

NOBEL LECTURE

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by

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In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful!

Your Majesties, Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished Committee of the Nobel Peace Prize, Arab spring and revolution youth in the arena of freedom and change, and all free people of the world: Peace upon you from the Nobel Peace rostrum!

With joy and pleasure I would like to express my gratitude for the honor I was given together with my peace fighter colleagues, Her Excellency the President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Mrs. Leymah Gbowee, for this international award, which carries great moral and human meaning. Thank you for the award, which I consider as an honor to me personally, to my country Yemen, to Arab women, to all women of the world and to all people aspiring to freedom and dignity. I accept the award on my behalf and on behalf of the Yemeni and Arab revolutionary youth, who are leading today's peaceful struggle against tyranny and corruption with moral courage and political wisdom.

Alfred Nobel's dream of a world, where peace prevails and wars disappear, has not been achieved yet, but the hope of making it come true has grown large, and the effort to achieve it has doubled. The Nobel Peace Prize still offers this hope spiritual and conscientious momentum. For more than a hundred years, this award has stood as proof of the values of peaceful struggle for rights, justice and freedom, and also as proof of how wrong violence and wars are with all their backfiring and devastating results.

I have always believed that resistance against repression and violence is possible without relying on similar repression and violence. I have always believed that human civilization is the fruit of the effort of both women and men. So, when women are treated unjustly and are deprived of their natural right in this process, all social deficiencies and cultural illnesses will be unfolded, and in the end the whole community, men and women, will suffer. The solution to women's issues can only be achieved in a free and democratic society in which human energy is liberated, the energy of both women and men together. Our civilization is called human civilization and is not attributed only to men or women.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Since the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, millions of people have died in wars which could have been avoided with a little wisdom and courage. The Arab countries had their share in these tragic wars, though their land is the land of prophecies and divine messages calling for peace. From this land came the Torah carrying the message: "Thou shalt not kill" and the Bible promising: "Blessed are the peacemakers," and the final message of the Koran urging "O ye who believe, enter ye into the peace, one and all." And the warning that "whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind."

However, in spite of its great scientific achievements, the history of humanity is stained with blood. Millions have fallen victims in the rise and fall of kingdoms. That is what ancient history tells us and what recent history confirms! Today's recent evidence tells us that the essence of messages calling for peace has repeatedly been trampled, and the human conscience has often been overrun by the voice of warplanes, rocket and missile launchers, bombs and all means of killing!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Mankind's feeling of responsibility to create a decent life and make it worth living with dignity has always been stronger than the will to kill life. Despite great battles, the survival of the human race is the clearest expression of mankind's yearning for reconstruction, not for destruction, for progress, not for regression and death. This tendency is strengthened day after day with all available means of communications, thanks to the rapid and astonishing development of information technology and the communications revolution. Walls between human societies have fallen down and the lives and destinies of societies have converged, marking the emergence of a new phase, a phase where peoples and nations of the world are not only residents of a small village, as they say, but members of one family, despite differences in nationality and race or in culture and language. All the members of this one family interact in all corners of our planet and share the same aspirations and fears. Despite all its missteps, humanity will go on in its march towards what is "beneficial to the people" and will make different cultures, identities and specific characteristics of civilizations come closer to each other on the road towards positive convergence and interaction, both in taking and in giving. Thus, understanding will gradually replace dispute, cooperation will replace conflict, peace will replace war, and integration will replace division.

One can say that our contemporary world, which has been refined and developed by expertise and long experience, good and bad, is marching with confident steps towards the creation of a new world and shining globalization. It will be a new and positive world with human prospects and globalization which will guarantee the values of freedom, truth, justice and cooperation to all human beings. It will be a world where all relationships, dealings and laws will be based on the prohibition of all forms and practices of exclu-

sion and enslavement of man by man. This will mean a globalization with no policies of injustice, oppression, discrimination or tyranny, and a world full of partnership and cooperation, dialogue and coexistence, and acceptance of others. This will mean a globalization where resorting to the law of power and its might, against groups, peoples and nations, in order to deprive them of their liberty and human dignity, will disappear, once and forever. Am I dreaming too much ... ?

I see on the horizon a glimpse of a new world, of a shining and flourishing globalization. I certainly see the end of a vicious and black history in which so many peoples and nations had experienced horror, tragedies, destruction and disaster. I certainly see the beginning of a humane, prosperous and generous history full of love and fraternity.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Peace within one country is no less important than peace between countries. War is not just a conflict between states. There is another type of war, which is far more bitter, that is the war of despotic leaders who oppress their own people. It is a war of those to whom people have entrusted their lives and destinies, but who have betrayed that trust. It is a war of those to whom people have entrusted their security, but who directed their weapons against their own people. It is the war which today people face in the Arab States. At this moment, as I speak to you here, young Arab people, both women and men, march in peaceful demonstrations demanding freedom and dignity from their rulers. They go forward on this noble path armed not with weapons, but with faith in their right to freedom and dignity. They march in a dramatic scene which embodies the most beautiful of the human spirit of sacrifice and the aspiration to freedom and life, against the ugliest forms of selfishness, injustice and the desire to hold on to power and wealth.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Peace does not mean just to stop wars, but also to stop oppression and injustice. In our Arab region, there are brutal wars between governments and peoples. Human conscience cannot be at peace while it sees these young Arab people, who are in the age of blossoming, being harvested by the machine of death which is unleashed against them by the tyrants. The spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize is the spirit of peace, in which today we look forward in support of the aspiration of the Arab peoples for democracy, justice and freedom. If we support this spirit, the spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize, then we will prove to the despots that the ethics of peaceful struggle are stronger than their powerful weapons of repression and war.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

The revolutions of the Arab spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, and the movement towards revolutions in other Arab countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Sudan and others, in terms of motivation, driving power and objectives, didn't take place on isolated islands cut off from all the rapid and astonishing developments and changes which our world is witnessing. The Arab people have woken up just to see how poor a share of freedom, democracy and dignity they have. And they revolted. This experience is somewhat similar to the spring that swept throughout Eastern Europe after the downfall of the Soviet Union. The birth of democracies in Eastern Europe has been difficult and victory emerged only after bitter struggle against the then existing systems. Similarly, the Arab world is today witnessing the birth of a new world which tyrants and unjust rulers strive to oppose, but in the end, this new world will inevitably emerge.

The Arab people who are revolting in a peaceful and civilized manner have, for so many decades, been oppressed and suppressed by the regimes of authoritarian tyrants who have indulged themselves deeply in corruption and in looting the wealth of their people. They have gone too far in depriving their people of freedom and of the natural right to a dignified life. They have gone too far in depriving them of the right to participate in the management of their personal affairs and the affairs of their communities. These regimes have totally disregarded the Arab people as a people with a legitimate human existence, and have let poverty and unemployment flourish among them in order to secure that the rulers and their family members after them will have full control over the people. Allow me to say that our oppressed people have revolted, declaring the emergence of a new dawn, in which the sovereignty of the people, and their invincible will, will prevail. The people have decided to break free and walk in the footsteps of civilized free people of the world.

All ideologies, beliefs, laws and charters produced by the march of humanity through all stages of its development and growth, as well as all divine messages and religions, without exception, oblige us to support oppressed people, be they groups or individuals. Supporting an oppressed person is not only required because of his need for support, but also because injustice against one person is injustice against all mankind.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

What Martin Luther King called "the art of living in harmony" is the most important art we need to master today. In order to contribute to that human art, the Arab states should make reconciliation with their own people an essential requirement. This is not merely an internal interest, but also an international one required for the whole human community. The dictator who kills his own people doesn't only represent a case of violation of his people's values and their national security, but is also a case of violation of human values, its conventions and its international commitments. Such a case represents a real threat to world peace.

Many nations, including the Arab peoples, have suffered, although they were not at war, but were not at peace either. The peace in which they lived is a false “peace of graves”, the peace of submission to tyranny and corruption that impoverishes people and kills their hope for a better future. Today, all of the human community should stand with our people in their peaceful struggle for freedom, dignity and democracy, now that our people have decided to break out of silence and strive to live and realize the meaning of the immortal phrase of Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, “Since when have you enslaved people, when their mothers had given birth to them as free ones.”

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

When I heard the news that I had got the Nobel Peace Prize, I was in my tent in the Taghyeer square in Sana’a. I was one of millions of revolutionary youth. There, we were not even able to secure our safety from the repression and oppression of the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. At that moment, I contemplated the distinction between the meanings of peace celebrated by the Nobel Prize, and the tragedy of the aggression waged by Ali Abdullah Saleh against the forces of peaceful change. However, our joy of being on the right side of history made it easier for us to bear the devastating irony.

Millions of Yemeni women and men, children, young and old took to the streets in eighteen provinces demanding their right to freedom, justice and dignity, using non-violent but effective means to achieve their demands. We were able to efficiently and effectively maintain a peaceful revolution in spite of the fact that this great nation has more than seventy million firearms of various types. Here lies the philosophy of the revolution, which persuaded millions of people to leave their weapons at home and join the peaceful march against the state’s machine of murder and violence, just with flowers and bare breasts, and filled with dreams, love and peace. We were very happy because we realized, at that time, that the Nobel Prize did not come only as a personal prize for Tawakkol Abdel-Salam Karman, but as a declaration and recognition of the whole world for the triumph of the peaceful revolution of Yemen and as an appreciation of the sacrifices of its great peaceful people.

And here I am now, standing before you in this solemn international ceremony. Here I am, in this unique moment, one of the most important moments of human history, coming from the land of the Arab Orient, coming from the land of Yemen, the Yemen of wisdom and ancient civilizations, the Yemen of more than five thousand years of long history, the great Kingdom of Sheba, the Yemen of the two queens Bilqis and Arwa, the Yemen which is currently experiencing the greatest and the most powerful and the largest eruption of Arab spring revolution, the revolution of millions throughout the homeland, which is still raging and escalating today. This revolution will soon complete its first year since the moment it was launched as a peaceful and popular revolution of the youth, with one demand: peaceful change and the pursuit of free and dignified life in a democratic and civil state governed by the rule of law. This state will be built on the ruins of the rule of a

repressive, militarized, corrupt and backward family police rule, which has consistently brought Yemen to the edge of failure and collapse during the last thirty-three years.

Our peaceful and popular youth revolution is not isolated or cut off from the revolutions of the Arab spring. However, with all regret and sadness, I should note that it did not get the international understanding, support or attention of the other revolutions in the region. This should haunt the world's conscience because it challenges the very idea of fairness and justice.

DEAR LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Through you and your great universal forum, we send to the world a clear and expressive message in which we emphasize that:

- Our youth revolution is peaceful and popular and is rallied around by the people. It dreams of a free and democratic homeland with no room for tyranny, dictatorship, corruption or failure. I, on behalf of the revolutionary youth, pledge to all people in the world that we are committed to peaceful struggle as a strategic option, without deviation or retreat, regardless of the sacrifices and regardless of the extent of state repression, killing and violence.
- Our youth revolution is peaceful and popular and is motivated by a just cause, and has just demands and legitimate objectives, which fully meet all divine laws, secular conventions and charters of international human rights. Our revolution is determined to fully change the corrupt conditions and ensure free and dignified life, regardless of sacrifices and bitter sufferings, until the establishment of a democratic civil state, a state where the rule of law, equality and a peaceful transfer of power prevail.
- Our peaceful popular youth revolution has succeeded in attracting to its ranks and marches hundreds of thousands of women who have fulfilled, and still fulfill, a major, noticeable and effective role in its activities, and in leading its demonstrations even to the smallest details. Not tens, but hundreds of these women have fallen as martyrs or been wounded for the sake of the victory of the revolution.
- Because of the peaceful popular youth revolution, the voice and thundering march of young people have dominated and the voice of terror and explosive belts, which were employed by Ali Saleh as a justification for his rule, has faded away. The culture of peace is expanding and spreading, and it is finding a place in every neighborhood and street where these young people walk demanding peaceful change and democracy.
- Our peaceful popular youth revolution has demonstrated that the values and objectives of freedom, democracy, human rights, freedom of expression and press, peace, human coexistence, fight against corruption and organized crime, war on terrorism, and resistance to violence, extremism and dictatorship, are values, ideals, demands and objectives of common

human interest, and are cherished by the whole international community. These are not subject to division, selectivity or cancellation under the pretext of differences in human characteristics or the requirements of sovereignty in any way.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I would like to emphasize that the Arab spring revolutions have emerged with the purpose of meeting the needs of the people of the region for a state of citizenship and the rule of law. They have emerged as an expression of people's dissatisfaction with the state of corruption, nepotism and bribery. These revolutions were ignited by young men and women who are yearning for freedom and dignity. They know that their revolutions pass through four stages which can't be bypassed:

- Toppling the dictator and his family
- Toppling his security and military services and his nepotism networks
- Establishing the institutions of the transitional state
- Moving towards constitutional legitimacy and establishing the modern civil and democratic state

Thus, the revolutions of the Arab spring will continue through the effort of youth, who are ready and prepared to launch each stage and to fully achieve its objectives. Today, the world should be ready and prepared to support the young Arab spring in all stages of its struggle for freedom and dignity. The civilized world should, immediately after the outbreak of the revolutions of youth, commence the detention and freezing of the assets of the figures of the regime and its security and military officials. In fact this is not enough, since these people should be brought to justice before the International Criminal Court. There should be no immunity for killers who rob the food of the people.

The democratic world, which has told us a lot about the virtues of democracy and good governance, should not be indifferent to what is happening in Yemen and Syria, and happened before that in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and happens in every Arab and non-Arab country aspiring for freedom. All of that is just hard labor during the birth of democracy which requires support and assistance, not fear and caution.

Allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to share my belief that peace will remain the hope of mankind forever, and that the best hope for a better future for mankind will always drive us to speak noble words and do noble deeds. Together, we will push the horizons, one after another, towards a world of true human perfection.

Finally, I ponder myself standing here before you, in this moment, which every man and woman aspires to reach because of the recognition and appreciation it contains. As I do so, I see the great number of Arab women, without whose hard struggles and quest to win their rights in a society dominated by

the supremacy of men I wouldn't be here. This supremacy has caused a lot of injustice to both men and women. To all those women, whom history and the severity of ruling systems have made unseen, to all women who made sacrifices for the sake of a healthy society with just relationships between women and men, to all those women who are still stumbling on the path of freedom in countries with no social justice or equal opportunities, to all of them I say: thank you ... this day wouldn't have come true without you.

Peace be upon you.

Portrait photo of Tawakkol Karman by photographer Ken Opprann.