

Peace for All Time

An excerpt from President John F. Kennedy's June 10, 1963 commencement address at The American University in Washington, D.C.

I have chosen this time and this place to discuss a topic on which ignorance too often abounds and the truth is too rarely perceived — yet it is the most important topic on earth: world peace.

Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children — a peace for all men and women — not merely peace in our time but peace for all time.

Total war makes no sense in an age when great powers maintain large and invulnerable nuclear forces and refuse to surrender without resort to those forces. It makes no sense in an age when a single nuclear weapon contains almost ten times the explosive force delivered by all the allied air forces in the Second World War. It makes no sense in an age when the deadly poisons produced by a nuclear exchange would be carried by wind and water and soil and seed to the far corners of the globe and to generations yet unborn.

Today the expenditure of billions of dollars every year on weapons acquired for the purpose of making sure we never need to use them is essential to keeping the peace. But surely the acquisition of such idle stockpiles — which can only destroy and never create — is not the only means of assuring peace.

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US Department of Peace and Peacebuilding

In 2001, Congressman Dennis Kucinich and 35 cosponsors introduced HR 2459 to establish a Department of Peace with these words: *"During the course of the 20th century, more than 100,000,000 people perished in wars, and now, at the dawn of the 21st century, violence seems to be an over arching theme in the world, encompassing personal, group, national, and international conflict, extending to the production of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction.*

We are in a new millennium, and the time has come to review age-old challenges with new thinking wherein we can conceive of peace as not simply being the absence of violence, but the active presence of the capacity for a higher evolution of the human awareness."

Over the past five years, 47 congressional members have cosponsored Representative Barbara Lee's HR 1111 to establish a Department of Peacebuilding, pointing out that, thus far in the 21st century, nearly 1,000,000 people have died in conflict and war. Their bill will establish Offices of: Peace Education and Training; Domestic Peacebuilding Activities; International Peacebuilding Activities; Technology for Peace; Arms Control and Disarmament; Peacebuilding Information and Research; and Human Rights and Economic Rights. The Secretary of Peacebuilding shall establish a formal process of consultation in a timely manner with the Secretaries of State, Defense, and the National Security Council prior to the initiation of policies that may lead to violence and of any armed conflict between the United States and any other country.



graphic: World Beyond War

I speak of peace as the necessary rational end of rational men. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable — that mankind is doomed — that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.

We need not accept that view. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable — and we believe they can do it again.

Let us focus on attainable peace — based on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements which are in the interest of all concerned. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations. It must be dynamic, changing to meet the challenge of each new generation. For peace is a process — a way of solving problems. We have no more urgent task.

Peace need not be impracticable, and war need not be inevitable. We must conduct our affairs in such a way that it becomes in the interest [of our enemies] to agree on a genuine peace. Nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy — or of a collective death-wish for the world.

We seek to strengthen the United Nations to make it a more effective instrument for peace, to develop it into a genuine world security system — a system capable of resolving disputes on the basis of law, of insuring the security of the large and the small, and of creating conditions under which arms can finally be abolished.

Our primary long range interest is general and complete disarmament — permitting parallel political developments to build the new institutions of peace which would take the place of arms.

We shall do our part to build a world of peace where the weak are safe and the strong are just. We are not helpless before that task or hopeless of its success. Confident and unafraid, we labor on — not toward a strategy of annihilation but toward a strategy of peace.

For full text of speech see <https://tinyurl.com/z8b5uamv>