

I pay my respects to the ancestors and the original guardians of the land and I want to start by talking about my own ancestry. A week ago I was in France in Arras visiting the seventh plaque in the Commonwealth War Graves Memorial at Faubourg d'Amiens British Cemetery where among the thousands of names and graves was recorded the name of Ross Latham Wilson, private, Kings Shropshire Light Infantry. They never found his body. He was a casualty of the German push on the night of 19 June 1917 and died probably in a trench near the little, now picturesque village of Monchy-le-Preux. He was twenty-one and was my great uncle. His elder sister, my maternal grandmother, went on to be married and gave birth to two sons. One, Peter, was my father. The other, my uncle, also named Ross for reasons we can only imagine, was a navigator on a flight delivering supplies to Italian partisans near Milan when their aircraft was shot down on Thursday, October 12, 1944 and all seven of the crew perished. His remains are in the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery outside Milan which, at my father's request when quite young I went with him to visit – he had never been able emotionally to go before. Having located the grave in the book I stood some distance back as my father stood in front of the simple, uniform gravestone and I saw tears coursing down his cheeks. My father was not given to outward emotion and it was the first and only time I ever saw him cry. Both Ross and his mother were active in the Scout Movement and he was a brilliant artist who illustrated their events posters and magazines many of which I still treasure. On his gravestone is the circle with a dot in the middle which is the scouting symbol for "I have gone home."

I have very personal reasons for realising why nations must come together and work co-operatively for peace both regionally and internationally and have no doubt that the development of the European Union from its intellectual author Altiero Spinelli who conceived the Ventotene Manifesto when imprisoned on the island by the Italian Fascists is largely responsible for Europe not tearing itself asunder for a third time in a generation. It deserved the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 with the citation "for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe". For me, the narrow result of just over half those who voted in the referendum to leave the EU is the most disastrous political decision in my lifetime.

This is especially so when we live in great danger and when other regions of the world are at last seeing sense in solidarity. There has been significant change in that most modern wars are now fought within countries rather than between them: it is the nature and heritage of civil wars in which families and neighbours are ranged against each other to be especially bloody and requiring enormous subsequent efforts to bring about reconciliation. Daily we see the horrors of such conflicts. Genocide still stalks the world – often as a result of the failure to embrace federal structures in which the voices of minorities can be heard and in which they can enjoy a reasonable amount of autonomy. There are federal states which increasingly resemble unitary ones with greater federal control such as India and the USA whereas the provinces in Canada truly have autonomy over a wide field including all labour legislation. It is such devolved federal states where tensions generally are less.

The full impact of climate change, economic migrant flows in an age in which it is comparatively cheaper to travel than at any time in history and in which the circumstances and labour needs of far away countries are available on the internet anywhere in the world and the potential for conflict over natural resources such as water and energy have not been

fully factored in by many who try to map our future. Notwithstanding all the tools of intervention in its armoury the international community has allowed a permanently electable President, who has now served more years than any of his predecessors save Stalin, to invade and seize territory of another country in Crimea and with apparent impunity. Of course, there have been significant sanctions imposed but Crimea remains in Russian hands, Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk (the Donbas) are regularly infiltrated by Russian troops with ceasefire violations on almost a daily basis and Russian aircraft maintain in power a dictator who has gassed his own subjects in contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention with yet another attack in Douma only two days ago with another at least 70 dead. He has bombed hospitals causing horrendous death and mutilation of women and children and massive migration flows which have exposed the weakness of collective response from the European Union.

Sadly, the Western world has its fair share of experience with those bent on territorial gain and greater hegemony. The Rhineland, the Anschluss with Austria, the Sudetenland and Poland tell their own tale. I hope that history will not record a similar sequence of Georgia, Crimea, the Donbas and Estonia. We should be under no illusions. When recently I put to an Estonian MP from Tallinn my fear, which I hoped that she would dismiss as fanciful, that Putin could one day engineer an excuse that ethnic Russians are being victimised in Estonia and justify rolling tanks into that NATO nation's territory she told me that this was precisely their scenario planning. From the Russian perspective, of course, the world looks different. Having lost the Stans and Eastern European countries (formerly Warsaw Pact) from its hegemony Russian sees itself boxed in by the West; the assurances allegedly given that NATO would not creep eastwards have not been honoured – those Warsaw Pact countries are now members of NATO. To many Russians the emasculation of their country is unfinished business for the West since the Second World War. You only have to compare a map of Europe in 1945 compared with today. That magnitude of misunderstanding is a recipe for potential conflict akin to the mutual mis-appreciation of nations' intentions before the First World War. That is why, even if not for public information, we must always keep channels of communication open.

We live in a more dangerous world than I can remember – far worse than the uneasy equilibrium of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) during the Cold War. More states now have nuclear weapons which could get into terrorist hands if not abused by those states themselves. We have seen state sponsored murder in other countries through nerve agents – at least in a way we must hope that it is state sponsored because, alternatively, if such devices are in the hands of rogue or terrorist groups then we have just ratcheted up another level of global fear. We have seen cyber attacks against the military and seeking to influence political affairs in other countries and infiltration of mass media both of which can wreak far more havoc than conventional military intervention; there is the real possibility of genetics being misappropriated in such enterprises and renewal of germ warfare. It should be remembered that the influenza epidemic of 1918 worldwide killed 50 million - more people than those killed in the First World War. Aldous Huxley's prophetic *Brave New World* is almost here less than one hundred years after it was written. There seems now to be little compunction about crossing the red lines of international conventions, whether the Geneva ones or the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which had its origins in the Brussels Convention on the Law and Customs of War in 1874 and the Hague Peace Conference in

1899, with draft text adopted by the Conference on Disarmament on 3 September 1992, commended by the General Assembly, opened for signature in Paris on 13 January 1993 and had 130 States signing the Convention within the first two days and on 29 April 1997 the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force with 87 States Parties—becoming binding international law. Those who ignore such international instruments fly in the face not only of morality and civilised values but also the hard work and negotiation of centuries. More than ten years after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, approximately 30,000 Iranians were still suffering and dying from the effects of chemical weapons deployed by Iraq during the war. The deliberate targeting of medical installations and civilian populations is a war crime as was pointed out by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in January 2013 following the appalling attack at Aleppo University. Articles 14 and 15 of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provide specifically for such medical facilities. Despite prohibition under international humanitarian law these incidents are not isolated but follow a pattern. Clearly, currently this is insufficient deterrence. The curse of the veto in the Security Council would prevent that body from referring such matters to the International Criminal Court. The greatest threat to peace remains the impunity of those who are careless to its disruption.

The case for maintenance of peace through established economic co-operation in a quasi-federal structure is put better than I can adumbrate in my few minutes by my colleague at Uniting for Peace Vijay Mehta who, in his latest book, which I commend, *Peace Beyond Borders* sketches the existing regional initiatives which demonstrate the thirst for such geographical co-operation. I agree with many of his conclusions. His theme is that history demonstrates that countries bound together by democracy, rule of law, economic truce, open borders and human ties, permanent discussion, dialogue and diplomacy, rules, human rights and multi-culturalism as well as mutual trust and peaceful co-existence and resistance to external interference *can* overcome armed conflict as the historic answer to dispute. He uses the EU as an example of a continent which, having been almost continuously riven by war since the advent of the nation state, has been able to resolve its issues peacefully rather than resorting to armed conflict encapsulated famously by Von Clausewitz as being merely an extension of foreign policy. Historically, Western Europeans have posed a greater threat to each other than external forces have posed to them. NATO has been a strong force for protection against external aggression but cannot account for internal peace which is thanks to the EU.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) set 2015 as the deadline to put in place its own economic common market: its 10 members comprise every single country in the well-defined sub-region of South-East Asia. Asia, of course, presents a particular challenge with giants such as China and India and enormous disparities in per capita income and living standards. In late 2014 UNASUR (Union de Naciones Suramericanas) with its headquarters in Quito brought together 12 South American countries into a single mechanism, creating a shared infrastructure and moving towards a common energy market while the North American Free Trade Association is under threat not from its concept but both by the dominance of its largest component in which the states of the US have less autonomy in trade issues than in other federal systems and the seeming protectionist policies of its present President.

Australia and Oceania present a double problem of both the economic predominance of the country in which this conference is taking place but also the geography of many small countries separated by great tracts of sea. Unlike Canada the states of Australia have ceded much authority to the federal government in court decisions from the 1920s on. It was not intended so. In the words of the namesake of this University Sir Samuel Griffith, inaugural Chief Justice of Australia from 1903 to 1919 and Head of the Supreme Court of Queensland, who prepared the first draft of the Australian constitution "It is not intended to transfer to the Executive Government anything which could be as well done by the separate governments of the colonies." The Pacific Islands Forum of 16 members is the closest Oceania has to the EU and unites Australia with most of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. In June 2014 its leaders endorsed the Framework for Pacific Regionalism defined as "The expression of a common sense of identity and purpose, leading progressively to the sharing of institutions, resources and markets, with the purpose of complementing national efforts, overcoming common constraints, and enhancing sustainable and inclusive development within Pacific countries and territories and for the Pacific region as a whole."

That leaves the troubled continent of Africa. Two weeks ago 44 African leaders of the 55 member states of the African Union signed a deal to create a Continental Free Trade Area under the banner "Creating One African Market" that will eliminate tariffs on 90% of products, liberalise services and reduce non-tariff barriers and which is the largest in the world since the creation of the World Trade Organisation in 1995. The African countries seek to form a \$2.5 trillion continental free-trade zone and it is an initiative of the African Union which, itself, has been modelled on the EU.

Among those holding out, however, were Africa's two biggest economies, Nigeria and South Africa but President Ramaphosa stated his commitment to the agreement once the necessary legal processes have been undertaken. It has been some time in gestation: back in October 2008 the leaders of three African trading blocs agreed to create a free trade zone of 26 countries with a GDP of an estimated \$624bn (£382.9bn) consisting of the three blocs of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa). As Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni at a meeting with the heads of state who chair the three trade blocs said "The greatest enemy of Africa, the greatest source of weakness has been disunity and a low level of political and economic integration." Of those 44 countries 14 are or have been members of the Commonwealth. This is an important milestone in Africa recognising that it has to provide solutions to its own problems rather than relying on outside intervention. It also marks a shift from the historic trade routes born of colonialism in which the emphasis was exporting its wealth rather than trading within itself.

But what of those organisations that straddle the world? Is there a role for them? They cut across ethnic and religious divides yet so often have more in common than what divides, not least the heritage of a system of justice and administration. When as a student I read Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* I was struck immediately by what I saw as the misapplication of the word Fall. Empires seldom fall as such – they mutate. The military and administrative hegemony may disappear but the legacy of language, culture and institutions is enormous and pervasive. The Mediterranean languages are based on the

Latin legacy of the Roman Empire – we still speak of the status quo without necessarily appreciating its origin – indeed, we even had a pop group named after it. There are numerous other examples. When studying my jurisprudence degree I learned about Roman law. Despite attempts to make Hindi the national language of India it is English that will continue to be the lingua franca as the one which crosses other indigenous languages there incomprehensible to each other.

Yet can we discern what keeps together a disparate collection of states called the Commonwealth into having regular annual Heads of Government meetings and a central Secretariat? Let me pass over the obvious unifying feature of the friendly competition and mingling of the Commonwealth Games which have spawned this conference.

With the exception of Mozambique which joined the Commonwealth in 1995 of its own accord all other 52 countries of the Commonwealth share the common heritage of having been part of the British Empire - they span Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific and are diverse – they are amongst the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. Thirty-one of the members are classified as small states – countries with a population size of 1.5 million people or less. They all subscribe to the Commonwealth Charter which brings together the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth - democracy, human rights and the rule of law - in a single, accessible document.

The Charter expresses the commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth. Most countries that have shaken off the shackles of colonialism have not wanted to keep formal links with their former masters so why was Britain different? Without gilding the lily of colonialism and disguising the exploitation and other abuses that accompanied it I believe it was the non-dogmatic way in which the British saw their empire as a trading colossus and were not interesting in changing local customs culture or religions so long as these were not inimical to the authority of its rule. Unlike others they did not proselytise (although it is true that many missionaries went in their wake). This largely laissez-faire attitude coupled with the institutions of law, Parliamentary democracy and administration not to mention the railways and language that were left behind somehow enabled former colonies to have a more benign view of their erstwhile masters. It is an enormous privilege that we should not squander.

The opening words of the Charter are instructive in the context of the theme of this conference: "We the people of the Commonwealth Recognising that in an era of changing economic circumstances and uncertainty, new trade and economic patterns, unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights and broadened economic opportunities, the potential of and need for the Commonwealth – as a compelling force for good and as an effective network for co-operation and for promoting development – has never been greater."

In pursuit of its collective objectives the Commonwealth is prepared to act – as it did with Fiji after a military coup, South Africa over apartheid and Zimbabwe over reckless farm seizures and blatant election tampering. It has a collective voice through its Heads of Government meetings and its Secretariat. The Queen is Head of the Commonwealth and Head of State of 16 Commonwealth countries yet this does not impugn the political independence of those states. In paying tribute to the indigenous peoples of this land, as I do, the Queen in her welcoming message to the Games said "The ancient stories told by the indigenous people of Australia remind us that, even though we may be half a world away, we are all connected. Over the years these Friendly Games have shown the potential of the Commonwealth to connect people of different backgrounds and nationalities."

Time does not permit a closer examination of the work of the Commonwealth Foundation, Association of Commonwealth Universities, Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, Commonwealth Games Federation, Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association but they are all worthy of study. Scholarships and fellowships are awarded by the United Kingdom to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. This disparate collection of 2.4 billion people has found a way of celebrating ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and common purpose in a way unequalled in history. It stands alongside other regional economic models which I have described. Its values and standards are ones to which all should subscribe. In the interest of global stability it remains a forum for good and, arguably, can be developed even further.

Is it, however, a workable world model as the title of this session suggests? It fails some of Vijay Mehta's ten tests, most notably a common resistance to external interference, economic truce and open borders but it scores on democracy, rule of law, human ties, permanent discussion, dialogue and diplomacy, rules, human rights and multi-culturalism as well as mutual trust and peaceful co-existence. Its value should not be underestimated not least as an additional vehicle for peace. Two days ago there was a television documentary about Northern Ireland after twenty years of the Good Friday Peace Agreement presented by someone whose father had been murdered in the troubles who concluded "Where there's peace there's always a wee bit of hope." Amen to that.

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