

Music at Lake Siljan 1998

Opening Address

by

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“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights“

28 June 1998

Note: This address was delivered in Swedish. It was translated into English by the author in honour of Mr. Harry Waaka, Director, Kaupapa Maori Division of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and H. E. Ambassador Michael Powles, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, in recognition of their most valuable contribution to its contents. I only wish that they had been able to see the spellbound audience when the Maori song sounded from the loudspeakers in the Sammilodal natural amphitheater that sunny Sunday afternoon. Music at Lake Siljan is an annual event, held under a specific motto during a week in June/July around Lake Siljan in the Swedish county of Dalecarlia. The event is arranged by a foundation and attracts tens of thousands of listeners. The artists are sometimes more than two thousand.

Dear friends, Dear friends of music,

First, my warm thanks to Mr. Bo Ekman and his collaborators for their invitation to inaugurate this year's Music at Lake Siljan. I consider this invitation as a mark of honour to the United Nations and its Secretary-General. Kofi Annan conveys his personal greetings to you all. The United Nations has been given a worthy leader in his person. I know what I am talking about; among other things, I accompanied him during his efforts to bring about peace during a few dramatic days in Baghdad in February this year.

In his inauguration address last year, Ambassador Thorwald Stoltenberg talked about the need to restore in the international work an order which is founded on justice and righteousness and not on fear. Let me start from his statement and proceed to talk about one of the most important pre-requisites for such an order, namely respect for human rights. The protection of human rights is one of the cornerstones in the activities of the United Nations. Kofi Annan's appointment of the former President of Ireland, Mrs. Mary Robinson, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has brought this matter into a new focus.

It is a moving sight to see all of you here from the rostrum. We should be several thousands gathered here in Sammilodal. But today I do not intend to speak to an assembly. Today I want to speak to *you*. What I have to say concerns *you in particular*.

Let us be quiet for a moment and listen to a song which has been recorded precisely for this occasion. ("Te Hōkai", a Maori song is played.)

The song you heard comes from the other side of the globe, from Aotearoa, the island under the long white cloud: New Zealand. The song is of the Maori people. I got it from Harry Waaka, who himself sung and recorded it for me. Translated from Maori¹ it goes as follows:

¹ Original text, see page 11.

This is me, this is me,
with footprints that span time and space,
that span Mother Earth, that span Sky Father,
that are descended from our ancestor, Tāne-Nui-a-Rangi.

Who climbed the heavens,
to the mountain peak, called Manono.
At which place, in his solitude,
resides God-the-parentless-one.

Who obtained the three baskets of knowledge:
of rituals;
of good and evil;
and of the secular.

That such knowledge would be spread upon the Earth.
So that humanity would flourish
ki te wai ao, ki te ao marama -- in a world of light and wisdom.

Why quote this strange song from our antipodes, you ask. There are two very good reasons for quoting it here and now. Firstly, knowledge about the topic of which I am about to speak -- human rights -- is a global matter. Secondly, part of what I *must* say today will make you feel uncomfortable. Therefore, it is important that you feel that the undertone of my address is, at all times, one of light and hope.

Freedom means perhaps different things to different people. To me, freedom is primarily a question of freedom for the individual. Certainly, individual freedom must sometimes be limited -- to secure the freedom of other individuals. This weighing is something that humankind has to wrestle with as long as we inhabit this earth. But, basically, human rights is about every

individual's -- every "footprint's" -- freedom and equal value.

This year, we celebrate an important anniversary: the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. You have all received the text of the Declaration. Read it! Read about the right to life and personal security, of freedom from torture or slavery, of the right to found a family, of freedom of thought, of freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, of freedom of association, of universal and equal suffrage, of the right to work, of the right to education, of all the other rights!

It is important to underline that the Declaration is universal. Sometimes, it is claimed that it is a Western invention. This is not correct. The roots of the Declaration are to be found in all cultures and customs. It was elaborated by representatives of many countries; the majority of them came from other countries than West. Today, the Declaration is recognized by all 185 Member States of the United Nations, and its articles are now considered to have the force of customary international law. It protects all human beings but, in particular, the weak: women, children, refugees, minorities, indigenous peoples.

The Declaration has also given birth to several Conventions on Human Rights, i.e., inter-state agreements that are legally binding upon the states that accept them. Today, there are also rules on human rights in the constitutions of many states. This is the case in Sweden. In our country also the European Convention on Human Rights is applicable as national law. It depends on us to make certain that these rules are respected.

But what is the connection between all this and music, you ask. I have emphatically been asked to speak today primarily about my personal experiences, in particular of specific events. It is against the background of this specific request that I will reply to the question, taking as a point of departure what I have experienced myself and what I am engaged in.

If we look at the actual situation in the world today, we can conclude that many, too many people are living under suppression or are visited by the scourge of war, by hunger and poverty. I venture to maintain that the root of the evil in almost all situations where people today are affected in this way is lack of respect for human rights. Therefore, it is necessary to address the situation. We must, across the borders, speak a common language of the importance of respecting human rights. What is more natural than to combine the message of these rights with something which is already a common language: music! To quote Joseph Haydn: "Music is a language which is understood all over the world."

In no other field of human contacts is there a more apparent common denominator than in music. Its expressions are many and the styles are even more numerous. Yet, I am certain that you, as well as I, have experienced the spontaneous feeling of togetherness which presents itself wherever there is music.

It can be that we have certain melodies and texts as common heritage. The tales of the hymn "Silent Night" being sung at Christmas in different languages in the trenches on both sides of the front line in the Great War moved me deeply when I heard about them as a boy. It can also be that the message that music would like to convey at a certain occasion is understood in the same way over the language barriers. Certainly, you can hear when music expresses: joy, sorrow, excitement, fear, peace!

As a UN civil servant with responsibility for legal matters within the Organization, I should therefore like to express my great delight that this year's Music at Lake Siljan has the motto:

"--- born free and equal in dignity ---"

The quotation is from the first article of the Universal Declaration: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Music has the ability of reaching out to people. In the same way the idea of human rights must reach all of us. You see, it is only if this idea has a broad foundation in society that you can ascertain and fortify the protection of individuals -- and thereby also the collectivity -- against persecution and violations.

In many countries, it is not popular with the government to call attention to lack of respect for human rights. They call it interference in the internal affairs of the country. But according to modern international law it is entirely legitimate to address the issue. Every time I hear the argument about interference I make the reflection that here speaks a government that probably would not remain in power if human rights were respected in the country. United Nations and many non-governmental organizations are performing an important work to draw attention to the violations.

My eleven years in an earlier period as the Swedish Government's agent before the European Commission and Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg have convinced me that all countries must participate in the struggle for human rights -- and loyally subject themselves to existing international control mechanisms. No state should be outside this control.

In fighting for human rights, one can also have recourse to music. We who are more senior surely remember the reports of the Soviet attack on Hungary in 1956. The Swedish Radio played Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies between the reports. The intense force of the music made an ineffaceable impression on me. Among my finest experiences I count an occasion a few years ago when I could commence an address before a committee in the now popularly elected Hungarian Parliament with a reference to my impressions from 1956 -- and to Liszt's music.

Who doesn't recall the Greek songs of freedom under the period of the Colonels in the 1960s and early 1970s? Mikis Theodorakis! The same Theodorakis also composed the music to the Chilean Nobel Peace Prize Winner and Poet of Freedom Pablo Neruda's "Canto General"

from 1949 (music from *Vienen los pajaros* -- The Birds are Coming -- is played), a wonderful musical experience. In South Africa people sang “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” -- “God bless Africa”, until the system of apartheid collapsed, Nelson Mandela became President and the song became the new national anthem of the country. Examples of music in the fight for freedom are manifold.

To work for freedom and human rights is a task for each and every one of us. The more we are who have an insight into these matters, the greater the possibilities of guaranteeing that in the future we will through democratic processes have governments that take respect for human rights seriously.

Maybe you ask what you can do to contribute. My answer is: inform yourself! Engage for human rights somewhere where people work for this ideal and where you feel at home: in your religious society, in your political party, in the Red Cross, in UNICEF, in Save the Children, in Amnesty! There are many to turn to. It is also your duty, based on the strength of your arguments, to speak up for human rights in public as well as among friends and in the work place. If you are a parent, teacher or youth leader, you have an obvious task in relation to the most important we have got: the new generation. Turn vigorously against phenomena like xenophobia and racism. Don’t accept violations when you see them. Next time it could be your turn.

Nobody has expressed the idea of individual responsibility in this context in a more striking way than the German theologian Martin Niemöller. His famous words merit reiteration:

“In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.”

Human rights must always be defended. The varnish of civilization is thin. Remember what happened only a few years ago in our immediate vicinity. It is important that we do not allow the cognizance of the Nazi death camps to fall into oblivion. Elie Wiesel, later Nobel Peace Prize Winner, writes in his book "Night":

"Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.

Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."

The fact that the Universal Declaration and the United Nations Convention against Genocide could be adopted shortly after the Second World War depended partly on a feeling of shame over what had occurred. And yet -- no sooner had the echo from the marching boots of the 1930s and 1940s died away than people in Yugoslavia started killing each other. We saw TV shots from concentration camps. As Europeans we must be ashamed that we have not been more ready to learn after two World Wars. But there have also been violations in other places. Cambodia under the Pol Pot régime and Rwanda are perhaps the most grisly examples.

In 1992, at the request of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I investigated with two colleagues the possibility of attributing individual responsibility for what had occurred in Yugoslavia. In February 1993, we made the first proposal for the International

Criminal Tribunal that the Security Council of the United Nations shortly thereafter established in The Hague. The impressions from my visit in the region will never leave me, personified in the bewilderment and desperation in the eyes of an old woman whom I met on a road outside the city of Vukovar.

In November 1994, at the request of the Security Council, I discussed with the President, Vice-President and Prime Minister of Rwanda the question of the establishment of an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda. The visit to that country gave me a feeling of unreality. I am looking down at the beautiful scenery -- "the thousand hills" -- commenting on the many little houses and huts that are scattered all over, when my bodyguard quickly brings me back to realities: "Mr. Corell, Sir, the problem is only that there are now more houses than people." That genocide would occur also in our time! The United Nations Security Council has established a Criminal Tribunal also for Rwanda.

We must now continue to work to punish those who are responsible for the atrocities. Tomorrow, I will return to Rome, where I am responsible, as the Representative of the Secretary-General, for the organization of the current Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court -- the missing link in the international legal system. Let us hope that the negotiations will be successful! Of course, the Court cannot put a complete end to war and violations. But its existence will, no doubt, have great importance not only in the cases which will be tried by the Court, but also as a preventive factor for potential warlords.

The Fiftieth Anniversary for the Universal Declaration for Human Rights is now celebrated all around the world. In many cases this is done in connection with musical events. Music at Lake Siljan is an important link in this global manifestation. You are part of it yourself!

It is my hope that you who have come here will have first-class musical experiences in combination with thoughts and ideas on human rights. Above all, I hope that in the future you

will remember precisely the combination of the two, so that you do not forget to carry the message onwards. In particular, it is important that we learn to discover and prevent violations of these rights. I reiterate: all of us are responsible in this connection!

Let this be the message from this year's Music at Lake Siljan: Firstly, that all human beings will be ensured human rights. Secondly, that all human beings in the future will live in freedom and dignity on this earth. Thirdly, that every individual is responsible for the realization of this goal.

I commenced my address by playing and quoting a song from New Zealand. It was about spreading of knowledge and ended in a prayer for a world of light and wisdom. It is within your own power to acquire the knowledge that leads on to this goal. An important element in this context is the knowledge of human rights and the understanding that all human beings are born free and equal.

Knowledge is power. It gives us strength. What we need in the future is not more so called "strong men". Instead, we need strong individuals with knowledge about and respect for the freedoms and rights of other individuals. It is a matter of making the right choice in the second among the three baskets of knowledge -- the one of good and evil!

Allow me to end by adding to the Maori song from the other side of the earth a well-known quotation from our own country. The first lines, bright as steel, of Bishop Thomas' "Song on Freedom"² are as timely today as they were five hundred and sixty years ago:

"Freedom is the best of things
That can be sought all o'er the world,
For the one that bears this freedom well."

² Original text, see page 11.

With this message from the present and the past -- a salutation in the signs of light, knowledge, human rights and music -- I declare Music at Lake Siljan 1998 opened.

Original texts

Te Hōkai

Tenei au, tenei au,
ko te hōkai nei ki taku tapuwae.
Ko te hōkai Nuku, ko te hōkai Rangi,
ko te hōkai o to tipuna, a Tāne-Nui-a-Rangi.

I pikitia ai ki nga rangi tūhāhā,
ki te tihi o Manono.
I rokohina atu ra,
ko lo-Matua-Kore anake.

I riro iho mai i nga kete o te wānanga:
Ko te kete tuauri;
Ko te kete tuatea;
Ko te kete aronui.

I tiritiria, i poupoua ki a Papatuanuku.
Kia puta te ira tangata
ki te whai ao, ki te ao mārama.

Ur Biskop Tomas Frihetssång

Frihet är det bästa ting
Som sökas kan all världen kring,
Den frihet kan väl bära.