

*Peace in the
Middle East: A Global
Challenge and a
Human Imperative*

Hanan Ashrawi

2003 City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture

CPACS Occasional Paper No. 03/3



Centre for Peace
& Conflict Studies



The University of Sydney

Sydney  Peace
Foundation

ISBN 1 86487 611 5

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2003 City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture
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Complete transcript of the 2003 City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture as delivered by Hanan Ashrawi at the
Seymour Centre, Sydney on 5 November 2003

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First published 2003, by:
The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Sydney
NSW 2006
Australia

City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture 2003
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**Introduction by Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees,
Director of the Sydney Peace Foundation**

Let me first of all acknowledge the Eora people: the traditional owners of this land. They have given us a legacy and a responsibility to address the issues of peace with justice. Not peace, and you'll hear me on this theme many times – we've heard about it many times in the past few weeks – not peace, but peace with justice. There is a wonderful poem by the Aboriginal poet Jack Davis called 'Eulogy for Peace by an Old Aboriginal'. It contains the lines 'why does white man always want to stand up and fight for? Why doesn't he sit down quiet and talk by fire?' (There is no pun on the word fire.) And that's in a way what the responsibilities of the Sydney Peace Foundation are: to have a dialogue, as it were, metaphorically, to talk by fire. To produce an interesting partnership – and it's not a sponsorship; it's a partnership – between the corporate, media, and community sectors and academic interest.

In the sign up there you'll see the partners for peace identified and I want to acknowledge them, because it gives us an opportunity to talk and to meet across professional boundaries, across occupational boundaries, across political and religious boundaries. I want to acknowledge the important support we've received from Rio Tinto, from Citigroup, from Gilbert and Tobin, from Publishing and Broadcasting Limited, and I am very pleased to have my colleague, the current chair of the Sydney Peace Foundation, Director of PBL Limited, James McLachlan, on the stage with me. And the City of Sydney of course is responsible for this lecture, it is called 'the City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture' and it is appropriate that it should have the imprimatur of this significant international city.

I am in some ways a part-time academic – I have always been a part-time academic some of my colleagues will think – so I am not going to give a definition about peace with justice. I thought I would quickly run through the names of the previous recipients of the Sydney Peace Prize and give you the titles of their lectures so that you can see the cosmopolitan flavour of what we are about. Mohammad Yunus, that visionary founder of the Grameen Bank for the poor, spoke in this auditorium about peace being freedom from poverty. He was followed a year later by one of the giants of the 20th Century, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who spoke about peace through reconciliation, at a time when we were trying to give a particular momentum to our responsibility for reconciliation with the indigenous people of Australia. He was followed by the leader of the newest nation in the world: the wonderful painter and even more significant poet, who had been a guerrilla fighter and guerrilla leader for 17 years, Xanana Gusmão, who spoke about building peace: the challenge for East Timor. That was followed another year later by someone we

desperately miss on the public stage of Australian life: Sir William Deane. Bill Deane was rewarded for his work with indigenous people as a priority for the peace with justice agenda. Then came someone whom I like to think of - and I used to tease her about this - as being the kind of Eleanor Roosevelt of the Western world in terms of her commitment to human rights: former President of Ireland, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who spoke about the attainment of human rights as being the centrepiece of any peace agenda.

In preparation for this year our deliberations on ten or twelve nominations included consideration of the long and significant career of Hanan Ashrawi. It concerned her work for human rights, the work for openness and democracy, the significant work for the advocacy for the philosophy of non-violence. And bearing in mind also her appearance on the Western world stage as being the very important spokesperson for the Palestinian authority in the Madrid and Washington Peace Talks, which led to that famous picture as I recall, when Bill Clinton managed to produce a handshake between Rabin and Arafat.

It is important to know that we are acknowledging the work of Hanan Ashrawi over four decades or more. I think I said that to Hanan over the phone in Ramallah a couple of weeks ago, and she said 'is it that long?' But if you read the wonderful 'This Side of Peace', which is half of an autobiography - the other half is yet to come - you'll know why we have made this judgement, and we can make this judgement without any kind of reference to a peace settlement, desperately though the world needs it, desperately though the people of Palestine and Israel need it, between Israel and Palestine. I do want to say again as slowly, as carefully, as unemotionally as possible to everyone, including our colleagues in the media, that the business of struggling for peace with justice involves small victories every day, on issues like unemployment, on issues like civil rights, on issues like legal aid, and there are merits about that, notwithstanding the absence of any peace settlement. It's important to say that.

The other thing that impressed us was the embrace of humanity that characterises Hanan's work and writing as a Professor of Literature, as a poet, as well as a human rights activist and legislator and so on. It really conveys I think what Oodjeroo of the tribe Nunucall said in a poem about human rights: 'I am for human kind, not colour jibes, I am international, never mind tribes, I am international, never mind place, I am for humanity, all one race.' And to avoid the notion - and I am almost finished Hanan, I am not giving the lecture myself - to avoid the notion that I am only going to refer to indigenous poets, I looked at an Israeli poet and a Palestinian poet, both of whom I am very fond, and each of them speaks of the terribly fractious nature of life in that part of the world. Each of them speaks almost uncannily, almost with the same words and the same tone, about the lack of coherence that is available for people: the lack of political, moral and intellectual coherence. Yehuda Amichai is the Israeli poet and he speaks about the notion 'we are like people who go out of their house whole in the morning but return in the evening as small change. Like letters with no addresses and no one to receive them.' And that's almost echoed by Mahmoud

Darwish in the poem about travelling: 'we are all travellers around the world, but we return to nowhere, as if travelling is the way of the clouds. We are a country of words but speak speak, somebody please speak', he says, 'so that we know how our travels may end.'

Well, we have invited to Sydney, Australia to give the 2003 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture, somebody whom I now have great pleasure inviting to speak: Dr Hanan Ashrawi.

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Introductory comments

I am indeed overwhelmed. Is there any way I can see the audience or do I have to look into a sea of blackness? I like to see people's faces when I speak and look into their eyes. [Lights are raised] Thank you. I hope I did not ruin anything in the production but it is much better that we recognise each other and our humanity, our common humanity, as we are forging together a common language. Let me say I am indeed overwhelmed by this wonderful and warm reception. Here at the airport, those who managed to get through, at the hotel, those who woke up very early, and everywhere. Those who tried to convey the erroneous impression that Sydney is an inhospitable place have been proven wrong, definitely.

So let me start by thanking you for coming here this evening, to share these words together, a message that I hope would be global and human, but anything that is global and human always emanates from a specific condition. And we deal with that condition as a starting point, as a jumping board so to speak, to deal with larger contexts. So I thank you, and let me thank James McLachlan and the work of the Sydney Peace Foundation and your colleagues. I would like to thank Stuart Rees: I think what he has had to put up with has been just beyond sane. Let me congratulate you, not just for maintaining your sanity, but for maintaining your humanity and your kindness and your sense of humour: very important.

Also Megan and Sarah [who sang the opening 'Song of Peace'], you did promise something really exceptional, and it is exceptional and I enjoyed the aesthetics, the substance, the method and your presence. Thank you very much for this very significant contribution. The people of Sydney and Australia are very privileged to have you among them giving such a wonderful message in such a beautiful way.

And these flowers just came in from the Jews Against the Occupation. I acknowledge the flowers and their wonderful message. And there are too many people to thank individually, but let me just say that I did receive those hundreds and hundreds of emails and petitions. I did try to read all of them, but I have been out of commission for the last few days – I think I lost Tuesday on my way here – but I did try to respond, and I will, I promise once I get back I will respond to all the emails, all the messages of encouragement and hope and support, and I do acknowledge that there is a common commitment, humanity, a message of peace, that goes beyond all the hate language and diatribes that I felt were rather petty given the grandeur of the occasion and your endeavours.

I would like to thank also the indigenous people of Australia, the aboriginal people, who have allowed us with their hospitality to be here, on their ground, on the land that they own. I do feel that here too is a process of historical redemption and acknowledgement and recognition of identity and authenticity and I thank you all for it: this is a process of healing as well.

And I am going to do something I rarely do but I promised Stuart I would do it, I am going to read a speech. I usually like not to read a speech, but rather to exchange ideas spontaneously, however because the occasion calls for a written text, I have prepared a written text, and I will present it in as little a boring manner as possible – I know written speeches can be very boring. But I wrote that text, I wrote that speech, specifically disregarding any of the imposed or extraneous attacks, diatribes, smear campaigns and so on, because I felt there has to be a self-contained integrity and honesty to that speech and it should not be hijacked by any attempt at illegitimising not just myself but the Palestinians and all those forces who are working for a just peace.

So I will not allow the hate campaign to taint the speech or the message. If you remember in 1991 when we went to the Madrid peace process, I said very openly then that our motivation is to seek a just peace and to break through history, and to rescue both Palestinians and Israelis from this lethal embrace and abnormal situation of occupier and occupied. But I also said that our land is being confiscated. They are attempting to confiscate our voice and our will, and I said we will stand up to all these three, we will not allow our land, nor our voice, nor our will, to be confiscated, or to be besieged. And therefore here, once again, I promise you that our message, our joint message, and our Palestinian narrative will be maintained, and will not be tainted by these attempts at denying our very humanity. I do not believe that the only good Palestinian is a Palestinian who abandons his or her identity or struggle. I believe that a good Palestinian is a Palestinian who remains true to his or her own legacy, identity, cause and struggle, and at the same time understands that 'the other' is there as a part of a common humanity and that peace can be made on the basis of mutual recognition and accommodation.

So I will not be a broken or a silenced Palestinian, especially when it comes to the cause of peace, and I will continue to speak out against injustice and oppression, everywhere, and I will continue to relay my people's message, because I don't believe peace is made by defeated people. It is not made through capitulation. Peace is made through conviction, and courage, strength and tenacity, all those qualities that you have been displaying here this evening.

I will begin reading the text now – I might depart here and there from the text, but again as an academic I give myself the privilege, once in a while, of deconstructing a few texts.

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Allow me to address you as friends, sisters and brothers, which is our usual Palestinian and Arabic address.

The Sydney Peace Foundation, its members and partners, as well as its distinguished Director, Professor Stuart Rees, have taken the difficult decision to make a difference, to stand up for justice and the pursuit of peace, and to intervene as a positive force in the resolution of global conflicts. I am truly honoured to be included in this endeavour among such distinguished recipients of the Sydney Peace Prize, many of whom are personal friends of mine, and I feel empowered by their recognition as well.

May I also view this prize as a recognition of all those who have maintained an unwavering commitment to a just resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, who have defied the prevailing dynamic of violence and the mutual infliction of pain and delegitimation, and who continue to provide hope in the midst of despair on both sides of the 'divide'. Palestinians and Israelis, as well as people of good conscience throughout the world, will share the empowerment of this recognition as a significant force for reconciliation and inclusion.

You too have chosen courageously to take sides in the struggle against injustice as opposed to the refuge of so-called neutrality or the self-interest of power. You have refused to be deflected, intimidated, or silenced, exercising a tenacity and determination that are rare attributes of moral leadership and genuine service. In this context, the Premier of New South Wales, Bob Carr, stands out as the most appropriate embodiment of these qualities. For that too, I am truly grateful.

It is precisely during such times of adversity and pain, of violence and victimisation, of unilateralism and militarism, of ideological fundamentalism and absolutist exclusivity, that the world is most in need of voices and forces of sanity, reason and moral responsibility - the genuine building blocks of peace. As we witness attempts at imposing a simplistic view of a Manichean universe, of polarization and reductive stereotypes of good and evil, or if you wish to oversimplify it further: you are with us, or against us – sorry about that, that was rather snide – [laughter] we are most in need of those who will engage in a redemptive validation of pluralism, tolerance, diversity, authenticity of identity, and the comprehensive engagement in collective responsibility. As such, it is up to us jointly to give both a voice and an audience to the silenced, and to grant space and time to the excluded and the denied.

Such is the nature of intervention that the world requires, not only to resolve conflicts but also to prevent them from erupting or generating their own destructive forces that could spiral out of control. No conflict should take us by surprise, for all the symptoms are recognisable and the components definable. Longstanding grievances and inequities have become all too familiar and

have been left to fester on their own or to be manipulated by the strong as a means of victimising the weak. The nature of pre-emptive action must be, by necessity and by choice, constructive, peaceful, and therapeutic.

Since an aspect of globalisation is the redefinition of enemies and allies, as we have seen by the previous speakers and the recipients of this award, a redefinition of friends and foes, crossing national, territorial, and cultural boundaries, the process of rectification must also utilise the means made available by the knowledge and IT revolution as tools of contemporary global realities. Thus hunger, poverty, illiteracy, the spread of disease, the degradation of the environment, the disenfranchisement of the weak - and in particular in our case, and in many Third World cultures, this refers mainly to women and to the young - the suspension of human rights; among others, these are all universal enemies that require the collective effort of universal allies. Human-based development programs and inclusive systems of governance remain the most appropriate means of empowerment.

This of course is particularly true of the Arab world. Those of you who have read the Arab Human Development Report, the second one that came out two weeks ago, will understand how alarming the situation is, and how much we are in need of collective intervention and very serious reconsiderations, and this is in order to embark on a genuine strategy of human-based development, and a genuine strategy for peace and empowerment.

Most significantly, the indispensable universal instruments remain those that ascertain a global rule of law, encompassing both state and non-state actors, capable of assessing culpability, providing accountability, and ensuring redress with justice. The problem has always been that the Palestinians have been in many cases deprived of the protection of the law, of international law, while the Israeli occupation was given impunity and immunity actually, and treated as a country above the law. The time has come to encompass both within the law. And this stands for all situations where you have disparity of power, or where you have oppressor and oppressed. Along with the multilateral institutions of these universal instruments, they remain safeguards against unilateral power on the rampage or destructive military pre-emption on the basis of subjective criteria or, put bluntly, self-interest and power.

With that in mind, peace in the Middle East, or the just solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, can be addressed in its proper context as the longest standing case of military occupation and as the most persistent unresolved case of denial, dispossession and exile in contemporary history. As such, it is also an anachronism in that it has all the components of a colonial condition in a post neo-colonial world, even though I do recognise the fact that there is a re-introduction of colonialism as in the invasion of Iraq and the presentation of a situation of occupation or the imposition of democracy by military means, so we do have a new colonial situation, which we have to address as well. It is the only remaining military, longest standing let's say colonial

situation, plus it has all the requirements of national self-determination as a basis of nascent statehood in a world that is moving towards regional and global redefinitions, away actually from the traditional 19th century definition of a nation-state.

Regionally, the conflict has provided a convenient excuse for the suspension of human rights, the evasion of democratic systems of governance, the waste of natural and human resources, and the perpetuation of centralised regimes that have held back the challenges of development - all under the guise of 'national security' and external military threats. For decades, war, or the threat of military hostilities, has served to maintain the status quo and has framed the region within misplaced notions of self-defence that contributed to the rising power of extremism and fundamentalism rather than human empowerment and global engagement.

On the other hand, peace, or the prospect thereof, is possibly the most effective force for dislodging such notions and trends, becoming, de facto, the most destabilising factor in a region suffering from an imposed state of suspended animation. So those of you who think that peace is a stabilising factor, you have to understand that in cases where the absence of peace has been the norm, and has been used to maintain strict control, the threat or the prospect of peace can be a destabilising factor, and must be addressed as such, but only in the short term, as I will explain.

The legacy of colonialism clearly has served the interests of those in power, predominantly client regimes, who sought to maintain control, thereby leading to the collusion of internal and external forces in the exclusion of the people as a whole. A just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli (and hence Arab-Israeli) conflict would unleash all those forces so far held in abeyance, but forming the indispensable energy for sustainable progress, development, democratisation, and regional integration, and this is something we have to work towards. While threatening short-term stability based on restrictive and constrictive norms and patterns, it constitutes the sole mechanism for any stability that can lay claim to permanence on the basis of contemporary and future-oriented political, social, cultural, and economic systems of cooperation and interdependence.

Globally, the Palestinian question remains central to any human vision of globalisation as a test of the collective will to intervene and to maintain a global rule of law based on operative principles of justice and historical redemption. Granted, the current dynamic is antithetical to the aspirations of peacemakers who had based their endeavours on the universality of human rights, parity before the law, positive intervention, and the non-violent resolution of conflicts through redress and the elimination of grievances. A serious paradigm shift is necessary for the restoration of these human values that have long been subverted, particularly in the aftermath of September 11 and the triumph of the neoconservatives and fundamentalist ideologues in key power centres.

The logic of peace that had been formulated painstakingly (and painfully) as the substance of Palestinian-Israeli encounters and dialogues – and heaven knows I have had my share of those, from the early seventies actually, even long before negotiations – this logic is currently being drowned by the din of war drums and the frenzied mutual infliction of pain over the last three years in particular. Such tragic and unprecedented pervasive violence is not only eradicating previous achievements and agreements, but is also destroying the prospects of any future reconciliation. Its most alarming impact is on the perceptions and attitudes of both peoples, particularly in the regression towards the fallacies of the past and the stance of mutual negation emanating from the revival of deep-seated existential fears of survival.

Such fallacies and false assumptions must be boldly confronted and systematically deconstructed if there is any hope of extricating both sides from this lethal and self-perpetuating trap of mutual destruction. The notion that a whole nation can be brought to its knees by the use of unbridled violence, or that the will of a people can be defeated by military means must be discarded once and for all. Armies may be able to defeat other armies, but the limits of power are most apparent when used against civilians and non-combatants. Along with that, the fallacy that there is or can be a military solution to the conflict must be completely and irrevocably discarded.

Conversely, the emergence of the bizarre concept of a 'balance of terror' - I don't know whether you have heard of this expression, but this is a very troubling expression that is being used – the emergence of this concept has reinforced the irrational and immoral killing of civilians and the victimisation of the innocent. I have always maintained and will continue to maintain, that you should not do unto others what was done unto you. That even if your own people, if your own civilians are being targeted, adopting those means and methods that have been practised against you, that you condemn, when used against you, is not justified in any way whatsoever. And in this sense I have always said that acts of violence, regardless of the motivation or the reason, must stop immediately, must not be condoned, must not be encouraged, whether these are acts of suicide bombings in Israel, or whether these are acts of Apache gunship shelling and bombing in Palestine.

The drive for revenge, like the escalation of military brutality, has generated the most tragic and futile momentum for escalation and self-destruction. On both sides, the 'no holds barred' mindset has taken over as a mindless, visceral, repetitive response with horrific ramifications. The erroneous assumption that greater pain and punishment, or the escalation of failed measures would somehow lead to 'success' or the surrender of one side to the other is at the heart of the prevailing dynamic of death and devastation.

Related to that is the notion that a people under occupation will eventually come to be reconciled to the fact of their captivity and to accept their fate without struggling for freedom and dignity. Self-determination to the Palestinian people is not an abstraction, but the actual realisation and

enactment, of their identity on their own land, and a motivating force for independence and statehood. It is the final negation of the myth of a 'land without a people for a people without a land' that has long framed the rationalisation for the most extreme forms of Zionism that sought to deny the very existence and humanity of the Palestinians.

For the conflict to be resolved, its causes must be identified and solved, while grievances and fears on both sides must be addressed and laid to rest. Neither side can lay claim to a monopoly of pain and suffering, in the same way as it cannot claim exclusivity of narrative and legitimacy. Clearly, peace cannot be made incumbent upon converting all Palestinians to Zionism or transforming all Israelis to espouse Palestinian nationalism. There has to be a recognition that we are two separate peoples with separate narratives, but we have to create the discourse, the language, that will accommodate both narratives. I don't believe, as I said earlier, that the only good Palestinian is a defeated Palestinian, or the only good Israeli is an expelled Israeli. There has to be an understanding that there is a commonality of language and objectives, but that it has to be framed within a framework of a just and genuine and human-driven peace.

The denial or distortion of the narrative of the other has served as a convenient vehicle for the dehumanisation of the adversary and hence as a justification for all forms of violations and atrocities while evading accountability. And I am sure this is true of many other conflicts. It is very easy to dehumanise the other, therefore avoid any culpability or responsibility, and this has been a repetitive pattern in our conflict. Historical records must be reconciled, whether in the recognition of the horror of the holocaust and all its horrendous implications for humanity as a whole, or in the historical victimisation of the Palestinian people and their dual tragedy of dispossession and exile, on the one hand, and oppression and occupation on the other.

It should also become apparent, and I am going to be quite unorthodox in this presentation, that, ironically, in this context the Palestinians and Israelis have reached the stage of dependent legitimacies rather than a competition over a singular and mutually exclusive legitimacy. Since the essential requirement for peace lies in sharing the land of historical Palestine, and certainly we have made the historical compromise of accepting Israel on 78 percent and recognising Israel on 78 percent of historical Palestine, and demanding that 22 percent of historical Palestine left as occupied by the June 5th 1967 war. Since we have accepted the principle of sharing the land, it follows that there has to be a shared legitimacy based on parity and mutuality. Neither side can (or should be allowed to) destroy the other physically, morally, or legally. A full admission of equal value to human lives and rights must be internalised, with no claims to superiority on those most essential human values and attributes.

In the same way, there can be no exclusivity of claims - whether to the land, especially by those who are now attempting to expand, to take over, all of Palestine by building settlements and bypass roads and walls and also by a minority of Palestinians, not a large number but a distinct

minority, that still lays claim to all of historical Palestine. However that minority is not in power, while there are facts being created on the ground to lay claims to the whole land. So there can be no exclusivity of claims – whether to the land or to security or to the discourse and public presentation of the issues. Shared boundaries exist both as territorial and as moral/human concepts of proximity and interaction. Because nowadays the concept of boundaries is not just territorial or geographic. All states, all individuals, have to acknowledge that there are limits and boundaries. But also, the moment that you have limits and boundaries, you have created lines of interaction, not exclusion.

Security, therefore, is a factor of mutuality and interdependence, emanating from the core considerations of the totality of human imperatives, not selective. Historical, territorial, cultural, economic, social, personal, existential, legal, and political dimensions of security must shape the issues and drive the process beyond the narrow confines of military security. A human and humanistic strategic approach to peace is by definition one of integrated empowerment, rather than the stratagems of power politics or coercion or military control.

At the opposite pole, the fallacy of fundamentalism, or even divine intervention and dispensation, has been exploited to justify absolutism and exclusivity, thereby ending all hope of a solution based on accommodation, while claiming unrestricted license to kill and destroy. Extremist ideologies tend to thrive in times of despair and insecurity, and like the recourse to violence and militarism, they signal an absence of effective workable solutions and handles on reality.

Radicalisation is also a factor of distortion in the sweeping ideologies and simplistic generalisations of theories, and I am sure you discuss this in your courses, such as the 'clash of civilisations' or 'war among religions' or the imposition of democracy by force of arms. Increasing polarisation widens the gap and warps any vision of reconciliation, not only by depicting the conflict as part of a grand sweep of theological proportions, but primarily by rendering it impossible to resolve through available peaceful means of practical and legal disentanglement. Inevitability of conflict as defined by an abstract universal design is directly antithetical to responsibility and intervention. It is very convenient: if I am doing God's will, then I have free license. Or if I am doing God's will, then I don't have any responsibility.

By now it has become apparent that the assumption that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a purely bilateral issue and can be resolved by the two sides without third-party intervention is entirely false. It has been variously used to maintain the asymmetry of power, to justify the lack of political will or the impotence of external actors, and to sustain other false assumptions such as the 'peace through exhaustion' fallacy or 'intervention following sufficient bloodshed'. There has been a very cynical attitude lately to this conflict, and I have heard this openly from major politicians, saying there hasn't been enough bloodshed. How do you define enough bloodshed? People do not kill each other in order to make peace. People who are killing each other need intervention in order to

make peace. And the more bloodshed there is, the more motivation there is for further revenge and violence. On the contrary, it becomes even more imperative to intervene. It is a fallacy that warring parties get exhausted and make peace as a result of exhaustion. This is not a war, this is an occupation, anyway: a military occupation. Exhausted parties can probably conclude temporary truces that will not hold for long. Once you regain your strength, you will go at it again. Exhaustion has never led to peace. Only determination and courage and strength and energy and the willingness to take risks, this is what leads to peace.

The need for third-party intervention is not only a factor of balance, to redress or address the asymmetry of power, but an indispensable force for breaking the lethal cycle of violence and revenge, while providing a context for legality, arbitration, and guarantees. A genuine form of multilateralism and collective responsibility is the sine qua non of the resolution of this conflict. Artificial, unilateral, and power separation such as that represented by the expansionist apartheid wall is a recipe for further conflict and greater violence – not least for encapsulating many forms of coercive injustice including land and water theft, fragmentation of Palestinian reality and the creation of isolated ghettos, and imposing political boundaries that destroy the chances of a viable Palestinian state, hence of a just peace.

Palestinian nation building and statehood are imperative for peace and stability throughout the region. This is the absent ingredient: the absent state. As we said in the Madrid speech: there is no absent people in the Middle East, there is an absent state in the Middle East. Democracy and separation of powers, the rule of law and respect for human rights, institution building and good governance, transparent accountability and reform – all are the ingredients of viable Palestinian statehood. And these are a challenge, indeed we are working on those, every step of the way, and these are requirements that we have to acknowledge and internalise.

The occupation, however intrusive, must not be used as an excuse to avoid responsibility. Similarly, negotiations and compliance with agreements must not be suspended pending the establishment of a Palestinian Utopia. Remember how the Americans for a long time, and the International Community for a long time avoided discussing issues of human rights and rule of law and democracy in Palestine. Because what they needed – and we were told this very openly – was a strong system, a strong one-man show, without – and I've been told this openly – without a supreme court that can deliver security to the Israelis and that can contain the Palestinian people. When we addressed this issue and said 'no, the only way in which you can have peace is by having an empowered people who own the agenda of peace, through a democratic system and a democratic society, this is how you can establish mutuality', we were told not to upset the apple cart. Now the pendulum's swung to the other extreme. Now everybody is talking about reform, human rights in Palestine and so on, but where is the peace initiative? Where is the course towards peace?

Before, there was a process that was the end all and the be all. Now there is reform that is the end all and the be all. And I said if suddenly we all developed overnight and became the Sweden of the Middle East – I don't want to say the Australia [laughter]– and we have a perfect democracy with a perfect human rights record – which is not very likely, I can tell you that, it's a difficult struggle, with a difficult legacy – would that mean that all our problems are over? No, there are other issues that have to be dealt with: the interdependence of the national building process and the peace process by now should become absolutely apparent; we don't need to explain them over and over again. And of course when you tell the Palestinians that they have to be on probation forever, they have to be on good behaviour, demonstrate that they are good people worthy of human attention and consideration and worthy of international law and so on, and recognition – this is adopting implicitly again an imbalance in the value of human beings and human rights. As though some people are more deserving than others. I mean, suppose we sat back and said no, we will not talk to any Israeli until they reform. Until Sharon stops his abuse of campaign funds or until the South African connection is...[pause] Every single Israeli leader has been subject to accountability on the basis of corruption. We all know that. But we are not justifying anything, what we are saying is that you cannot impose preconditions on negotiating with the other, or on launching a genuine peace process with substance, because you want the other to behave impeccably before you talk to the other side. Now we have ended up with a precondition that the Palestinians have to be totally acquiescent, be totally peaceful, totally democratic, while we're incapable of carrying out elections, and while the Israeli army can carry out incursions, shell and bomb and assassinate and so at will.

I thought the road map said that both sides have to stop violence simultaneously. But when a process becomes conditional and the weaker side – like women all over the world, right? The weaker side and women are always judged by more stringent standards. So we cannot afford to wait until we create a Palestinian utopia, and heaven knows that is going to be very difficult to deliver. Let me say that devolution of occupation and evolution of statehood must proceed simultaneously with urgency and commitment as interdependent processes.

An instrument like the Road Map of the erstwhile Quartet – and I say that because the Quartet has been self-effacing lately – that instrument could have served as a lifeline for peace had it been implemented with speed and integrity, with clear timelines, monitoring and verification mechanisms, and the courage to exercise impartial accountability. I am not saying neutral: impartial, even-handed. The incorporation of the Israeli amendments in the implementation has tarnished the integrity of the text and of the external actors as well. Remember we were promised, when we were negotiating the Road Map with the Americans, and then the Israeli government – not all Israelis; this Israeli government; Sharon – presented 14 reservations, modifications. And the Americans said, well they accepted it. They accepted it with 14 reservations. We accepted it unconditionally without reservations.

What's the difference? They said we will not change the text. You will have the text as is, but we will accommodate Israeli constraints and reservations in the implementation. So once again we have a text, and they have the implementation. This is what happened with all UN resolutions: we have text upon text, we have lots of documents, UN resolutions, not one of which has been implemented. And this is what happened to the Road Map. We had a text that has maintained itself without any changes or amendments, but we have an implementation that has totally disregarded the text: I don't know which is more important. We can file away this text.

Frontloading the process with Palestinian obligations, adopting the sequential and conditional approach, which are not in the text, and creating further interim phases without guarantees on the ground have rendered the Road Map inoperative and subject to extremists on both sides. Absent political will, even-handedness, and seriousness of intent, third-party intervention could backfire and aggravate conflict further through dashed hopes and let-downs. And this is something we have repeatedly cautioned against. I don't know if you remember in the Madrid process when we had meetings with Baker we said 'if you are serious' – and this was Bush the father and Baker – we said 'don't raise people's expectations. Don't start a process unless you really mean it, and unless you want to see it to the end, to its full fruition'. But dashed hopes and frustrations, and a sense of let-down, could lead to greater violence, could aggravate the conflict even further. No, we were promised that this would be pursued. And here we are, twelve years later.

Now, there are other types of third-party interventions. Third-party interventions can also be destructive – and here I am being very particular – if motivated by special agendas, if they exercise bias, and if they are incapable of effecting reality on the ground. Without substance, legitimacy and applicability, such interventions create a semblance of engagement without coming to grips with the reality of the conflict itself. When the issue is relocated domestically to become part of internal political realities – that is in the third party or parties, as is the case in the US – particularly in election votes and funds or the influence of special interest groups – I understand this is contagious; is it happening here as well? – [laughter] then the question becomes one of exploitation and self-interest and political self-interest for the individual, rather than serving the cause of peace.

The most detrimental external interference is that of the zealots and enthusiasts who embrace the most extreme long-distance stances with the 'passionate intensity' of the 'worst'. Blind loyalty for, and identification with, one side lead to the adoption of the most strident belligerency towards the other, hence intensifying the conflict and subverting dialogue and rational communication. Islamic fundamentalists and regressive brands of Arab nationalists have ironically joined forces with Christian evangelicals of the most extreme kind, Jewish fundamentalists, and ideological neoconservatives to fight their own proxy wars at the expense of moderate Palestinians and Israelis alike. Such radical apologists have inflicted serious damage and pain from their safe distance in Riyadh, Damascus, Washington, Knoxville, or even Sydney, demonstrating the type of

intervention that no peace can survive. They also reinforce the worst misconceptions and fallacies by totally eradicating the legitimacy of one side, thereby justifying the false claims of the other that there is no peace partner, hence no peace option. There are peace partners; they do exist. What we have to do is empower them, not negate them, exclude them or destroy them.

The superimposition of blind loyalty or guilt – I don't know which is the motive – has revived the worst of racist labelling and dehumanisation with the additional superimposition of false analogies. It may be convenient to label all Palestinians as 'terrorists' and dismiss them from the conscience of the world in the context of the 'war against terrorism' – anything goes. It may be equally convenient to describe the Israeli occupation's measures of aerial bombardment and shelling of Palestinian civilian areas, of assassinations and abductions, of home demolition and destruction of crops, of siege and fragmentation, of checkpoints and humiliation, of illegal settlements and apartheid walls and annexation fences all as legitimate forms of 'self-defence'. It may be comfortable to dismiss decades of military occupation and dispossession as figments of the victim's imagination, hence irrelevant to the current conflict. However, such scoring of points only makes the solution all that more distant.

So far, the solution remains simple and attainable, having been repeatedly defined and having become part of a global consensus. The two-state solution is still possible, and I maintain it is still possible, although there are many who say that this is a pipe dream, though it is becoming increasingly more difficult with the expansion of settlements, and the building of by-pass roads, and the apartheid wall through Palestinian territory. The bi-national state as a de facto solution will become the only option should Israel continue its expansion and its refusal to withdraw to the June 4th, 1967 lines and remove the settlements from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That will become a de facto solution, and then territoriality will give way to demography, and the issue will then become one of democracy, with Zionism forced to re-examine its most basic premises.

We still have the chance, and we still have the option, of rescuing the principle of sharing of the land, of a two-state solution. But a de facto bi-national state is going to be a very painful situation, because it means we have condemned Palestinians and Israelis to perpetual conflict, to further conflict, at least until demography comes into power, into play, and then you will have an apartheid state, you will have an occupation within one state, and you will have a struggle for democracy within that state. Which means that both Zionism will have to – again, as I said – negate or negate itself as a result of extremism, and of course both Palestinians and Israelis will have to pay the price in the mean time by staying locked in a situation of mutual destruction. That is why I still believe that the two-state solution is still desirable and is still possible if we act quickly, and if we prevent further damage from taking place.

Within the two-state paradigm, Jerusalem, both East and West, can become an open city and the shared capital of two states, thus encapsulating the essence of peace and regaining its stature as

a city much greater than itself and not subject to exclusive possession or greed of acquisition. The Palestinian refugees must be granted historical, legal, moral, and human recognition and redress in accordance with international law and the requirements of justice. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, but there is a need for the will and courage to act against all adverse forces.

Dear friends, sisters and brothers – as we hurtle towards the abyss, as we daily lose unique, irreplaceable lives, and as attitudes and hearts are hardening, may I take a moment to recognise this luminous instant in history that you are affording us. You have chosen to intervene on the side of those who have decided to take risks for peace rather than those who thrive on hate and conflict. It certainly takes a unique form of courage, tenacity, and distinctive human priorities to challenge prevailing fallacies and injustices. Those who said that Australia is too far away and will not make a difference are mistaken. I think you can make a difference, I believe every individual makes a difference, let alone a country and a continent at that. On behalf of the Palestinian people as a whole, and on behalf of all Palestinians and Israelis who have maintained their partnership for peace, and on behalf of all those who are in solidarity with our joint effort, I thank you. You have taken up a global challenge, and you certainly embody its human dimension. We are indeed heartened and empowered. Thank you.