

## Iraqi Nonviolence Forum

Erbil

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Speech by Jean-Marie Muller



Es-salaam aleikum,

Dear friends,

It is with great emotion and humility that I am delivering this speech to you. As this is my first visit to your land and country, let me pay homage to your people, from the very bottom of my heart. It is unanimously recognised that civilisation originated in Iraq. The whole of mankind has inherited from your ancestors a culture that inspired other later civilisations all over the world. The first cities were built in Mesopotamia thousands of years ago. Writing was invented on the shores of the rivers Tigris and Euphratus. This is how your civilisation played a major role in the history of mankind.

Sadly enough, and now for many years, talking about Iraq has only been talking about the war in Iraq. As you well know, what people watching television see are only images of fire, blood and death. But behind these images there is such suffering, anguish and pain striking you, body and heart. What is admirable is that all this suffering, anguish and pain have not crashed your hope for building a liberated Iraq, liberated from all kind of oppression.

When I told my friends in France I was invited in Iraq to take part in a non-violence forum, they expressed their utmost amazement. They could hardly believe me. They could not imagine that women and men in Iraq were courageous and audacious enough to think about non-violence. I then tried to explain them that within Iraqi civil society there were women and men determined to organise themselves in order to confront the challenges in Iraq and put into practice the values and methods of non-violence.

As you well know, never and nowhere is violence capable of bringing human solutions to the

unavoidable conflicts which divide and oppose human beings, communities, people and nations.

Never, nowhere, is violence the solution. Always and everywhere, violence is the problem. Never, nowhere, does violence untie the knot of conflict. Always, everywhere, it only tightens it.

Never, nowhere, does violence bring justice. Always, anywhere, violence intensifies injustice. Never, nowhere, does murder establish peace. Always, everywhere, murder feeds revenge. Endlessly.

Never, nowhere, does violence lead to victory. Always, everywhere, violence is defeat, drama, trouble, tragedy.

Everybody pretends to defend his own cause. But killing a man is not defending a cause, it is only killing a man. And this is a perversion of any cause.

Never, nowhere, does violence keep its promises of offering tomorrows of joy. Always, everywhere, violence brings days of tears.

Therefore, in this early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the challenge for women and men of goodwill is about being clever enough to think up a solution to the problem of violence. It is precisely for investigating this solution, taking into account the possibilities offered by the strategy of non-violent action, that you decided to organise this forum.

Therefore, the challenge is about deconstructing *the ideologies of necessary, legitimate and honorable violence* that arm feelings, brains and fists. The ideologies of murder. The ideologies of death.

Therefore, the challenge is to construct a philosophy of non-violence. A philosophy of life. A philosophy of hope. A philosophy that provides the practical wisdom necessary for taking action.

Time has come to re-think non-violence.

### **Time has come to think non-violence.**

A history of non-violent resistance with all its noble acts does indeed exist. It is a history written by women and men who refused to accept the injustice that offended their dignity and trampled their freedom and who were capable of imagining means of resistance other than those of deadly violence. Many times, their non-violent struggles proved effective. With their naked hands, they managed to disarm their enemies. Sadly, their history is unrecognized, ignored, hidden. Through the distorting prism of the ideology of violence, we collectively remember only the history of armed revolutions and deadly wars. It is therefore important that we remind ourselves of this history of non-violent struggle and make it our own.

If we consider that all violence, no matter how just or holy the cause, hurts and bruises the humanity of the one who suffers it as well as the one of who exerts it, how can we justify the use of violence when looking for truth? Violence is real, concrete, objective in many situations, and may sometimes appear necessary, but it is never *true*, as violence always perverts the relation between man and man, because it is always bearing death.

History bears testimony – and everyday's experience confirms it : "truth" becomes a justification for violence if it is not rooted in the necessity for non-violence, in the "principle of non-violence". If truth does not demand the refusal of violence, there will come a time when violence will naturally appear as a legitimate means for defending truth. Only the recognition of the exigence of non-violence makes it possible once and for all to challenge the illusion, carried by all ideologies, that it is necessary and just to use violence for defending truth. Using violence as a mean to defend truth, is holding a position where truth cannot exist.

It is important to underline a principle essential to the strategy of non-violent action: to reach a rightful goal, rightful means have to be implemented. Contrary to what is asserted by the ideology of violence, a rightful goal does not justify using unjust means. In reality, it is exactly the contrary that happens: unfair means make a cause unfair. Who wants peace or justice has to use fair means and peaceful means.

The truth of non-violence is not made out of a dogmatic knowledge which becomes a instrument of division and opposition between human beings, but it proves itself in a practical wisdom which drives intelligence and will towards imagining, through the conflicts themselves, ways of reconciliation and peace.

Mankind will certainly not address the challenges we confront these days if we do not fit in with Gandhi's intuitions. He is inviting us to examine the traditions of the former times we have inherited – either philosophical, religious or political – and to become conscious of all the ways our different cultures have been complicit with the empire of violence. We will then understand how urgent it is to develop a true culture of non-violence. What is threatening peace, everywhere in the world and within each of our societies, are the ideologies based on discrimination and exclusion- be it nationalism, racism, xenophobia, religious fundamentalism, or any economical doctrine based on profit only – and which all are linked with the ideology of violence. What threatens peace in the end is not conflicts, but the ideology which makes people believe that violence is the only mean to solve conflicts. It is this ideology which teaches contempt for others and hatred for enemies; it is it what arms feelings, desires, brains and fists. It is it what makes man become a tool of murder. Therefore it is it which has to be fought.

Facing the tragedy of violence, facing its inhumanity, facing its absurdity, facing its inefficiency, has not the time come, realistically, if not wisely, to become aware of the evidence of non-violence?

The “no” of non-violence is not a no of negation: the point is not denying the reality of violence. The “no” of non-violence is not a no of resignation: the point is not about resigning to the injustice of violence. The “no” of non-violence is a no of resistance; the point is about resisting violence.

At the heart of each of our cultures, there is the requirement of non-violence which gives every human being dignity, majesty and nobleness. Each of our cultures is invited to discover this requirement which has been buried by the cinders of the ideology of violence. Each of our cultures is invited to build a philosophy of non-violence and to dialogue with the other cultures to express the unity of mankind. Each of our cultures will give its own colour to this philosophy which will be expressed in the rainbow of non-violence, annunciator, in the middle of the darkness that covers the world, of a new dawn.

Violence can only destroy bridges and build walls. Non-violence invites us to destroy walls and build bridges. Sadly, it is more difficult to build bridges than walls. Wall architecture does not ask for imagination: following the law of gravity is enough. Bridge architecture asks for more cleverness: you have to overcome the power of gravity.

The most visible walls that separate people are the walls made out of concrete which damage geography and divide the land which should be shared.

But there are walls too within the hearts and spirits of men. These are the walls of ideologies, prejudices, scorn, stigmatization, rancor, resentment, fears. The most dramatic consequence of violence is building walls of hatred. Only those who, whatever their side, are clear-headed, clever and courageous enough to deconstruct these walls and build the bridges that will give people, and communities the capacity to meet together, know one another, talk together and start to understand one another, only they will preserve the hope that gives meaning to the future of mankind.

In the days of weariness, violence can appear as a fatality. In reality, it is a fatality all

handmade by man. It means that all people together, with their bare hands, can deconstruct it.

When organising this first Iraqi forum for non-violence, you invited all those who believe in non-violence as an alternative means for changing Iraqi society. My friends, I do not doubt all the work you will achieve during these days will give you the opportunity to take steps forward on the path to peace, democracy and justice. Let me assure you, I am very happy to be beside you, taking part in this exciting adventure.

My friends, our societies are sick of violence, the world is sick of violence, mankind is sick of violence. But violence is not a fatality. If we are willing, non-violence can cure mankind from this sickness of violence. We will then be able to leave as a heritage to our children the hope of non-violence, so that they can live at last in a brotherly world. In a brotherly world, at last!

Thank you for your attention.