

Remarks of Professor Mary Kaldor, Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance, London School of Economics and Political Science at Finlandia Hall, Helsinki, 1 August 2005, 30th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

I am very grateful to have been invited to speak on this occasion and I would like to start on a personal note. For me and many of my generation, Helsinki was part of our personal history and I am very pleased that some of the people who shared that history are here today.

I am half Hungarian and for a large part of my childhood my uncle was in prison in Hungary and my aunt and cousin were in a Stalinist labour camp. My mother was an anti-nuclear activist. She took me on my first demonstration in 1955 and, in 1957, she took my sisters up to London for the founding of CND, with Canon Collins and Bertrand Russell.

In 1957, my Hungarian family were allowed to visit us for the first time and I still remember my uncle asking, “Why didn’t the West save us in 1956, in the Hungarian Revolution? Why didn’t you stop the Russian tanks?” My mother replied that this would have led to nuclear war and the whole family would have been killed on both sides of the iron curtain.

That exchange was profoundly important in shaping my political thinking. I was against nuclear weapons not just because of their direct consequences, as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also because nuclear weapons suppressed democracy and legitimised oppression in Eastern Europe.

I am proud to say that I have only been arrested twice in my life – once in 1963 for sitting down in Trafalgar Square to protest against the resumption of nuclear testing, and once in Prague in 1988 for meeting with members of Charter 88.

Helsinki began the reconciliation of the two halves of Europe and also the reconciliation of the two sides of my family. What I want to talk about today is the Helsinki idea and why it is still relevant. I will say a little at the end about Helsinki as an organisation.

The Helsinki idea was to bring peace and human rights together. Peace was about the international arena and it was about relations between states. This was the Soviet preoccupation, to maintain the security of the borders of the Soviet empire. Human rights were about the rule of law and democracy, which were supposed to operate within a domestic setting. And this was the American preoccupation. Helsinki was a bargain between these two viewpoints and it also included a co-operation basket, something the Eastern bloc were also keen on. When it was signed, many people were sceptical about its significance. Milan Simecka, a Charter 77 spokesman, described it as a “party at the expense of the east Europeans”. Any mention of Helsinki, he wrote, “would send police officers into fits of laughter”.

But Helsinki spawned both the peace movement in the West and the human rights movement in the East. It is usually only the latter that is mentioned. But I think the Western movement was also an offspring of Helsinki. The NATO decision to deploy a new generation of nuclear weapons four years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act seemed completely unacceptable to a generation who had seen the thawing of the Cold War.

A huge peace movement sprang up all over Europe – I remember coming to a demonstration here in Helsinki in the early 1980s and some of the people who took part are here in this room. Helsinki also spawned a new democracy movement in the east who found that they could use the Helsinki Agreement as an instrument to defend their rights. The travel and co-operation element was also important. I remember a young Hungarian activist in the Dialogue group saying: “I am against Reagan’s nuclear policies because I fear a return to the ‘50s and closed borders and that would be unbearable”.

I was a part of the peace movement that saw itself as trying to end the Cold War, against both nuclear weapons and oppression. One of the inspirations of the movement was E.P. Thompson. We talked about “détente from below” and “Helsinki from below”. The movements in both East and West shook the status quo and led to the 1989 revolutions. Afterwards we created the Helsinki Citizens Assembly aimed at being an OSCE from below.

When Helsinki was signed, the favoured term was “common security”. Common security meant security between States. The movements added a citizens’ dimension. Nowadays we use the term “human security” to cover the coming together of peace and human rights. Human security applies to individuals and not just States and it applies in the international arena and not just the domestic arena. It also links physical and material aspects of security – “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”, as the President pointed out. Effectively, what we have seen in the aftermath of Helsinki is the growth of global governance and international law as it applies to individuals. Also, of course, the enlargement of the European Union is a consequence of the impetus given by the movements of the 1980s to the European idea.

The main legacy of the Final Act is the Helsinki idea. Many hoped that the CSCE, as it was called then, would eventually supplant both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. That did not happen and OSCE is rather marginal nowadays. But I think the new roles of the family of international organisations – the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe, the UN, the ICC and also of course the OSCE – owe a lot to the Helsinki idea.

Since 2001, we have seen a reversal of the post-Cold War situation. Terror broke the human rights side of the Helsinki bargain. The attacks on the Twin Towers or in London recently or in Sharm El Sheik or Iraq are a profound attack on human rights. Moreover, these attacks are used everywhere as a reason to reduce civil liberties. And the war on terror, especially the war in Iraq, broke the peace side of the bargain. Coming from London, I really fear a long-term war-like atmosphere as we experienced in the Cold

War. Russia and Chechnya, Israel and Palestine, even the ‘frozen conflicts’ of the South Caucasus, all find themselves in a vicious circle where terror and the war on terror reinforce each other and I fear that this could happen on a global scale. I do not think that the attacks on London can ever be “explained” by the war in Iraq. This kind of terror has no political rationality. But Iraq is used as a legitimisation – wars in various parts of the world are cited in justification by those who do not sufficiently condemn terror.

So what is the alternative? I do think the idea of human security has to be promoted. It is about protecting people. Preserving the rule of law and promoting democracy rather than defeating an enemy. And it puts value on the equality of human life so that an Iraqi is equal to an American or a Londoner. I am impressed by how far we have come; in Britain, for example, there are some very important cases brought by Iraqis under the European Human Rights Act. I do not have time to elaborate what this might mean but I would like to emphasise two points.

First, human security is not a ‘soft’ security option. It is about protecting people from violence and sometimes that requires the military and the police to use force though not through winning wars. That is necessary in Iraq today or in Darfur. When UN forces shelled the Serbs who were attacking the safe haven of Goradze, that was human security. They failed to do the same in Srebrenica. In places like the South Caucasus, many people live in situations of intolerable daily insecurity. An effective human security policy is needed whether it is undertaken by the EU, NATO or the UN.

Secondly, human security has to involve civil society. There is need for a public vested interest in human security, whether we are talking about the “human dimension” or the “frozen conflicts”. I think the Key West talks over Nagorno Karabakh failed because it only involved political leaders and they could not carry the public – it needed a mobilisation of public opinion. Just as Helsinki spawned the peace and human rights movements, so OSCE could play a unique role in facilitating the involvement of civil society. Could not the OSCE host a civil society meeting in Nagorno Karabakh? Could it act on behalf of the displaced persons and refugees and help them to organise and represent their interests?

I would like to end by remembering Olof Palme. When the Helsinki Final Act was signed here in this very room, Giscard d’Estaing said “Now we can all agree.” And Olof Palme said “No, now we can begin to disagree.” Helsinki marked the beginning of a European and global conversation. The weight of the Cold War and fear of nuclear weapons prevented us from disagreeing, just as my mother explained to my uncle. In a new context of fear, it is all the more important to keep that conversation alive.