

# Look to the United Nations to find solace in Trump's wind of madness

In the UN Charter, we find the truths to guide us, such as saving humanity from the scourge of war, reaffirming faith in fundamental human rights, and the dignity of the human person.



Douglas Roche

*U.S. politics*

The failed attempt to convict U.S. President Donald Trump in the impeachment trial has thrown me, just one person, off balance. I'm usually pretty steady in the cross currents of political fire, but now I find myself caught up in what UN Secretary-General António Guterres calls a "wind of madness" swirling across the world. How can I maintain my equanimity in the age of Trump?

Although it was Trump who was on trial, all of the core human elements of law and order, respect and decency, truth and lies, and the global search for the common good were in the spotlight in the U.S. Senate chamber. The corruption in the Senate votes exposed the thin veneer of our civilization, which we thought was built on honour and trust.

What we saw was the most powerful government in the world abandoning due process and reverting to the law of power. The repercussions in the ongoing breakdown of the U.S. system are felt around the world. Wars in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. A breakdown in arms control. Global warming. Mounting numbers of refugees and economic migrants. A general disrespect for international law.

The United States is the most powerful country in the world, with a defence budget bigger than the next 10 countries combined. Everything the U.S. does matters. When it calls the world to action, as John F. Kennedy did in the 1960s, the world responds. When it denigrates truth and lowers values of human conduct, that, too, is absorbed in other lands, particularly those already susceptible to authoritarianism. The U.S. is tearing itself apart, and when that happens, the most

important cog in a turning wheel causes the whole carriage to careen wildly.

Some may welcome the decline of the U.S. in world affairs, but I do not. I do not want China and Russia to dominate the international arena. It was the United States that founded the United Nations. The U.S., as then-president Ronald Reagan said, was the "shining city on the hill." The Statue of Liberty is not just a national emblem of pride, but a world symbol of hope. Now the Lady is crushed—and so am I.

I've built a public career on expressing hope that the gradual elevation of civilization would enable humanity to move down a path of social justice leading to peace and the development of peoples. I've pointed to lots of evidence to support that hope: a UN system that has lifted up hundred of millions of people from destitution; an international legal order providing a basis of justice; treaties to curb the spread of arms; a widespread recognition of the universality of human rights; a palpable caring for a cleaner and safer planet.

All this has made me feel part of a transformation in world society. I have felt part of the movement from a culture of war to a culture of peace. I could express hope in my lectures and writings because I truly felt hopeful. When I looked into the faces of audiences, I saw there the yearning for hope and I was able to give it to them.

Now the "wind of madness" is upon us.

I have to find a compass in the swirling storm around me. I cannot let Donald Trump dominate my life. I need stability to keep my head clear. Perhaps a start is to stop watching cable news, which feeds incessantly on political confrontation.

Reading history is also useful, as I've been doing these past few days rediscovering how Franklin Roosevelt was able to generate hope with his "New Deal." Meditating on how we are all part of the mysterious continuing process of God's creation helps.

But what is the one instrument all humanity has at our disposal no matter

our race, religion, culture, or background? It is the Charter of the United Nations. There, we find the truths to guide us: saving humanity from the scourge of war; reaffirming faith in fundamental human rights; the

dignity of the human person; better standards of life in larger freedom. This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. No other global alliance for peace has ever lasted so long.

The UN Charter is today protecting my sanity. I must keep my mind fixed on it. There I find equanimity in the age of Trump.

Douglas Roche was a Member of Parliament from 1972 to 1984, a Senator from 1998 to 2004, and is also a former Canadian ambassador for disarmament and author. His most recent book is *Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World*.

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U.S. President Donald Trump shows a newspaper headline during a Feb. 6 address at the White House, after being acquitted in the U.S. Senate Impeachment Trial. Douglas Roche writes that even though it was Trump on trial, much more was in the spotlight. *White House photograph by D. Myles Cullen*