



FOR PEACE+EDUCATION

## VANCOUVER PEACE SUMMIT 2009

Sunday, September 27, 2009 – Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, Vancouver, B.C.

### Nobel Laureates in Dialogue – **Connecting for Peace**

Panel: His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Karen Armstrong, Reverend Mpho Tutu, Jody Williams, Betty Williams, Mairead Maguire. Moderator: Mary Robinson.

*Dialogue Contributors:* His Holiness The Dalai Lama was accompanied on the panel by **Karen Armstrong**, former Roman Catholic nun, and author of over 20 books on commonalities shared by Islam, Judaism, and Christianity; **Betty Williams**, head of the Global Children’s Foundation and co-recipient with Mairead Maguire of the 1976 Nobel Prize for her work as co-founder of the Community of Peace People in Northern Ireland; **Jody Williams**, a leader in the international effort to end the conflict in Darfur, and recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize for her work on the International Campaign to Ban Landmines; **Mairead Maguire**, who works with a number of interfaith organizations and is a member of the International Peace Council; and **Reverend Mpho Tutu**, Founder and Executive Director of the Tutu Institute for Prayer and Pilgrimage and Chairperson Emeritus of the Board of the Global AIDS Alliance. Absent from the panel, but acknowledged with an empty chair and a bouquet of flowers was 1991 Nobel Laureate **Aung San Suu Kyi**, who was and continues to be under house arrest in Burma.

Moderator **Mary Robinson**, Ireland’s first woman President (1990-1997), also served for five years as the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“The hummingbird told them, ‘I’m just doing whatever I can to help.’” – **Victor Chan**

Victor Chan, the Founding Director of the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, set the theme for this sold-out event. To illustrate the Center’s core purpose, which is also the first commitment of His Holiness The Dalai Lama – to promote and foster universal values such as compassion, forgiveness, and altruism, and to do so in a way that involves action – Chan told the following story: There was once a raging forest fire and all the animal and insect inhabitants of the forest were cowering on the outskirts of the forest, terrified and overwhelmed by the blaze. The hummingbird, however, flew to the river, gathered up a drop of water in its beak, and bravely deposited it onto the fire. He did this repeatedly. The other creatures made fun of his meager efforts, but the hummingbird told them, “I’m just doing whatever I can to help,” and continued with his mission.



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Vancouver Peace Summit 2009: Nobel Laureates in Dialogue.  
Bradford Noble photo

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**“Always treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself.” – Karen Armstrong**  
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As the winner of the 2008 TED prize ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)), Karen Armstrong knew exactly what she wanted to do with her “One Wish to Change the World” that accompanies the prize. In keeping with her lifelong observation that the essence of all religion and all morality is compassion, she wanted to create an online Charter for Compassion (<http://charterforcompassion.org>) to which people of all faiths from all over the world would contribute. The Charter has been translated into over 30 languages and now has close to 41,000 signatories.

While Armstrong believes that compassion is part of our humanity, it needs to be assiduously cultivated. If we continually look into our own hearts, discover what causes us pain, and then refuse to inflict that pain on anyone else, then we begin to develop new capacities of mind and heart that “take us beyond the prison of selfishness and self-interest that holds us back from our best selves.”

Misunderstood by many Westerners, compassion is neither pity nor emotional softness, but a disciplined intellectual, emotional, and moral effort to put ourselves in the position of another: “It demands risk, it demands courage, day by day and hour by hour, to make ourselves vulnerable to the other.”



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*"We are living in a period of commercial globalization. What we really need is spiritual globalization."*

Karen Armstrong

In response to Mary Robinson's question about the Charter's practical implications, Armstrong described a number of worldwide grassroots initiatives to educate adults and children about compassion, and to encourage them to think creatively about it. She has a "wild idea" to engage the great spiritual leaders in devising a 12-step program to help people become more compassionate: "I'd like it to become cool to be compassionate."

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**"Would sharing personal stories help?" – Mary Robinson**  
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Setting the context for the dialogue with the Nobel Laureates, Robinson spoke of attending the Second Sudanese Women's Forum in January of 2009 at which her friend, a human rights lawyer, gently superseded her roll-up-our-sleeves agenda with the suggestion that the women spend a little time getting to know each other first. This was a valuable lesson for Robinson who noticed that when the group later proceeded with the business of the day, "there was a bond between us that would not have been there if we hadn't had that personal conversation."

She asked His Holiness if he would comment on the relationship between listening and compassion. He replied that compassion is not just a word but a genuine feeling of concern for another, which requires focused physical and mental attention.

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**"Only if you listen ... " – Betty Williams**  
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Recalling the words of a former loyalist paramilitary turned youth worker who, when she asked him why Senator George Mitchell was so successful in the peace process in Belfast, said: "Ach President. He listened us out," Robinson asked Betty Williams for her thoughts on listening. Speaking candidly about her own struggles to be a better listener, and her appreciation for the wisdom she receives from His Holiness and Archbishop Desmond Tutu whom they call, "The Arch," Betty Williams said that "Over the last few years, I've learned a lot more by just shutting up."

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**"There but for the grace of God go I." – Jody Williams**  
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After confessing that she has tended to equate being loving and compassionate with being "wimpy," Jody Williams said that, for her, compassion arises from the words, "There but for the grace of God go I." In her view, "peace is justice with equality, peace is the end of impunity, but peace is not the dove and the rainbow." She was adamant that sensitivity about others' suffering is meaningless in the absence of "getting up off your butt ... and going to help change that situation."



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*“Peace talks tend to be peace talks by the perpetrators. Do they begin by telling personal stories? And if they did, would it actually change things?”*

Mary Robinson

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**“Love isn’t what we feel, it’s what we do.” – Reverend Mpho Tutu**  
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To counter Jody Williams’ concerns about love being saccharine and sentimental, Reverend Mpho Tutu put forth the following definition of love: “What we feel really doesn’t matter much. What we do, how we treat each other really matters – infinitely.”

Speaking about the emergence of women in Africa, Reverend Tutu said that allowing themselves to be confined by culture not only hasn’t worked for African women, but it hasn’t worked for their children, their menfolk, or the country as a whole, which continues to suffer from upheaval, famine, environmental degradation, and war. She said that African women are now claiming their authority because “Quite frankly, we’re fed up.”

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**“Ordinary people coming together.” – Mairead Maguire**  
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Asked about the Nobel Women’s Initiative, to which she and the other Laureates belong, Mairead Maguire said that it has been an effective avenue for strengthening and standing in solidarity with one another and with others in their work for peace. For example, a number of them were just in Guatemala to support local initiatives to address violence toward women.

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**“Basically, we are the same human being with a natural disposition to seek happiness.”**

**– His Holiness The Dalai Lama**  
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His Holiness affirmed the right for every living thing to exist, and said that human rights emerge from a shared desire for happiness. When Mary Robinson pressed him to comment on the relationship between dignity and compassion, he replied, “I don’t know,” and with a chuckle said, “I think my right to say I don’t know is part of my dignity.”

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**“You have no idea how much a daughter needs a good father.” – Betty Williams**  
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Robinson went on to ask Betty Williams where she found the inner strength to lead a community to peace in Northern Ireland. Williams responded with a story of herself as an extremely difficult, wilful child who had been particularly badly behaved one day. Her mother, at her wit’s end, told her, “Just wait until your father gets home.” Once her father got home, Williams was terrified as she overheard her mother telling her father, “I can’t



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*"I think we just showed that ordinary people can come together and work on issues together to try to make a difference."*

Mairead Maguire

take any more of Betty. I think you just need to smack her." Her father responded by saying, "Margaret, have I ever smacked you?" Her mother responded, "Certainly not!" to which he said, "Then why would I smack someone smaller than you?" He then went to his daughter, told her that he and her mother said that they needed to talk, and asked her what she wanted to talk about. Having removed her fear, Williams and her father were able to discuss her wilfulness in a way that had real impact.

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**"We made them confront their humanity." – Jody Williams**  
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Robinson asked Jody Williams to speak about how she was able to break through the United Nations bureaucracy to negotiate an international treaty to ban land mines. Key to the campaign's success was Jody Williams' and her colleagues' refusal to allow the men in power to hide behind their suits, their position, or their procedures. Landmine survivors themselves wheeled up to the leaders in their wheelchairs to present petitions with thousands of signatures; campaigners created a faux minefield by the entrance of the palace in Geneva, which the men had to walk through to get to their meeting place; and they arranged to have an explosion occur every 20 minutes, since it is estimated that every 20 minutes somewhere in the world someone is affected by a landmine. "Sometimes people think that human rights movements are aggressive. Well, if people behaved properly and with compassion, there would be no need for making them think about it."

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**"Compassion is being prepared to suffer with people." – Mairead Maguire**  
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In the summer of 2009, Mairead Maguire was part of a mission to bring medicines to the people of Gaza but was kidnapped in international waters by Israelis, detained for a week, and banned from ever returning to Palestine or Israel. Although it was a frightening experience, she stands by her reason for going in the first place: "We believe that every single human life is sacred, and particularly the lives of little children and civilians who have nothing to do with these war situations... One and one-half million people of Gaza are cut off from the world... it breaks every human rights law in the book." According to Maguire, compassion begins when "we make the quantum leap to build nonkilling, nonviolent societies... I would like to see a covenant of nonkilling." It is only then that we can deepen our love and our compassion and become fully alive human beings. This is not a miracle in her view; it is how the vast majority of the human race currently lives.

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**"I know that peace is possible. I've seen my parents." – Reverend Mpho Tutu**  
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Robinson asked Reverend Tutu a question about her father's influence on her life, having heard repeatedly from other women leaders the key role that their fathers have played in



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their success. Mpho Tutu said that the most important opportunity that she and her sisters received was seeing their parents' relationship – both her father and her mother were committed to working together with mutual respect, and to finding common ground, even in situations in which their needs were divergent: “This is what a good partnership looks like. I think a lot of people growing up don't get to see that.”

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“Compassion is challenging oneself.” – *His Holiness The Dalai Lama*  
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To conclude the dialogue, Robinson asked the Dalai Lama for his opinion on making a personal connection before negotiating issues. His Holiness recalled having told some world leaders to share a holiday with their families and to have their children play together before negotiating the difficult matters. However, he is more concerned about the rapidly increasing global population, which he says we need to take seriously.

He then turned his attention to the meaning of compassion. Since compassion emerges from self to other, it is impossible for a self-hating person to be compassionate. Real compassion is universal, based on our fundamental humanity, on our recognition that there is no separation between others and ourselves. Such compassion is not passive. Action is required, and sometimes countermeasures such as those described by Jody Williams are necessary. Indeed, opposition to another's unjust actions arises from our genuine concern for that person's wellbeing. His Holiness took pains to explain the distinction between the kind of compassion that arises from attachment, which can disappear when the other's actions are no longer agreeable to us, and genuine compassion, which is unbiased and constant.

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