A Tribute to Douglas Roche

By

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On the Occasion of Douglas Roche’s 85th Birthday:
A Celebration of Life

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The date was 14 June 1946. Bernard Baruch introduced his famous plan for achieving global nuclear disarmament. So I thought it fitting to use this occasion today to ask—was it a mere coincidence or a predetermined fate that on that very day Doug Roche was celebrating his 17th birthday?

As we join now in commemorating the year of his 85th birthday, I hope his magic will produce many more disarmament initiatives in the future until his great goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is finally achieved. And yes—achieved in his lifetime.

Now, in our impersonal world of States and organized groups, it is fair to ask, are the actions of individuals now simply irrelevant?

Doug’s life and career prove that individuals do indeed count in this business. What more can a single person do for his country and the world community?

He has served both as Member of Parliament and as Senator.

He founded Parliamentarians for Global Action and the Middle Powers Initiative.

At the UN, he served as Canada’s Ambassador for Disarmament, as a Chairman of the UN Disarmament Commission, and as a Special Adviser on disarmament issues for the Vatican, for which he received a Papal Medal. He was once President of the UN Association in Canada and Honorary President of the World Federation of UN Associations.

His contributions to disarmament education are legendary, as seen both in his teaching at the University of Alberta, his receipt of no less than eight honorary doctorates from Canadian and American universities, and his authorship of some 20 books on disarmament and other international security issues.

For all these great contributions, he was made an officer of the Order of Canada, yet even that honour did not cause him to rest. He organized a project in which more than 700 members of the Order of Canada have endorsed a call for Canada to commit to working with other countries to achieve a Nuclear Weapons Convention, as has been proposed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

I think Canada’s former Prime Minister Joe Clark summed it all up very well. In his introduction to Doug’s book, *Creative Dissent*, he wrote, “As a Member of Parliament and senator, his interest was not really in the ‘art’ of the possible, but in the boundaries of the possible, and how far they could be pushed.” This quote certainly also applies to his many contributions to disarmament.

Imagine what could be accomplished in our imperfect world if we had just a few more individuals like Doug Roche to blaze new paths for advancing the common good, and to push “the frontiers of the possible” to new horizons. The more people read his books and contemplate his career, the more likely such individuals will appear amongst us. He is and will always remain an inspiration to all of us, myself of course included.

So congratulations, Doug, and best wishes from your grateful friends at the Office for Disarmament Affairs. We anxiously await your next contributions to our great common cause.