

Honorable Mayor Khatuov, Distinguished Guests, Brother and Sister Delegates,

We are indeed grateful to you, to the citizens of Sochi and, of course to your staff, for your hospitality hosting our General Assembly. We fully understand how the recent events in South Ossetia created circumstances that made holding this meeting of Cities devoted to Peace so difficult. Here was an international situation that affects the ability of cities to carry on their responsibilities. Our organization issued a statement to the international press and the global diplomatic circles condemning the bombing of Tskhinvali. Our position is firm; Cities Are Not Targets. Not by conventional arms or nuclear weapons. Such an attack was in defiance of international law and, certainly, morality. It must be condemned by all peace loving people. The presence of our Association, of leaders of cities today in Sochi, affirms our principled voice for peace and justice.

The theme for this General Assembly is the Struggle for Peace and the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This historic document was signed by all the nations belonging at that time to the United Nations on December 10, 1948. It has since been supplemented by the Rights of Women and the Rights of the Child. It established internationally the concept that everyone was entitled, as a universal Human Right, to employment and a living wage, to decent, livable, affordable housing, education, medical care, no discrimination based upon religion, gender or national origin, the right to join a trade union, to be treated equally under the law. It banned torture. It spelled out human rights that would guarantee a peaceful, productive life that would allow for the full development of the human personality. These, and more, are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that must be recognized as a beacon of light in our common struggle for peace and justice.

What is the reality of the world today as we gather here, an association of cities designated as Peace Messengers by the United Nations in 1985? In 1985, even when the cold war raged, there were cities and leaders who spoke out and worked for peace. They recognized that they had the responsibility to uphold their oaths to protect and assist the people in their cities. Since that time, more cities have recognized that peace, internationally and domestically, is an imperative to provide for their citizens. They realized that it is more than paved roads, street lights and picking up the trash. They understand that wars, the threat of wars, the militarization of the economy drain the society, produces fear, intolerance and instability in the streets. We meet here, Peace Messenger Cities, to speak out against the tragedies of Tskhinvali, against the dangers posed to our citizens by the realities that contrast so vividly to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

What is that reality? 3 Billion People in our world live on less than US\$2.00 per day. Over 2 billion people have no safe drinking water. Every minute of the day, including this day, a child dies from hunger or disease. 200 million people, today, this very moment, are wandering the earth, crossing rivers and deserts, endangering their lives, looking for work so they can feed their families. Diseases, malaria, aids, and other infectious diseases are devastating whole societies, at a time when for pennies medical science can save them. Food prices have soared making it impossible for millions to buy rice or cooking oil, other necessities of life. Water has become a scarce commodity. Water, the absolute necessity for life itself, has become a commodity for profit. Global warming's impact, caused by reckless industrialization, is only now recognized as creating serious and permanent natural damage globally, especially to those communities in the undeveloped world with the least amount of resources to address this issue. Now with the scandalous financial crisis brought about by unscrupulous international finance, millions are losing their homes, their pensions and their jobs. Globalization has removed all national barriers. Cities, thousands of miles apart, are suffering from this global crisis. Cities like mine are in a financial crisis. The people of my city, 124,000, have paid over US\$240 million towards the war, but city workers are being laid off, construction is stalled, even city parades are halted; homeless shelters are overfilled.

The United Nations has set a goal, the Millennium Development Goal, for eliminating poverty by 50% by 2015, six years from today. Nations pledged they would devote seven-tenths of their gross national production to that effort. You can count on one hand the number of countries that have donated to that fund, yet this year the world will have spent one and half trillion dollars FOR KILLING MACHINES. The war in Iraq costs 12 billion US dollars alone every month, now in its sixth year. That does not count what other countries in the coalition of the unwilling are spending. We don't know what the Afghanistan War is costing. There is an arms race with new and more dangerous killing machines, costing billions of dollars while there is no money for food, for medical care, adequate housing, and education. New bases are being installed creating an atmosphere of dangerous provocation. Entire fleets are in foreign waters, adding to the tensions. That, dear friends, is the reality for humanity.

As leaders of cities these are not abstract problems, but deal directly with the ability to provide for the good and welfare of the people. We have the responsibility to use the influence of the cities to demand a change in direction. Thousands of Mayors are speaking out for the abolition of nuclear weapons. They recognize that their cities and their citizens have the responsibility to use the influence of the cities to demand a change in direction. They recognize that their cities and their citizens are the potential targets. Cities are the only targets for nuclear weapons.

In increasing numbers we are witnessing the people placing in political power leaders who advocate historic measures for peace. The Global Peace Movement is the largest in history. Many of our Cities have joined with these movements in common demand, but not enough. City leadership can add to the weight of the struggles by joining. Our Association is proud of the role we have played. We are involved in the global movement to abolish nuclear weapons. We were involved in the movement to ban land mines. We are demanding a just solution to the division of Cyprus that affects our member city, Morphou. We are involved in the United Nations calling for the 4th Special Session on Disarmament, and the International Decade for Disarmament. We are working with the Non-Aligned Movement in the United Nations. We had the privilege of addressing the Working Group on the Special Session. Our Association has joined other organizations demanding that the nuclear weapons states abide by the obligation in the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty to negotiate for the total abolition of nuclear weapons. We call for the transfer of funds from the military into peaceful development. We speak out for negotiations, not arms, to solve outstanding problems between nations.

This assembly is meeting at a very critical time. We will chart a course for our Association that will speak directly to the issues we face. Our deliberations in Sochi must, and will, make a contribution to the hopes and needs of the people for peace.

Thank you.

Alfred L. Marder  
President  
International Association of Peace Messenger Cities  
Opening Ceremony  
General Assembly  
Sochi, Russia  
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