

Opening Conference Remarks
By
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United States Institute of Peace
at the
Ashland Global Peace Conference
on
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Good morning. Happy International Peace Day.

Mayor Stromberg,

Citizens and Leaders of Ashland,

Conferees from beyond Ashland,

David and Irene, Co-Chairs and Members of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission,
Ambassador Chowdhury,

Senora Chela from the Ashland-Guanajuato Sister-City Initiative, and Field Coordinator Amy Amrhein from Sen. Merkley's Office, I am deeply honored and equally excited to join you today to discuss Ashland's inspiring experiment in building a culture of peace.

I come to you today as a messenger from the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. The message that I would like to deliver is that USIP stands by you in your arduous and courageous journey since we too support the building of cultures of peace around the world. Indeed, we have a common vision and a common mission.

USIP President Nancy Lindborg had hoped to join you today because of our shared interest in peacebuilding and because as the former president of Mercy Corps she has deep roots here in Oregon. But she had to take an urgent trip to Colombia to demonstrate USIP's long-standing support to the continuing peace process in that country. Nancy asked me to convey to you her warm regards, her congratulations for your community's achievements to date, and her wish for your continued success.

For me, visiting Ashland and the beautiful Rogue Valley is a homecoming. I grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley, the youngest of five children in a refugee family from China. I lived in the Bay Area during my early 20s and for a time I harbored dreams of becoming a Shakespearean actor. Thus I made annual pilgrimages to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, spending many summer evenings watching the amazing outdoor productions at the Elizabethan Theater near Lithia Park. Given my parallel interests in peace and justice, I conjured thoughts of playing Cassius on the Ashland stage.

Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face? Tis just. And it is very much lamented, Brutus, that you have no such mirrors as to turn your hidden worthiness into your eye that you might see your shadow. Therefore, good Brutus, be prepared to hear. And since you know you cannot see yourself, so well as by reflection, I, your glass, will modestly discover to yourself that of yourself which you yet know not of.

Alas, Life, with a capital L, took me around a different bend . . .

Over the last month, in getting to know David Wick, Irene Kai and the story of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, I've become convinced that the bend in my life that took me to Washington, DC, 36 years ago was meant to return me here today.

What I mean is that our paths have converged in the past and merge yet again today. Irene Kai and I were both born in Hong Kong. She moved to New York Chinatown at the age of 15. She sought in art, painting and writing a universal language by which she could make sense of her often harsh and bewildering immigrant experience. I moved from Hong Kong to Stockton, California, as a baby; and growing up I faced similar challenges as an outsider. And I, too, turned to art, searching for solace and meaning in literature and theater.

David Wick and I were both living in Santa Cruz, California, in the 1970s. David was working with troubled youth, pioneering alternatives to juvenile hall—and seeking his North Star. I was studying political science at UC Santa Cruz, organizing in support of the day's social-justice imperatives (including boycotts of wineries that did not recognize Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers and boycotts of corporations that invested in apartheid South Africa). And I, too, was looking for my touchstone.

In the early 2000s Ambassador Chowdhury and I were both serving the noble cause of the United Nations. The ambassador was a senior member of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's leadership team. Earlier, when Amb. Chowdhury was Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the UN, his leadership was crucial in the passage of the General Assembly's Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace; and in the Security Council's passage of its landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security—which brought attention to war's heavy toll on women and girls, and which sought to break down the barriers to women's participation at peace tables. During those years I was an official at the UN Development Program, inspired by the leadership of Secretary-General Annan and Under Secretary-General Chowdhury. I, too, was eager to implement the UN's far-reaching post-Cold War agenda on peace, human rights, and poverty reduction.

So even though we did not know it at the times, our paths have crossed—and, fortuitously, they cross again today in the service of local and global cultures of peace.

Citizens and leaders of Ashland, you are true trailblazers. You are trying to foster the values, develop the practices and build the institutions of peace. These are universal human aspirations but yet they are rarely pursued with the degree of creativity and commitment that you have brought to your present initiative.

Fellow Peacebuilders, I am inspired by your work—

- David, I am inspired by your decades of seminal contributions to the Pathways To Peace organization and now by your rooting of your experience here in Ashland;
- Irene, I am inspired by your beautiful art for peace and by your having taken a wrong turn in the Welsh countryside in September 2015 so that Ashland could have its own World Peace Flame;
- Mayor Stromberg and Councilor Rosenthal, I am inspired by your early political support that enabled the birth of the Commission;
- Finley and Ms. Healey, I am inspired by your keeping the Peace Flame burning, literally at Thalden Pavilion and figuratively in the hearts of Ashland's youth;
- Chief O'Meara, I am inspired by your innovative Peace Officer program, your openness to engaging your community in bold ways, and your collaboration with Lisa Broderick's Police2Peace organization;
- Senator Merkley, State Senator Golden and State Representative Marsh, I am inspired by your magnifying the story of the Ashland experiment in Salem, Washington, DC, and beyond;
- CEO Saslow, I am inspired by your using the voice of the Ashland Daily Tidings to educate citizens in your biweekly columns about the Commission's work; and
- Ashland Culture of Peace Commissioners and Ashland Community Leaders from every sector (from business, education, social services and the arts), I am inspired by all of the work you've done together—including the peace ambassadors and their listening circles, the skills trainings on prejudice identification, the political candidates forums, the winter shelter, the membership in the International Cities of Peace, and on and on.

Thanks to all of you for your inspiration, and thanks for bringing to life Amb. Chowdhury's dream.

The United States Institute of Peace is housed in a graceful building at the northwest corner of the National Mall in Washington, DC. Opened in 2011, the building is distinctive because its roof is topped by a giant set of dove wings. We face the Lincoln Memorial. Nearby are memorials to the Vietnam and Korean Wars; and farther down the Mall is the World War Two Memorial. At the groundbreaking ceremony for the USIP building, Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, then President of the University of Notre Dame and one of our board members, said, "Amidst all these reliquaries of wars, we are going to commit a temple of peace." Today, Father Ted's temple stands as a living and working monument to the commitment of the American people to peace.

From my office window I of course cannot literally see across the continent to Ashland, Oregon. But trust that my colleagues and I feel the impact of your experiment because, as I said, our two communities share a common vision, mission and dream.

USIP is a national, nonpartisan and independent institute dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical and essential for U.S. and global security. Thus our vision is simply a world without violent conflict; and our mission is to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflicts around the world. We do so by engaging directly in conflict zones; by linking analysis, training and field programming; and by partnering with those working for sustainable peace. In other words, we support the building of cultures of peace.

Congress established USIP in 1984 following years of proposals for the creation of a national "peace academy," proposals notably from a nationwide grassroots movement and from World War Two combat veterans who had been elected to Congress. The congressional leaders included Oregon's Senator Mark Hatfield and Hawaii's Senator Spark Matsunaga. Sen. Hatfield

had commanded Navy landing craft on the beaches of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and had led the first American team to survey the destruction from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. (By the way, Sen. Merkley began his career in public service as an intern to Sen. Hatfield.) Senator Matsunaga had been twice wounded and awarded the Bronze Star in the war's North Africa and Italy campaigns.

In a bipartisan effort, Senators Hatfield and Matsunaga led the Congressional passage of the United States Institute of Peace Act. The act was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.

Next month USIP will mark its 35 anniversary. We have staff members in 13 countries, and we conduct activities in over 50 countries.

Rather than give you a clipped overview of USIP's global programs, I will instead share a single, emblematic story of our work. This story came to my mind when I was reading through the many compelling documents about the Commission's work that David and Irene proudly shared with me.

In particular, my selection of this story was inspired by the high priority placed on education by the Ashland Commission as well as by the global Culture of Peace movement dating back to the 1999 UN declaration and program of action. So I was thinking of Finley and the next generation of his fellow Flame Keepers at Ashland Middle School, of Ms. Healey's leadership in their classroom, and of the Commission's cooperation on education with community leaders like Superintendent Raymond and President Schott.

My USIP story is about Ms. Adriana Combita, a 28-year-old Colombian youth leader. I met her a few months ago in Washington. Several years ago Adriana participated in USIP's Generation Change Fellows Program.

The Generation Change Program partners with young leaders from conflict countries. With over 1.2 billion people across the globe below the age of 35, young people have the opportunity to be powerful agents of change. Yet even the most dedicated young peacebuilders face challenges and burnout as they work to create change. They often work in isolation, or lack the knowledge, skills and resources to achieve their organizational goals and to increase their personal resilience. USIP developed the Generation Change Fellows Program to counter their isolation through a family-like community of practice, to augment their existing knowledge and skills of participants through mentorship and training, and to partner with them through community-led peacebuilding initiatives. During the course of their two-year program, the fellows are trained in leadership, conflict management, and participatory action research.

Adriana is a youth leader working on prison projects for the Fundación Accion Interna (Internal Action Foundation), a Colombian NGO based in Bogota. Before her Generation Change experience, she, as a former business student, worked mostly with women prisoners to develop entrepreneurship skills so that they could earn a living after their release. Through the Generation Change Fellows Program, Adriana met a group of women who were leading trainings for imprisoned fighters from Colombia's two main rebel groups—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (or FARC, the Spanish acronym), the main group that signed a peace accord with the government in 2016; and a smaller insurgent group, the National Liberation Army (or ELN), which has yet to sign a peace treaty. Inspired by those women and by her

Generation Change experience, Adriana decided to change her focus to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The scene that I will now describe played out several years ago on the Puente Aranda military base in central Bogota.

The prisoners will be arriving soon and Adriana, like a young teacher preparing to greet a new class, is nervous. This is not the first time that she has led a peacebuilding training with soldiers convicted of war-related crimes. But these are senior officers, commanders with master's degrees, military officials who had lived abroad.

As they enter the classroom, some of the prisoners display a wary tension. Others slide into their seats and lean back, looking relaxed. The 16 men make small talk while scanning the room to see who has shown up. Four of them still wear military fatigues. The rest are dressed in civilian clothing, a sign that the military or national police had severed them from service because of the severity of their crimes. Adriana reviews her agenda and tapes diagrams on a white board

The prisoners don't know what to expect, but they do know why they volunteered to be here: Before long, they will be given the option to tell their stories to a tribunal of magistrates established under the peace accords that ended over 50 years of war between the Colombian government and the FARC. This classroom is a place to learn how to tell their personal war stories.

The tribunal, which could recommend reduced sentences for the prisoners in exchange for the complete truth, forms part of an innovative transitional justice system known as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Its mandate is to investigate and document serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the long war, and to prosecute, judge and sanction the perpetrators of those crimes. The Special Jurisdiction is also responsible for presenting Colombian society with the truth of what happened in the conflict and for addressing the rights of victims. The overarching aim of this transitional-justice project—and of Adriana's support—is to help Colombians to reweave their social fabric.

Adriana will help the men reflect on their lives and on how their actions in Colombia's war affected others. They will learn new strategies to engage with people from different backgrounds and experiences through means other than violence.

Adriana's direct but caring manner sets up an easy rapport with the prisoners. The military has given her program welcome access to its prisons. Adriana's first session with this new group lasts well beyond its scheduled two hours. In one structured exercise, she asks the men to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of their lives. For 10 minutes they silently draw "rivers" of their lives—el rio de la vida—with positive and negative shorelines. Many of the men, who range in age from 18 to mid-50s, discuss their careers as a positive. Negatives include the armed conflict, the death of family members caused by it, and their imprisonment. Most talk about "Dios supremo"—God supreme—as an ally throughout their journey and their families as providing stability throughout their sentences. They say the peace process that ended the conflict and the approval of the Special Jurisdiction are positives that they hope will allow them to tell their truth and feel some sense of relief.

In other exercises, the men talk about the incidents, people and places that shaped the trajectory of their lives and reflect on the experiences that landed them in prison. One of the ex-soldiers says: "I know that what we're doing and talking about today will help me in the future. I would have liked to have this type of training when I first arrived in prison. It could have helped me understand my colleagues, to help ourselves be better, understand myself and how I got here."

As the initial session wraps up, another of the prisoners says: "Sometimes as men, we have a hard time reflecting on the past, and being okay with crying and letting go, and allowing ourselves to know each other better and grow closer, despite our circumstances. What we're doing here is beautiful."

Now several years later, Adriana continues to hold sessions for women, guerillas, soldiers and police in Bogota, Cartagena and Cali. She applies lessons from the Generation Change program on prejudice awareness and reduction, conflict management and leadership development. Many observers consider the Special Jurisdiction to be the backbone of the peace accords and a critical component of the larger Integrated System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. The Special Jurisdiction's success will largely depend on the engagement of civil society actors like Adriana. Thus her prison engagements are critical to moving Colombia closer to a durable peace. And that's why Nancy Lindborg traveled to Colombia this week.

We at USIP are proud to support youth leaders like Adriana. Next month I will have the honor to join a new cohort of Generation Change fellows from many conflict countries, from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. We will gather in Dharamsala, India, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama will host us for a fourth year in a row. As a youth exile from conflict, His Holiness will share his own story and listen to the stories of our Fellows. Together we will swim in el rio de la vida.

I could share many other stories of USIP's support for cultures of peace around the world:

- Stories that Chief O'Meara would be interested in, of convening community dialogues between citizens and police officers across Sahelian countries threatened by violent extremism;
- Stories that Rabbi Zaslow would be interested in, of our program in northern Nigeria where Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye have co-established the Interfaith Mediation Center to bridge historical divides between the Muslim and Christian communities;
- Stories of higher education that President Schott would be interested in, where in Afghanistan USIP is supporting the introduction of Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution courses in universities, leading to the establishment of student peace clubs that are blunting the effect of extremist groups in shaping campus culture; and
- Stories of leadership training that Christopher and Will of the Thriving Leadership Academy would be interested in, of USIP programs in Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding where we train civil-society activists in countries as diverse as Sudan and Nicaragua, activists who are then able to respond to harsh repression in the nonviolent civic-resistance tradition of Gandhi, King and Mandela.

My sharing these stories with you is important not in touting the impact of USIP's field work, but rather in fulfilling the other part of our Congressional mandate: to serve the American people by providing education on how conflicts can be resolved without violence, on how peace is possible. USIP has a dedicated Public Education team that conducts this work. We engage across all 50 U.S. states, including here in Oregon. We interact with teachers and

students, organizations and communities. We raise awareness of our work abroad and how you can engage with us.

It's particularly meaningful for me to be here today on International Peace Day. I note here the contributions that David Wick and his colleagues at Pathways To Peace made in transforming the then-quistotic idea of an International Peace Day into the important political reality it is today. USIP has a tradition of celebrating this meaningful day by issuing our Peace Day Challenge. We see Peace Day as an occasion of both celebration and action. We ask our partners around the country and around the world to take an action on behalf of peace. That's why our theme this year is: "Peace is possible. It takes action. It takes all of us."

I invite you today to take an action, reflect it in a photo, and post the photo on social media with the hashtag #PeaceDayChallenge. My own action this year was to join all of you in sharing ideas of how we can work together on promoting cultures of peace around the world. I tweeted a photo of me, David and Irene yesterday.

This morning from Dharamsala His Holiness tweeted his Peace Day Challenge action. He wrote: "It's our responsibility to work with vision, determination and wisdom to create a happier, more peaceful world. We need to take action, while respecting others and their needs; considering all seven billion human beings alive today as belonging to one human family. #PeaceDayChallenge."

So, come to think of it, I have been able to play Cassius on an Ashland stage after all. In joining you today, perhaps I have held up a mirror of USIP's work so that all of you pathfinders in Ashland can see your local reflection in a new, global light. That of yourself which you yet know not of. As David, Irene and Amb. Chowdhury believe, cultures of peace are inherently a linked local-global phenomenon. The one without the other would not be sustainable. The local informs the global, and the global informs the local—in a never-ending virtuous circle of peace.

"Peace is possible. It takes action. It takes all of us. You are the flame."

I repeat: "Peace is possible. It takes action. It takes all of us. You are the flame."

Now in our best Ms. Healey voices, let's say it together: "Peace is possible. It takes action. It takes all of us. You are the flame."

Our respective words come from the same language of peace. Our words have universal meaning. Our words have their own iambic pentameter that beats in the heart of every human being.

Thus your Peace Day Challenge—that of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, that of the citizens and leaders of Ashland, and that of all the state and community leaders gathered here today—your challenge is to join hands with the United States Institute of Peace, the United Nations, and grassroots and grassroots peacebuilders around the world to ensure that the lessons of your hard-won local experiment are shared across Oregon, across the Northwest, across the United States, and across the globe.

Seeing you gathered here this morning, I know that you have already embraced this challenge. And I know that after hearing your stories today, I will leave with the confidence that you will

meet this challenge with the greatest success and I will also leave with the inspiration to deepen my own commitment to the local-global nexus of peace.

Professor Angus Bowmer, rest in peace. Your spirit is in good hands. You would be proud of your Ashland descendants. Every Independence Day you built with your own hands a makeshift stage of the best Northwestern hardwood timbers so that your local thespians could perform Shakespeare's canon. Now the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is one of the great theaters of the world. What Professor Bowmer did for theater, all of you assembled here today can do for peacebuilding. The local can indeed become one with the global. Today, Ashland, you are the flame. Tomorrow we will be the flame together, all the world over.

Good luck and Godspeed.

Thank you.