

Introduction to EC Lecture

17th February 2009

Good evening and welcome all. I'm pleased to see old and new faces of dedicated peace activists. All of you are the driving force behind social change in our world.

It is an honour to have Nobel Peace Laureate, Mairead Corrigan Maguire, with us today as our keynote speaker today to give our Annual Erskine Childers Lecture.

The lectures are a tradition which have been delivered by eminent politicians, academic and diplomats, the first one was in 1997 by president of UN general assembly Ismail Razali, Ambassador of Malaysia. These are compiled in a book, 'The UN and its Future in the 21st Century,' which is available here today.

The lectures are held annually in honour of Erskine Childers – a UN free-thinker, critic and constructive analyst. He was a man with few illusions about UN flaws, shortcomings, and its need for reforms. Nonetheless he remained to the end a dedicated servant of the organisations founding ideals. Today, we are very fortunate to have Marjolijn (his partner) and David Childers (his son) who have travelled from the Netherlands to be with us this evening to join our annual lecture. Ladies and gentleman, please give them a hand and welcome them.

Allow me to say a few words about UN and our organisation. The United Nations is set up to solve the world's most

intractable problems—challenges that directly or indirectly affect us all: issues such as health, the environment, human rights and justice, peace and security, population, hunger and peacekeeping – The UN represents the global, the local and the truly indispensable. To highlight the work of UN, we at Action for UN Renewal organise events, participate in debates, publish newsletters, briefings and books. There is literature at the tables for you to take away. Including charter for a world without violence sent to us by Mairead Maguire.

ACT-UN, emphasises the UN's successes and at the same time work for its need for urgent Security Council and General Assembly Reforms. In an article by Ban Ki Moon, which deserves a better light of day, Ban wrote the 'UN is much more than just talk,' as it has a global peacekeeping force of 120,000 deployed in 18 peacekeeping operations on 4 continents. It feeds 90 million people in 70 countries. It gives 2 billion annually in emergency disaster relief and has wiped out diseases like Smallpox and Polio. It has implemented 172 peaceful settlements and allowed people in 45 countries to vote. So the UN is more than just talk. However, it has its own weaknesses and can very quickly go into a stalemate. The obvious example is the UN resolution on the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas which failed to stop the war, despite the repeated visits of the Secretary-General to the area. Even today all the 13 crossings except one are closed in Gaza with one million refugees waiting and trapped for humanitarian aid of food, water and medicines from UN.

Let me flag a number of events in the coming months.

1) World Disarmament Campaign AGM on the 21st of March in Wesley Chapel, London on 'A New Cold War in Europe'.

2) Action for UN Renewal AGM on 28th of March at Friends House, London on

'Celebrating the United Nations International Years of Reconciliation, 2009'

3) Movement for the abolition of wars - Peace history conference on 24th and 25th of April – lessons from the past hope for the future.

All the leaflets are on the forthcoming events table for all the details of these and other events.

ACT-UN is here to inform, educate and generate public understanding of UN. We are a voluntary organisation, relying solely on the support of our members and the public. Please donate generously.

Today's topic, is timely and appropriate. **"Saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war:" Building a non-killing, non-violent culture for the human family.** The brutality of the prolonged war in the Middle East have forced us to rethink our strategy for peacemaking, peacebuilding and working for a lasting peace. Hearing from Mairead Maguire will give us a better understanding so I'm now going to pass on to our chairperson, Rita Payne, former BBC World's Asia Editor, and now chair, Commonwealth Journalist Association.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Rita Payne.