Speech delivered by Erna Paris on receiving the 2012 World Peace Award from the World Federalists Movement - Canada

Winnipeg, July 2012

Thank you to the Council of WFM-Canada for this great honour. And thank you to the members of my family who travelled to Winnipeg to share this wonderful moment with me – my brother Peter, my children Michelle and Roland, and my nephew Mark. You honour me with your presence.

On reflection, I think I may have been a World Federalist sympathizer before the age of 10. My father was a remarkable man who took his parenting duties seriously. One of his many educational pursuits was to orchestrate political and literary conversations at our family dining table in which everyone was expected to have a considered opinion about the subject at hand, regardless of their age. From his place at the head of the table he would read aloud to us. Unsurprisingly, his favourite book was *Father Knows Best*. *Cheaper by the Dozen* came a close second, since it concerned a benignly autocratic father and his obedient brood of children – the latter being something poor dad could only dream of. But he also read to us from *Animal Farm*, George Orwell's cautionary tale about tyranny. Perhaps he thought it would be easier for his children to understand concepts of fairness and inequality if they applied to pigs rather than humans.

There was something else. We children were encouraged to imagine ourselves into situations where we might experience emotions we had not yet encountered in life. How well I remember performing for the family, sobbing over the imagined death of an imaginary puppy.

My father favoured what he called one-world government. For a time during my adolescence I disagreed with him, on the necessary principle that everything either one of my parents said was wrong, by definition. All the same, his view of a world order animated by global institutions stayed with me.

The nightly theatre of ideas that characterized our family dinners may explain why an early experience affected me so profoundly. One day, the principal of my elementary school festooned the corridor walls with the pages of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I can still picture myself standing on tip toes, using my recently acquired reading skills to take in the document. “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” it said. That includes me! I remember thinking. I couldn’t wait to tell my father.

In a second revolutionary phrase that would later inform my thinking, the document on the wall also notified me that, “Human rights should be protected by the rule of law.” That also sounded like promising information to take home. Naturally, I did not know that this was the first document of its kind in history, or that it had come about as a direct result of the murder of millions of European Jews. I think I knew vaguely that something unspeakable had happened to my people – and that the reason it was unspeakable was that it never came up at our dinner table, where father was the arbiter of everything worth knowing. Yet reading that seminal document on the school walls, I sensed that it represented protection …from something I couldn’t fathom.

I now believe that the Holocaust, which I learned about in incremental pieces over my teenage years, was a root, if not *the* root, of my passion for justice, for *universal* human rights, and for the rule of law. I am a third-generation Canadian, not a direct

survivor of that event; however, like many Jews, I carry with me a sharp awareness of what might have been were it not for my grandparents' chance emigration from Eastern Europe to Canada at the turn of the 20th century. It is I believe , at least in part, this razor's edge of understanding that has led me to explore the universal foundations of experience and extreme vulnerability, including the psychological factors that come into play when community breaks down, moral inhibitions fail, and criminality is normalized. And here I would like to mention that, as many of you may know, I have just returned from Greece, where these three factors – community break down, a failure of moral inhibition, and emergent criminality – are clearly visible. The ability to enforce the law and sustain order, the necessary prerogatives of leadership, is failing in the streets of Athens. The rise of a populist neo-Nazi party is testament to what can when economic and social structures begin to collapse, even in an established democracy.

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Among the tentative inferences I have drawn across the forty years of my writing life, a few stand out from the rest: The first is the substantive importance of *universal* human rights as a strategy for peace. To frame rights, law and justice as the entitlement of the few is always dangerous, for the *excluded* are likely to be *preyed upon* as beings of lesser worth. A second observation is that the now-commonplace phrase – no *lasting* peace without justice of some kind – is likely true, with a stress on the word 'lasting.' I have seen from my study of historical memory in places that have experienced conflict, followed by what may appear to be a stable peace, that the victims of major offenses such as crimes against humanity and genocide will eventually demand some form of accountability. Even if they have remained cowed and silent for years. Even if the

justice they receive is a mere apology for the harm they endured. This was true in post-war Germany and in post-war France. It was true in South Africa during the transition away from apartheid. *Lack* of accountability continues to be a major problem for Armenians a century after the Turkish genocide, and for diaspora Chinese after the so-called Rape of Nanjing in 1937. The passage of time matters not to victims and their descendants. Nor does it matter to the many conscience-stricken citizens of perpetrator nations who refuse to accept what was carried out in their names.

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I was half way through my fourth book before I realized that I had spent the previous 15 years writing about interrelated themes. Now I am able to articulate them. They are, briefly: How do nations remember, or choose not to remember, their national histories after war and other crises? And are there social and political consequences to these memory choices? Second, how and why does the public consensus with regard to minorities in mixed ethnic societies sometimes change from tolerance to intolerance? How is it that seemingly ordinary people can be led with such apparent ease to commit atrocities against people who were their friends and neighbours? And finally, what might be needed to rebalance the social pendulum after war and other major crises?

These are Meta questions – and frankly, if I had been able to articulate them at the start I probably would have scared myself to death and not proceeded. I certainly do not claim to have definitive answers. It is enough for me to have formulated a few questions.

Somewhere along the way the seminal importance of the rule of law and justice presented itself to me as my destination. Justice as a reconciler of historical memory. Justice as relief for the victims of major crimes. Justice as push back against the long-

accepted impunity of perpetrators, who must be held accountable in the short or long term if societies are to properly regain their footing after conflict. Justice as a many-featured instrument of possible reconciliation among peoples.

In addition to formal trials, my understanding of justice includes soft approaches, such as official and unofficial apologies, which, as I mentioned, is sometimes all that can be mustered. Serge Klarsfeld, the French holocaust survivor who, in the 1980s, tracked down the Nazi Klaus Barbie in his Bolivian hiding place, once told me that in spite of all his lobbying for a public trial he would have been satisfied with just a sign of remorse from this ruthless man. But there was nothing. I also think truth and reconciliation commissions are a useful tool if they are handled properly, which isn't always the case.

Justice is complex. We know that the strands of culpability are not easy to tease apart. I shall never forget an intense conversation with Louise Arbour when she was the chief prosecutor of the ICTY. Although her court properly tried individual perpetrators for individual acts, she spoke openly about the indeterminate boundaries of guilt in post-conflict societies, where specific atrocities may have been committed by just a few, but were approved of and tolerated by many. Collaboration. Complicity. What the Germans call *mitlaufer* - people who just go along with the prevailing ethos. These are the human complexities that transcend the walls of international courtrooms. They remind us of our limitations.

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When I examine the priorities of the World Federalist Movement, I note that this organization has been at the cutting edge of global internationalism for decades – and that your work unfailingly promotes the common, or public, good. This ancient idea has had its ups and downs. The Greeks articulated it first. In our own time the notion of a public good fell into disrepute in the 1980s when US president Ronald Reagan began to promote his trickle-down economic theories. Unfortunately the nourishing waters of equality *failed* to trickle down; in fact the putative droplets defied the laws of gravity and trickled *up* – only to explode in scandal almost three decades later. The "me" generation that emerged from the same ideology justified selfishness. The writings of Ayn Rand, today more popular than ever, openly promote disdain for the disadvantaged. Hyper-individualism replaced collective responsibility, which is a sine qua non of citizenship.

Before, throughout, and after - popular or not - World Federalism has held to the foundational ideal of citizenship, and not just within national boundaries. To understand this, as I think people increasingly do, largely through the environmental movement, opens a wide lens on the world and alters one's perspective about what needs to be done. The World Federalist Movement has consistently been the first to promote ideas that were first seen as extravagant, but have come to pass, such as a permanent international criminal court, and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. You were an intellectual backbone of peacekeeping, for which Lester Pearson, a Canadian prime minister, won the Nobel Prize. Today you advocate the absolutely necessary reform of the Security Council. And the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly to improve the democratic character of global governance – an idea that is slowly attracting attention as the Security Council looks increasingly dysfunctional.

As a Canadian, I am honoured to point to the seminal tenure of Lloyd Axworthy as Canada's minister of foreign affairs. Mr. Axworthy shifted the focus of this country away from traditional issues of territorial security to human security - to the protection of civilians – on grounds that, as the 20th century drew to a close, sovereign states were less able to shield their citizens from abuse; indeed, the sovereign frequently transformed himself into the prime abuser, and has continued to do so in Iraq, Libya and Syria, to name just a few. That Mr. Axworthy is a long-time member of the World Federalist Movement does not surprise me. Thank you Lloyd Axworthy from this Canadian.

The seminal idea of human security also paved the way for Canada to become the prime mover in a group of like-minded states that in 1998 miraculously agreed to the Rome Statute, the treaty underpinning the world's first permanent international criminal court. This is my chance to thank Bill Pace, a former World Federalist Movement president and the driving force behind the Coalition for an International Criminal Court, a brilliant NGO comprising 2,500 civil society organizations in 150 different countries that works to strengthen international cooperation with the ICC and to ensure that the Court is fair, effective and independent.

I met Bill in New York more than a decade ago. He inspired me with his passion for justice - and with his utter conviction that a permanent International Criminal Court was the missing link in the world order. Bill shared his remarkable theory about the surprising birth of the court – an event no one in his or her rational mind might have predicted would happen as quickly as it did. I recount Bill's story in The Sun Climbs Slow as well as the extraordinarily dramatic tale of how the delegates to the Rome

Conference finally reached agreement in a Cinderella moment as the clock struck midnight.

On a personal note, the launch of the ICC 10 years ago helped convince me of something my historical work was already suggesting; that chance plays a larger role in global politics than rationalists care like to acknowledge. Too often A does *not* lead necessarily to B, or if it does, it *may* be because of an unexpected C factor – which is what happened when an unlikely confluence of world events, starting with the end of the Cold War, made the birth of a permanent ICC possible.

I later met Bill Pace in The Hague on several ICC-related occasions. Each time he inspired me anew to pursue my own path as a writer. Thank you, Bill, for all you have done.

Some years ago I interviewed the late Robert McNamara. I wanted to meet him because I had learned that when the Rome Statute lay unsigned on the desk of President Clinton, he, McNamara, had called Ben Ferencz, who, as everyone here knows, had been agitating for an ICC for half a century. I wanted to understand why the man who continued to personify the Vietnam War in the eyes of so many still-angry Americans had made that call.

He was an old man, close to 90, and he told me he had been doing a lot of thinking. He realized that economic sanctions were largely ineffective and that military intervention was a rough, crude instrument. There had to be a third option, he said. He had come to believe that option was international justice.

Towards the end of our conversation, he began to speak about something he said would not have crossed his mind when he was younger. The power of empathy. Not

sympathy, but empathy: the ability to imagine oneself into the person of another and see the world though his or her eyes. Empathy is a tool for understanding events from an opposing view, he said. He now believed that knowledge so gleaned should be a strategic element of military planning. As evidence he cited his 1995 visit with North Vietnam's former foreign minister, the man who had been his enemy counterpart during the war. He said he was shocked to learn that while the US believed that the war was about maintaining the security of the West by preventing the Communist Chinese and the Communist Soviets from controlling South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese thought of the conflict as a civil war. *They* saw the United States as a colonial power – substituting for France - a not unreasonable conclusion since US involvement on behalf of the French had started in 1950, a full six years before the French finally withdrew. The Vietnamese minister said to McNamara: "Mr. McNamara, if you had ever read a history book you would have known that we are not the pawns of the Chinese or the Russians. We have been fighting the Chinese for 1,000 years. No amount of pressure would have stopped us fighting for our national independence."

It was a sobering image, I thought. Two once-powerful, now-elderly men belatedly clarifying fatal misunderstandings.

I recount this telling story because I too believe in the power of empathy as a means of widening perception. Empathy in combination with historical study for fact and context, and literature for deeper understanding and texture. When she spoke of the elusive difficulties of seeking justice in war-torn Bosnia, Louise Arbour also seemed to be hinting at a textured understanding of the sort Robert McNamara had come to so late in his life.

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I wish to dedicate this award to memory of both my parents. To the early stimulation I received at our family dinner table where the thrilling world of ideas first entered my life; and where feeling – projective, imaginative feeling – was encouraged.

And thank you World Federalists. I am profoundly honoured to be recognized by this organization whose fundamental values I share.