

Message of Peace, Health, and Justice to the People of Torino, Italy

from Mayor Rocky Anderson

On the Occasion of the
2006 Winter Olympic Games and 2006 Winter Paralympic Games

To the citizens of Torino, we send you hearty greetings and best wishes as you are about to welcome the world for the 2006 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. May the Games provide a means for people from throughout the world to come together in peace, celebration, and goodwill.

In the inspiring tradition initiated by Lillehammer, Norway, Host City of the 1994 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, and proudly continued by the citizens of Nagano, Japan, Host City of the 1998 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, we bring to you and to our brothers and sisters around the world a message of hope and a call for sustained action to bring peace, health, and justice to all.

Peace, health, and justice now elude many millions of the men, women, and children on Earth. We speak of peace, democracy, and freedom when, too often, we choose war, tyranny, and gross inequity. Now, more than ever before in human history, we have the tools to improve the lives of people around the world. We can put aside fear and strive for the good of all.

The past century saw more death, armed conflict, and state-sponsored brutality than during any other century in the entire history of human existence. Well over one hundred million men, women, and children met violent deaths in armed conflicts during the twentieth century. These tragedies could have been averted through intervention by the international community.

For one to decide not to take action to protect others in need is a decision to side with those who prey on our brothers and sisters.

Complacency is complicity with those who perpetrate evil. We have the capacity to help others by acting with compassion and love.

In just the past four decades, several millions of people have been subjected to horrific violence and millions more have been forced from their homes.

From 1975 until 1979, some two million Cambodians were executed or starved to death by the Khmer Rouge. In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranians and Iraqi Kurds, and executed, disappeared, or forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of Kurds. In Bosnia, from 1992 until 1995, some 200,000 people were killed, many thousands were imprisoned in concentration and rape camps, and much of the nation was "ethnically cleansed." In Rwanda, during 100 days in 1994, 800,000 people were massacred.

Nations and international organizations, upon which we largely rely for peace and protection, failed to intervene to stop these atrocities.

Now, in the Darfur region of Sudan, genocide is occurring, with some 400,000 people dead from malnutrition, disease, and violence during the past two years of brutality. The international community can put an end to this tragedy, if only it has the will.

Following the complacency of the international community during the Holocaust, the promise was made: "Never again." That promise has been broken repeatedly.

Heroes have emerged from these tragic circumstances – heroes who reached out in remarkable ways to assist those in need – heroes who provide inspiration to us all. Nancy Wake – daring, courageous and optimistic in the face of overwhelming adversity – was a valiant Resistance fighter, so effective in her resistance to oppression and at helping many people escape from Nazi atrocities, she became the Gestapo's most-wanted person and the Allies' most decorated servicewoman. Romeo Dallaire, head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Rwanda in 1994, bravely worked during the slaughter of 800,000 people to stop the bloodshed, while the international community abandoned the Rwandan people. Ordinary men and women have acted in extraordinary ways, often at great risk to themselves, to help others as they confronted violence and oppression.

We have great need of these heroes and heroines. They inspire us to be our best selves, to be fearless in speaking the truth, and to work to improve the circumstances of many who are in need of human kindness, compassion, and courageous action.

Similar heroism is called for to save our Earth, which is suffering from a wanton misunderstanding of ecological principles of sustainability, with tragic consequences. Already, millions of people have suffered devastation as a result of our short-sighted reliance upon fossil fuels for most of our transportation needs and energy production. The devastation will become far worse if we do not act boldly to stop the destruction now.

In 1994 Lillehammer began the tradition for each Olympic host city to deliver a message to the next host city by means that do not entail the burning of any fossil fuels. Since that time, severe climate-related disasters have occurred and scientists have discovered that climate change and its consequences are far worse than previously believed. The need to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the demand for effective action, has never been more compelling.

Our planet is rapidly warming. Over the last century, the average temperature climbed about one degree Fahrenheit, and the increase in temperature is accelerating. Mean temperatures in Alaska have increased five degrees in summer and ten degrees in winter since the 1970s. Seventeen of the eighteen hottest years on record occurred since 1980. The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has projected that the Earth's average temperature will rise an additional 2.2 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of this century and that droughts, floods, and violent storms across the world will intensify because emissions from the burning of coal and oil are driving up temperatures far more quickly than earlier believed.

Seasons are changing. Worldwide, the oceans are becoming acidified due to the absorption of carbon dioxide, threatening entire ecosystems. A heat wave in Europe during the summer of 2003 killed 35,000 people. The World Meteorological Organization has projected a doubling of heat-related deaths in the world's cities within twenty years. The Arctic Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, 150 feet thick in 1980, thinned to less than half that depth by 2003. Coastal regions, with about half the world's population, are at enormous risk

of massive flooding, as glaciers are melting. As warming speeds up the breeding rates and the range of insects, there are far more insect-borne diseases. The World Health Organization has projected that millions of people will die from climate-related diseases and other consequences of global warming in the next few decades.

Many people, and many nations, are working hard to combat devastating climate change. Important leadership has been found in parts of the business community and in national and local governments that have committed to make necessary changes to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. This challenge can be met if all governments, all businesses, and all individuals, working together, do their part to conserve energy and to utilize clean, renewable sources of energy.

Similar challenges face the nations of the world in connection with access to decent and affordable health care. Although an inexpensive cure for tuberculosis has been available for 50 years, more people will die of the disease worldwide this year than at any other time. Tuberculosis has been killing people at a rate of about 2 million people every year, although the drugs to treat a standard case of drug-susceptible tuberculosis cost about \$10 per person. The AIDS pandemic in Africa has infected approximately 25 million people. In South Africa, 5.3 million out of 45 million people now are infected with HIV, with 600 to 1,000 people dying every day from AIDS-related diseases. Unless wealthy nations step up their efforts to fight AIDS, the United Nations estimates the disease will kill 70 million people over the next 20 years.

Many heroes have emerged in the efforts to provide health care for people in developing countries. For instance, Dr. Paul Farmer has founded organizations and dedicated his life to bring health care services to hundreds of thousands of the poorest people on the planet.

These human rights, environmental, and health challenges call for greater compassion, for greater wisdom, and for urgent action.

We have only one option if we are to be part of a truly civilized world. That option is to do all we can, as individuals, as nations, and as an international community, to achieve and sustain peace, to protect our world and the future from climatic disaster, and to provide for the essential health care needs and the protection of our brothers and sisters around the world.

When we promise “Never again,” we must mean it. Our obligation to those threatened with violence or displacement from their homes is no less than that owed to our own parents, siblings, and children. We are all brothers and sisters, members of the human family – and are no less so because of differences in the color of our skin, our traditions, or the miles that separate us.

Let us have the wisdom and the moral sensibility to urgently take the measures that will protect us, our Earth, and the future from cataclysmic climate change. As an international community, we can work together to effectively combat disastrous climate change – but we cannot, with any semblance of good conscience, delay any longer.

Just as we would minister to those in our households who are ill or otherwise vulnerable, let those of us, individuals and nations, who are fortunate enough to have the resources commit to aid those who are in need.

Peace is achieved not simply from an absence of conflict, but from loving our brothers and sisters. Such love demands compassion. It demands our resolve to help relieve suffering. And it demands action.

Let all nations unite in the cause of a peaceful, safe, and healthy world.

With the Olympic Games comes an opportunity to re-affirm our commitment to peace and justice for all and to teach our young people how to turn this commitment into action.

The father of the modern Olympic movement, Pierre de Coubertin, foresaw the Olympic Games contributing toward world peace. In that spirit, we send the people of Torino, and people throughout the world, our best wishes for tremendous success during the Torino Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games – and for a more peaceful, just, and healthy world.

