

MR. DESMOND TUTU'S ADDRESS. CATALONIA INTERNATIONAL PRIZE

1. Introduction

Thank you for recognising the pre-eminent position that social justice occupies in our shared world today.

Across the planet, people are waking up to the realisation that *business as usual* is no longer good enough if we, human beings, are to avert twin disasters of our own making: environmental degradation and socio-economic inequity.

Across the planet, good people have risen to challenge injustice. To challenge the rights of governments and corporations to profit at the expense of the people and the world. To challenge discrimination and prejudice and hatred and wickedness. To challenge the status quo, as it were, that seems to be driving us – inexorably – to the precipice.

I am honoured and humbled to accept this award on behalf of this magnificent group of socially conscious people – of activists for the common good of human beings and our world.

A diverse, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-skilled lot...

- From those who are engaged in saving girls from being trapped in abusive marriages in sub-Saharan Africa;
- To those who support divesting in fossil fuel companies, and in Israel;
- To those who oppose homophobic legislation in Uganda;
- To those who support the closure of the despicable prison in Guantanamo Bay;

- To those in the medical support field who care for the refugees in Syria;
- To those extraordinary women who dry the eyes of children orphaned by AIDS in my own country, South Africa;
- To those who support the right of the Catalan people – and citizens of other territories from Tibet to the Falkland Islands – to peacefully determine their destiny...

There are many more. I accept this award on all of their behalf. They have the wisdom and the courage, and they do the work – but I get the credit. Thank you.

2. Active citizens

I travelled to Catalunya from the north of Canada, where I was invited to speak at a First Nations conference convened to discuss what are termed, the *tar sands fields*.

Fuel companies have discovered the potential to make masses of money by extracting oil from this sand.

To them, these profits outweigh the fact that this form of harvesting oil is said to be the messiest and most environmentally diabolical on earth.

And the profits outweigh the rights of the First People in the formerly pristine region known as Northern Alberta.

They make a mockery of the words and spirit of the treaties that the First Nations signed with Queen Victoria more than 100 years ago.

These treaties guaranteed the first people of Canada the right to practice traditional ways of living “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow”.

The sun still shines in Northern Alberta, but for how long the grass will continue to grow, and the rivers to flow, is very much in the air, in the increasingly polluted atmosphere...

When one considers the impacts humans have already made on the world's climate, one wonders how people can be so shortsighted, so blinded by profit and greed.

I have stood in solidarity with communities across Canada and the United States that are opposing the proposed oil sands extraction, and the pipelines to move the oil all the way south to the Gulf of Mexico.

The struggle of citizens against this potentially calamitous project puts them on the frontline of the most important struggle in the world today.

3. One family, one world, many countries

God made people with the intention for people to share the world.

But, long ago, people decided sharing was not the best option, so they set about dividing the world into pieces that they had the power to manage, manipulate and exploit without interference from other groups of people.

Thus, for thousands of years the world has witnessed the rise and fall of powerful leaders, cities, principalities, empires, unions and states.

The history of cartography, or map-making, is thought to begin approximately 8000 years ago – though there are earlier examples of people having mapped the heavens.

The earliest “world maps” were developed for two reasons: (1) To enable navigation and (2) To accurately depict who owned what.

These are the so-called “physical” and “political” maps that we have today.

The physical maps showing God’s world, as it was created, in all its natural topographical and oceanic and riverine splendour; the political maps showing how people have arbitrarily carved it up, the sizes and shapes of the pieces determined not by the needs or desires of the people but by the ability of the rich and the powerful to control them.

One map, with constant physical features that have – until very recently – not been affected by people. The other, with features that have changed over the centuries reflecting human power and flux.

We live today in what has been termed a global village. Communication, information and travel technology enables us – virtually – to be in many places at the same time. And there is a global economic system that allows people to say that can quite literally lead to a sneeze on Wall Street leading to stock exchanges in far-flung places catching a cold.

We need to re-draw the political map to reflect human interest, in the context of our so-called globalized world.

We need to reconfigure, in our hearts and our minds, the notions we have learned from our history and our parents of “us” and “them”.

There is only “us”. It doesn’t matter what nationality flag is hanging in the garden or how we look or whom we love, we are members of one family, the human family – God’s family.

Surely it's time for us to begin to view ourselves as sisters and brothers with mutual interests with regards to what we want to leave behind for our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren to come.

In South Africa, we refer to the essence of being human as *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – *Ubuntu* – you are known for your generosity.

We think of ourselves far too frequently as individuals, separated from one another. But we are connected, and what we do affects the whole world. When we do good, it fans out; it is for the whole of humanity.

Peoples' power to effect positive change

When the critical mass of citizens of any region or nation act with common purpose to achieve a righteous objective they become an irresistible force.

Those who would seek to stop them may succeed for a while, at great cost, but will inevitably discover that resistance is futile.

Broad-minded and open-hearted settlement discussions, in which all parties necessarily make concessions for mutual benefit, are infinitely preferable.

The struggle of the Catalan people for an independent state burst to the attention of the world in 2012 when more than a million people – some estimate 1.5 million – gathered in central Barcelona for the largest demonstration in the city's history.

This was followed a year later by even more people linking hands to form a 400 kilometer long human chain from the north to south of Catalunya.

But Spain's parliament, in April, formally rejected Catalunya's petition to hold a referendum to gauge the opinion of the people; the rejection was followed by a public hardening of positions by both sides.

The violent invasion by rightwing thugs of a Catalan cultural center in Madrid last year was a worrying sign of what could be to come.

Common sense seems to say that if the majority of the seven million citizens of Catalunya crave independence, Spain's central government should listen.

The parties should be discussing how independence might best be achieved for Catalans and citizens of the rest of Spain, and what kind of future relationship would benefit most of the people.

Surely it makes more sense to jointly plot the future than to allow relationships to deteriorate – and risk Catalunya unilaterally declaring independence. I use the word “risk” advisedly, because any form of unilateralism is second best to consensus and agreement.

The sun will rise again tomorrow – even over the oil sands fields in Northern Alberta, for the time being, at least. Those sisters and brothers who find themselves on either side of Catalunya's border will remain – well – sisters and brothers in our one shared world.

Hold hands and plot the best future for all. That has to be your collective first prize.

I thank you.

God bless you.