

Third Rally of Hope Keynote Address: The Absence of War Is Not Good Enough

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Dear Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, excellencies, participants and viewers from around the world, ladies and gentlemen, dear hosts from the Universal Peace Federation, thank you wholeheartedly for inviting me to join you today. For me to speak to you at this Rally of Hope is indeed a real honor. Madam Dr. Moon, ladies and gentlemen, seventy years ago, my country, the Kingdom of Belgium, was one of those nations that engaged in the UN-led effort to defend freedom and to protect Korean citizens from communist invasion. More than three thousand volunteering Belgian soldiers joined in a battle that made our shared values prevail.

In Belgium, it has been, since then, a matter of collective pride to witness the tremendous

development Korea achieved in becoming not only a wealthy and prosperous nation but also a leading advocate for freedom, peace, democracy and human dignity. That these impressive achievements and their underpinning values may soon flourish on the entire, re-united Korean Peninsula for the benefit of all Korean citizens is still our hope today. For that reason, it was, back in September 2010, for me and my fellow compatriots, such an unforgettable experience to host a delegation of the Universal Peace Federation and the world-class choir, the Little Angels, in Brussels. Let me add that today how Korea is a beacon of hope for the way the country has managed to deal with COVID-19 as an open and free society of responsible citizens.

The human factor is the key

Ladies and gentlemen, our admiration and gratitude also go to you Dr. Moon and to the so important work the Universal Peace Federation is doing. Ladies and gentlemen, of course, our societies are structured through institutions, through constitutions and laws, through rules, regulations, authorities, and administrations. But at the end of the day, it is the people that make the real difference. All the efforts you, Madam Moon, and your late husband have undertaken and are achieving, all the good and crucial work the Universal Peace Federation is performing day after day is what makes the real difference, what brings lasting progress, and what today can bring back the hope we so much need in these dark and difficult times. This is the hope for citizens and societies, the hope for the values of peaceful coexistence, for international understanding, and for inclusive progress, respect, and human rights. Indeed, today more than ever in so many decades, we need a surplus of courage, a surplus of hope, of leadership, of understanding without borders to face and overcome the daunting challenges of our time. Because indeed, the challenges we are facing are both numerous and extremely demanding. This Rally of Hope is taking place when we are facing in all parts of the world the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus is hitting and destroying our health, it is hitting and destroying our economies and it is hitting and destroying the very essence of our collective and personal interactions.

This is a fragile moment

Ladies and Gentlemen, this virus knows no borders, the effective fight against it should not either. But furthermore, the present focus on COVID-19 should not hide the global challenges we already were confronted with before. These have become even more daunting since last Spring: the potentially disastrous effects of climate change, global warming, and our mishandling of nature, the economic turmoil, and downturn, the rise of extremism and violent terrorism, exacerbated racial and religious antagonism, conflict, and tension between nations, the unraveling of crucially important multilateral institutions that brought us so much progress and so often prevented war and violence. All these mutually reinforcing challenges confront us with the urgent need for effective action. And all these challenges have in common that they can only be overcome by more international understanding and working together. We need more cooperation in engineering the so-needed vaccine, in bringing help and relief to the victims, especially in poorer parts of the world, and in ensuring access to care and cure for all. We surely can effectively overcome COVID-19 if we join forces. And we can resume the path of economic and social progress if we resist populism, if we resist protectionism, if we resist selfishness.

These threats to a peaceful world and to continued progress have been flourishing for too long and in too many places, without sufficient reaction, without being countered. We have today, with all people of goodwill -- including not least the newly elected US leadership -- to stand up and to speak loudly against the so-called simple solutions fueled by populism and demagoguery. Slogans and simple solutions that are just bringing deadlock, increasing difficulties, and exacerbating scapegoating and antagonism. We have today, with all people that stand for freedom and cooperation, to make clear that protectionism and unfair barriers for transborder trade and investment lead to a loss of opportunities and block the elevator to progress for developing countries.

We have today to loudly say that peace is much more than the absence of war, that we should actively promote fairness, security, and tolerance and that war never brings lasting, sustainable solutions to conflict. This so much needed action by all world citizens of goodwill is an endeavor that just cannot be left to the political world alone. Indeed, our more horizontal, chaotic, and fragmented world today needs positive impulses from all ordinary citizens, from private organizations, from businesses, and from all the positive societal forces of the human family. It is more than ever needed to offer platforms for common reflection, real dialogue, and respectful, inclusive action both in our own places and at the global level. We need to increase the efforts to bring together, to federate. And that is exactly what UPF does through these Rallies of Hope.

Let me thus conclude by commending you for this. Your work is important, it is crucial, it is the pathway to a better future, a beacon of hope in these darkest times. Thank you very much for your attention.