

A Call for Peace, Dignity, and Justice Atlanta, June 21, 2016

Since 2003, The Carter Center has convened a series of global Human Rights Defenders Forums to assess the most pressing challenges from those on the frontlines of the struggle. This year's forum is a culmination of work over 13 years by some of the most courageous and effective human rights defenders and peacemakers.

From June 18-21, 2016, activists and peacemakers from 22 countries gathered for The Carter Center's Annual Human Rights Defenders Forum, *A Time for Peace: Rejecting Violence to Secure Human Rights*.

The forum heard about the impact of women's leadership for peace and justice around the world, from Ugandan women who literally walked the path of peace, marching many miles to gain access to the peace talks and profoundly affecting the agreement and subsequent implementation, to the story of Berta Caceres, an indigenous environmental activist from Honduras who galvanized a movement of indigenous communities to challenge the unsustainable exploitation of resources and the extreme violence that bolstered it. We heard of the power of peace tables formed by women in Ferguson, Missouri, and learned of the successful approach that develops the capacity of Pakistani communities, led by mothers and women, to prevent violent extremism and reintegrate former extremists into the society. A forum participant noted: "Women and girls are the weavers of the fabric of society, and hearing their stories creates a new power."

Forum participants joined former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in calling for all nations to recommit to the realization of universal human rights, the advancement of women's leadership, and the rejection of violent approaches to countering extremists, which have resulted in an unending cycle of violence.

Discussions centered on the growing threat to human rights in the name of national security, the global spread of conflict, and the exclusion of women, half of the world's population, from decision making.

Regard for human rights is the most effective antidote to violence and extremism and the best guarantor of sustainable security. Lack of adequate standards of living and political repression are fueling recruitment into terrorist organizations. Ill-conceived and solely military responses have worsened this problem.

Excessive violence has resulted in its normalization. When the state focuses exclusively on military investments and military options, the message sent to citizens is that brutality is a normal way to solve problems.

Often, the exhortation to nonviolence is directed at civilians, not those in power. In addition to encouraging people to act nonviolently within families and communities, we must also hold our governments accountable for excessive or unwarranted use of violence.

In an important speech at the forum, President Carter asserted that human rights, which he vigorously promoted during his presidency, are being eroded, and that the United Nations has failed in its mission to prevent war.

“What is needed now, more than ever,” he said “is inclusive and peaceful leadership that steers us away from fear and fosters greater confidence—a belief in the inherent goodness and ingenuity of humanity.”

We call on governments to recommit to universal human rights and divest from violence; to shift from a fear-based framework to a human-centered approach to peace.

We must shift our resources to the empowerment of women and girls, comprehensive approaches to national security threats with war as a last resort, and full implementation of the commitments made by governments to the Sustainable Development Goals.

We call on all those committed to human rights and peace to heed the stories of those who are suffering the consequences of violence. Protecting those who courageously struggle for human rights must become a high priority. The U.S. and other nations should not provide military assistance to governments that commit egregious violations of human rights.

We invite leaders from key sectors, including military, business, media and entertainment, and religious communities, to join this effort to examine past failures and help us mobilize the public through intensive and effective campaigns to create the political will that is needed to make the shift from violence to peace.

We call on President Barack Obama and the next U.S. president to avert a new nuclear arms race by rejecting proposals to commit many billions of dollars to a new generation of nuclear weapons, which will only encourage other current and aspiring nuclear powers to increase spending as well. Similarly, we call on all governments to commit to non-proliferation of these most dangerous weapons that hang as a Damocles sword over humanity, and drain our scare resources.

People of faith have a central role to play, as every major religion has at its center human compassion, social justice, and love. We must mobilize to help realize that we all are one, and each of us is equally worthy.

The Carter Center’s Forum on Women, Religion, Violence, and Power will continue to serve as a convening space through in-person and online forums to advance this movement for real human security, gender equality, human rights, and peace.