$2 billion a year on pet food. **"We must learn to live together and allow all of us to enjoy the fruits of the planet."**

**Martin Barber** spoke on behalf of the **United Nations**, whose agencies have been awarded the prize several times and most recently in 2001, when the UN and Secretary-General Kofi Annan received the award jointly. Barber cited a recent article in The Economist magazine which claimed that the role of international law is in crisis and the relevance of the UN is challenged as never before, questioning the fate of the organization. He then responded by elaborating ways the UN has tried to respond to the challenges facing countries emerging from conflict more effectively. He highlighted efforts to coordinate responses of the UN system as well as engaging in realistic demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation projects. In closing, Barber noted **"the UN is not dead yet – it embodies a great ideal and we will be with you for some time to come."**

**Wangari Maathai**, the most recent laureate, who will receive her award in Oslo on 10 December, began by highlighting common threads. "Justice, consciousness, development, security, community, threat, democracy – all can be used in describing our concern for the environment." Maathai noted that in her Greenbelt Movement they first began working with women who didn't have food, water, firewood, and then came to realize that they needed to address the causes - lacking basic needs due to environmental degradation. There was less and less land for cultivation, grazing animals, gathering firewood, collecting water. "We realized that in all likelihood they would fight over these scarce resources. It is important to manage resources sustainably so there is enough for all of us or people will start fighting over them."

She recounted how they then began to organize the women, to mobilize them to work together, plant trees, and reclaim resources. "We were told we could not meet, if we were more than 9 people we needed a license to gather. **Eventually we came to understand that the law was put in place to control people because when people come together they organize, and when they organize they empower themselves, and when they empower themselves they say no to power."**

Maathai related how in saying no, in reclaiming space that was disappearing due to desertification and privatization, they also needed to reclaim democratic space. "In trying to see how we could reclaim those natural

resources and bring about results quickly, so we didn't lose hope but could see fruits of our labor, we planted trees, which also provided the women with food, firewood, shelter, and if properly protected, forests and water. We could use trees to reclaim our land and our spirits. **We would plant trees of peace— planting seeds for peace, democracy and respect for human rights.”**

**Jody Williams**, who won the prize together with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in 1997, was the final panelist. She began by noting that she also had been making lists of themes of things that ran through the evening's conversation and all were elements of human security. She noted that one of the interesting things to emerge from the landmine movement was the attempt by some governments to create a network to deal with human security – the Human Security Network – and it needs the support of civil society. “ **If we are going to address the needs of all of us on the planet we must define security not in terms of military weapons but in terms of basic human rights –enhanced human security provides for global security.**” Williams then addressed how real peace means a reallocation of resources, and that people must begin to realize “to shop is not a basic human right. People in the North and West must realize when we consume 50 times the resources we are robbing the South and their hope for a better future. There is something wrong with the planet when almost \$1 trillion is spent on weapons and war and \$10 billion on education. There is something wrong when 3 billionaires have more resources than the poorest 48 countries combined. There is something wrong with the global system that permits and accepts and glorifies this.”

“Those of us in the landmine movement have seen the power of real change, when we work together, with bold leadership of governments, stepping outside of the bureaucracy. **It takes courage and leadership for each and every one of us, including governments, who must decide to look at the world differently.**” Williams closed by applauding the Nobel Committee for expanding what it means to defend peace “the committee got it – they recognize that we must defend our environment or we'll have no planet left” and remembering sister laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, still imprisoned in Burma. “We need to do more to support her.”

About 400 government and non-governmental delegates to the Summit as well as members of the Nairobi diplomatic community participated. David Atwood, of the Quaker United N