

## **Address to the Notre Dame Community by President Jimmy Carter Upon Reception of the Inaugural Notre Dame Award, March 23, 1992**

Mrs. Carter: It's wonderful to be back here with Father Ted and Father Malloy and all of you great people who have come out this evening. The last time I was here it was for the dedication of the Hesburgh Center for International Studies. I was excited about that because I think it is so important for us to get to know and love the people of the world. There are so many problems out there and so much suffering: the more we know about them, the more we are willing to open our hearts and to help the people of the world. As Jimmy speaks to you, you will see some of the things that we have been trying to do. This University can be of great force for international understanding and for help for those who suffer. I am honored tonight by this award. Thank you so much.

President Carter: Father Malloy, Father Hesburgh, fellow students from Notre Dame (we both have honorary degrees from Notre Dame so we feel part of the student body), it is nice to come back. I have been here two times before. The first time was during the 1976 campaign. There were not many more people than there are on the stage tonight to welcome me. Luckily, John Brademas was also along, so the audience was a little bit larger. I came back as President in 1977, and the audience was both large and enthusiastic. I did make what I thought were some profound comments, which have been described very beautifully by Father Malloy. I felt that our national was greater than one to be filled with fear and hatred of the Soviet Union. Concerned, yes, vigilance, yes, but not hatred. And I thought that our national should be measured by standards other than just how many nuclear weapons we could accumulate, matched almost one-by-one in the Soviet Union. Those times have passed, and I am grateful for it. Like Rosalynn, I am also very honored by this award, especially in its first year.

Tonight I am going to talk about a few things, emphasizing three words that comprise the motto of Notre Dame this year. The first one is "inquiry," the second, "community," and the third, "belief." Before I start let me say that, not with any degree of false modesty, quite often a former President is honored beyond what he deserves, and I think that is the case tonight.

I tried to think of a story that would illustrate this. I'm not a very good storyteller, but when I began running for president, a lot of people said, "Well, he's from Georgia, he doesn't have a chance to be elected, but he's a southerner so he knows how to tell funny stories." As a matter of fact, I didn't have that capability. In fact, it was my successor in the White House who was a good storyteller, but I did my best. During the four-year period I was in the White House, to be perfectly honest with you, my jokes went across very well. When I left the White House, I lost my touch except for one notable occasion when Rosalynn and I went in 1981 to visit China. We came back through Japan, and I made a few speeches – I might say without fee. I went to a small college near Osaka, and I was invited to give the graduation address. There were about 800 students who were graduating and everyone was very nervous, including me. I never had given a speech to a Japanese audience before (as you know, it takes longer to say things in Japanese than it does in English.) I had a very wonderful interpreter, and I knew everybody was up-tight, so I decided I would tell a joke to get the audience to loosen up a little bit. I

knew how long it would take, so instead of getting the funniest joke I knew, I took the shortest joke I knew, left-over from an old governor's campaign. I told my short joke and the audience just collapsed in laughter. It was the best response I had ever gotten to a joke. I couldn't get through with the speech fast enough to go back and ask the interpreter, "How did you tell my joke?" The interpreter was very evasive, but I insisted. He finally bowed his head in embarrassment and said, "I told the audience, "President Carter told a funny story – everybody laugh."

This event in my life illustrates some points I want to make tonight. Inquiry is the first word that addresses itself to Notre Dame's sesquicentennial, and I think all of us Americans, all of us Christians, all of us who have other faiths, understand the importance of looking at new ideas, searching for the truth in a troubled world. Trying to answer questions that are not easy to answer, looking for solutions to multiple problems. At the Carter Center we try to look at new ideas. One of our basic principles is that we do not duplicate what others are doing. If the United Nations, or the U.S. government or the World Bank or the United National Development Program or Harvard University or Notre Dame is doing something, we don't do it. We try to look at new problems and new ideas.

Another word that I would like to address is belief. There has to be some sense of what is our faith, what are the guiding principles in our life. What are the standards by which we measure ourselves as individuals, what are the standards by which we measure our nation or the community within which we have some influence?

And the third notion is community. What comprises our community? How do we find those who are, to us a biblical expression, "our neighbors?" I grew up in the South. I grew up in a South that had a philosophy a society, a social and political and legal commitment, based on constitutional theological interpretations, that white people were superior to black people. It was a given that there could not be an equality, there could not be an integration, there could not be a sharing as brothers and sisters with each other. So, I am familiar with the ravages of discrimination because of race. Had it not been for the civil right movement, had it not been for a change in the laws, I could never have been considered seriously as President of this country.

Rosalynn and I have spent a lot of time in Ethiopia and Sudan, particularly in Sudan, a country torn apart by war between fundamentalist Muslim leaders and Christians and animists. In 1989, more than 260,000 people died in a year. Most of us, perhaps in this audience, didn't even know about it. So, while I am familiar with discrimination because of religion, I tell you that, unfortunately, the greatest plague of discrimination on earth today is the discrimination by the rich again the poor.

Sometimes this is deliberate, but most of the time it's inadvertent. Most of the time it's non-acknowledged. Who are the rich, and who are the poor? I would say that everyone in this audience is rich, comparatively speaking. We have a home, we have food to eat that is adequate. We have health

care and a modicum of education. Our children look forward to a fruitful life and we have some form of gainful employment now or the prospect of it in the future. We feel that the police and the criminal justice system is on our side. We think that if we make a decision it will have an effect, at least on our own lives. Those are measurements of wealth in human terms and we, most of us, have all those things. Many people don't have any of those things, and there is a tendency for us to wipe them out of our minds or address them in a superficial way.

We have been honored here tonight, primarily, because we have lived in the White House. I don't say that to derogate the importance of the award which we appreciate very much on a personal basis. But let me tell you how Rosalynn and I get the reputation for being worthy.

The Carter Center is becoming a famous place. The executive director of the Carter Center is a man named William Foege, who is not famous. William Foege is an epidemiologist, perhaps one of the world's foremost leaders for preventive health care. He was the director for the Centers for Disease Control for ten years. He was the man who orchestrated the eradication of smallpox, which is the only disease ever eradicated. Seven years ago, leaders from the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Rotary Clubs, Rockefeller Foundation, and United Nations Development Program, came to the Center and said in effect, "We have been trying to immunize the world's children. We have had polio vaccine thirty years. We have had measles vaccine more than sixteen years, but we still don't have twenty percent of the world's children immunized. Can you help us with it?"

They didn't come to me – they came to William Foege. And Bill Foege said, "Why don't we put together a task force so that when several agencies go into a country, they don't go in as competitors?" He put together at the Carter Center a task force on child survival. So now when we go into a country, it's a massive team. Although the money and the people have not increased substantially, in only five years we jumped from twenty percent of the world's children immunized to eighty percent. Jimmy Carter? No. Nor Rosalynn. But Bill Foege.

We have now organized, under Dr. Foege's direction, a task force on disease eradication. It has been fourteen years since smallpox was eradicated, and no other disease has since been targeted for eradication. We have now targeted two more – polio, with which most of you are familiar, and guinea worm. The Carter Center is in charge of eradication guinea worm, which afflicts about ten million people a year in the poorest, most isolated rural areas in twenty-two national of the world. The man in charge of that is a black scientist, a medical doctor named Don Hopkins, who worked for years studying how to prevent, how to cure guinea worm and now is working on how to eradicate it. We have also targeted polio. We will never have another case of wild or contagious polio in this hemisphere. We had our last one within the last ten months. South America, Central America, the Caribbean, North America will never have another case of polio by the end of the century. It won't be because of me, although the Carter Center is part of it. It will be because of Bill Foege and Don Hopkins.

Every year for the last twenty years, the production of food grain per person has gone down in Africa. The average African citizen now has seventy calories less per day than twenty years ago. A starvation diet two decades ago is getting worse every year. We have in Africa, in Tanzania, in Sudan, in Guyana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, tens of thousands of small farmers who are now being taught how to rapidly increase their production of basic food grains – corn, wheat, millet and sorghum. We can triple or quadruple their production the first year. The Carter Center helps with this. It's not I who does it, it's Dor. Norman Borlaug, a seventy-eight-year-old agricultural geneticist who won the Nobel Peace Prize and is famous for the "green revolution" in India and Pakistan. We get credit for what we call Global 2000 and for increasing food production in Africa, but it's not Jimmy Carter and it's not Rosalynn at the Carter Center; it's Dr. Norman Borlaug.

When I go down the aisle to speak with people in the airplanes, they never say, or rarely say, "Thank you for Camp David," or "You did a good job as President," and so forth, they say, "We like what you're doing with Habitat for Humanity." And it's a wonderful program. It's now more than fifteen years old. We send out letters every year to get money, and Rosalynn and I go five days a year to act as carpenters. We're not the bosses on our house – we are told what to do by the boss on our house who is sitting here tonight in the front row, LeRoy Troyer. The point is, when the television cameras come to look at the great work being done on a Habitat house, they don't concentrate on LeRoy Troyer or the others on the site, they concentrate on me and Rosalynn because we lived in the White House. The man and woman who founded Habitat (who have been here to the Notre Dame campus), Millard Fuller and his wife, Linda, are the ones responsible for the achievement in reducing homelessness on earth. We now have Habitat chapters in more than 700 American communities, on more than 200 university and college campuses, and in thirty-three foreign nations. This is the work of Millard and Linda Fuller., Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, because we lived in the White House, get more publicity than do the people who founded and who worked every day of their lives doing something about the homeless.

When I was in the White House, I was very concerned because increasingly I saw that very little attention was paid to conflicts on earth. I did some negotiation while I was in the White House, but when I got out I began to see more clearly that the wide range of conflicts were not being addressed by our community, our nation, by other nations or even by the United Nations. So we began to put together a program we called International Negotiating Network. I turned to a young woman who was an assistant U.S. attorney in northern Alabama. She was just a lawyer, not famous, but she has come to be an expert on the technique of resolving conflicts. Under her direction at the Emory University campus. We monitor every conflict on earth every day. You might be interested to know that, as of the first of February, there were 112 of them. This young woman's name is Dayle Powell. Dr. Powell supervises students who monitor these conflicts. Of the 112, some are minor in nature, but others are profoundly catastrophic. I mentioned already Sudan, where 260,000 people died in one year, and Ethiopia, where more than one million people died in war. Equally troubling are conflicts around the world about which we rarely hear. In Africa alone, in Somalia and Mozambique, as well as Ethiopia and Sudan, Western Sahara, and Liberia, tens of thousands of people die. In Liberia alone, more than half the total population is displaced from their homes – 600,000 refugees, and we barely know about it.

The problem is that of these major wars (there are 32 of them) none is between two countries. They're all civil wars, domestic wars, wars among neighbors at home. The tragedy is that the United Nations is precluded from dealing with these wars in almost every case, because it's not proper for a UN official or even an American ambassador to communicate with revolutionaries who are trying to overthrow a government member of the UN or one to which our ambassador is accredited. There is a vacuum there, and increasingly the Carter Center is marshalling scientific methods of negotiating, mediating, trying to bring about cease-fires, and increasingly turning to elections. All this is under the direction of an unknown young woman named Dayle Powell.

Let me close this part by talking to you about another problem. I mention international affairs because that's the thrust of this award, but international also includes our own country. Increasingly we have become concerned about problems in American cities and Communities. Perhaps the origin of this was Millard Fuller and Habitat for Humanity, dealing with people who don't have and never have had, a decent home. We've seen their lives transformed as they get a house for the first time. There's no charity involved. They have to put in 500 to 2,000 hours building their own house, as well as a neighbor's house. They have to pay full price for the house when it gets built, but we don't charge any interest and we don't take any profit, so poor people can afford a house. In some cases, these people have never had their ancestors or themselves finish high school, but they move into a Habitat house and in just a few days they're deciding which college their children will attend.

Housing is important, but it's only one aspect of increasingly blighted American communities affecting people who quite often are our next-door neighbors, who live within 100 yards sometimes of where we live or work or go to school. Forty-five percent of all the black kids in this country are born in poverty. A baby has a better chance to survive in Bangladesh than Harlem. Twenty-five percent of our young black men are either in prison or on probation and the situation is getting worse. It's people who don't have the basic necessities of life, who have dropped out of school or who have teenage pregnancies or children without basic health care. It's mothers who never see a doctor before the day of birth, communities where drug addiction is becoming rampant and where crime increases like a skyrocket.

Atlanta is a great city, a beautiful city. We have always had great relationships between our black and white leaders. In competition with the rest of the world, we won the right to have the Olympics in 1996. We were chosen last November as an outstanding city for business investments by Fortune Magazine. But still Atlanta is getting worse and worse. In the last five years alone, we've had a 300 percent increase in crimes of violence among our young people. In the same juvenile courts we've had (listen to this) a seventeen-hundred percent increase in five years in drug-related crimes. These are our next-door neighbors for whom we are directly responsible. How many of them do we know? How many poor people do we know who do not have a home? There are 12,000 of them in Atlanta alone. Atlanta is certainly not the worst city of all, it's one of the better ones. Twelve-hundred government apartments

are boarded up with no one living in them. How many people do we know who have never had a decent job? We don't really know these people, and that is our responsibility as American citizens.

I'll close by giving you one incident that Rosalynn mentioned at supper tonight. We now have set up in Atlanta a program to deal with the urban problems of our great city, and we hope that we can move from there to other cities around the nation with something like an America Project. One of the key players in this is a young man named Neil Shorthouse, who came as a flower child from San Francisco at the end of the 1960s. He and another young man named Bill Milliken (not very famous) lived as white boys in a neighborhood with African-Americans. They slept on a pallet, and they began to try to get to know the poor people who lived around them, which many of us don't ever do. They finally ascertained, that of every hundred children who are at risk, thirty-four people are supposed to be responsible, for those children – schoolteachers, counselors, policemen, health care workers, Boy Scout executives, and so forth. What is needed is a network of sharing and understanding. Neil Shorthouse and Bill Milliken – not famous, deserve to be famous.

Neil and I went through a middle school in one of the troubled neighborhoods in Atlanta not long ago. We chose one with a famous name – Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School. We visited the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders that go to school there – bright kids, beautifully dressed compared to what my children wore when they went to school. They knew that Jimmy Carter was the 39<sup>th</sup> President; they knew that Jimmy Carter was from Georgia; they knew the date on which Jimmy Carter was elected; they knew Jimmy Carter's wife's name was Rosalynn. But they didn't think I was Jimmy Carter until the principal convinced them and showed them a photograph. Then they began asking me wonderful questions – very effervescent, very intelligent questions, very intriguing questions. When I got through, I asked the principal, "These are such bright kids – what's your main problem with them?" and she said, "The boys believe that their avenue to success, to prestige, to influence is to own a semi-automatic weapon." And I said, "What about the girls?" and she said, "Pregnancy is our growing problem." I said, "I've heard about teenage pregnancy – that's terrible," She said, "What you don't understand, Mr. President, is that the 6<sup>th</sup> graders have more of a problem than the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders." I said, "I can't believe it, I have a granddaughter who is only 12 years old, and these are 12-year-old girls – why is that?" She replied, "I don't know if you want to know. The drug pushers and pimps prefer sex with the little girls. They're cheaper, they're less able to defend themselves and they're not as likely to have AIDS." And this is not Bangladesh and it's not Addis Ababa – it's one of the shining cities of America of which we are proud.

Where are the heroes? The heroes are among the people like Bill Foege, Norman Borlaug and Dayle Powell and Millard Fuller and Don Hopkins and Neil Shorthouse and Bill Milliken and those who work in the classrooms and on the police beats and in the school lunchrooms and in the clinics. People whom we never know. The heroes are also the poor, who are our neighbors who are struggling for a better life.

Let me mention one other thing about belief. It is time for us to take a look at our nation and ourselves. It's a time of the end of the cold war. As I mentioned here in 1977, it's time for America to put forward its best character. How do you measure the best character? It's not easy to measure, I know, but we can take some thought from the words of Saint Paul when he was asked a similar question, and he reminded us that it's not the measurements that we human beings apply to ourselves. It's not how big a house we have or how many cars we have or our bank account or our security in our old age or even the level of intelligence or educational ability or esteem or fame or awards. It's the things that Paul said you cannot see and you cannot feel and you cannot count. Those are the kinds of things Notre Dame puts forward and has put forward for the last 150 years of its vision. What is it that you can't see or count or feel? They are the things like justice and peace and service and unselfishness and compassion and sharing and, if you'll excuse the expression, love.