

**“Peace & Diversity” – The legacy of Lester B. Pearson**

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Given the theme of this event, I believe it’s fitting to focus on Canada’s notable Nobel Peace Laureate: Prime Minister Lester Bowles Pearson. In his **1957 Nobel Lecture**, Mr. Pearson addressed the Four Faces of Peace. I will focus on the fourth, **Peace and People**. And in particular young people – and how educating and empowering them can change the world.

Mr. Pearson asked:

“How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can [people understand each other] if they don't know each other?”

Throughout my life, I have been guided by Mr. Pearson’s words and deeds.

In the late 1980s, when studies were showing that a full one quarter of Canadian youth were having regular nightmares about nuclear war, I was particularly inspired by Mr. Pearson’s commitment to **nuclear disarmament** and non-proliferation. And so, at the age of 16, I and three other Montreal teens took a full year off school to organize and undertake a national tour: as members of **SAGE [Solidarité Anti-Guerre Etudiante]**, we spoke in a quarter of Canadian high schools about global peace and disarmament. We went on to speak in the **US, former USSR and United Nations** as members of the Canadian Delegation to the UN Special Session on Disarmament. The car that took us across Canada eventually went on to our National War Museum, on display as a “vehicle for peace.”

One of the last stops on our Canadian tour was **Pearson College** of the Pacific, where I vividly remember the engagement and idealism of the students. I learned from a young age that through hard work and team work, through preparation and determination, one can accomplish almost anything. I also learned that you can have fun and make lifelong friends while trying to change the world. Based on my experience connecting with youth in communities across Canada, I learned that we need a **national youth service** – that will help young people learn about themselves and what they can achieve as they strengthen communities across Canada and around the world.

Following the SAGE Tour, at the close of the Cold War, I, like many peace advocates, turned my attention to another crucial aspect of peace: **sustainability**. At the age of 19, I decided I was *too old* to speak to high school students in a way that would empower my peers to take action: so I launched another national tour, but this time recruiting a more diverse group of teens from across Canada to speak to their peers across the country. The **SAVE [Student Action for a Viable Environment] Tour** went on to become an annual tour for years to come.

As one of two **Global Youth Ambassadors appointed by the late and great Maurice Strong to the UN Earth Summit of 1992**, I became particularly passionate about the preservation of the diversity of the world's biological resources and the need to exercise wise stewardship for the equitable benefit of all peoples. I also became deeply involved in combatting climate change.

The twin issues of **biodiversity and climate change** continue to be a matter of grave concern, generating world-wide activism, particularly among our youth whose future is at stake. They became the subject-matter of my graduate studies in International Relations at

the London School of Economics; the focus of my work as an international reporter for the UN; the themes for the courses I taught in International Development at McGill; key considerations in my work as senior policy advisor on international cooperation in the government of Paul Martin; and ultimately the focus of my advocacy in co-founding Al Gore's Climate Reality Project in Canada.

**Through my work in the areas of peace and sustainability, I became more and more convinced of the role education must play in uniting people of diverse interests, perspectives and perceptions in seeking the common goal of peace.**

And while education in its broadest terms is necessary for common understanding, the **education of leaders is essential** for the world to reach the goal of peace. Educating and empowering a new generation of leaders is fundamental if we are to tackle the litany of global problems – social, environmental and economic – we ourselves, humans, are creating.

As one of the founding members of the **Banff Forum**, I have witnessed – and participated in – the development of one of the most influential networks of younger Canadian leaders whose annual gathering fosters civil discourse of national issues. Not that we all agree or speak with one voice! But the respect for one another's perspectives carries over to the exercise of leadership in every aspect of Canadian society including the highest levels of government. Before seeking public office, Canada's Environment Minister Catherine McKenna served as the Forum's Executive Director while François-Philippe Champagne, now Parliamentary Secretary for Finance, served as its President.

I'm pleased to see **the Global Shapers** and Millennials like previous speaker Giovanna Mingarelli have been instrumental in supporting this event. As a member of the **Young Global Leaders**, the next age

group up within the World Economic Forum, I was able to apply the same approach with my peers globally – engaging in discussions but also collective projects to address global peace and sustainability.

For over seven years, in my previous role as President of the **Jeanne Sauvé Foundation**, I worked with an outstanding group of young leaders coming from some 50 countries and dedicated to tackling global problems. This year's group of Jeanne Sauvé Fellows [some of whom are with us this evening] are addressing the broad theme of *Public leadership for Culturally Diverse Societies* through a specific focus of integrating refugees into Quebec society. Living, learning and leading together, they hone their leadership skills; and today the Sauvé Fellows alumni are making their mark as founders of social enterprises, as journalists, doctors, lawyers, human rights specialists and, of course, educators.

Several decades after my first visit, I returned to **Pearson College**, this time as President. I promised myself and the Pearson Community that I would be relentless in championing the work of Pearson and the United World College movement whose mission is to *make education a force to unite peoples, cultures and nations for a peaceful and sustainable future*.

Lester B. Pearson College is not merely named for Mr. Pearson; he was the driving force behind the founding of the College. His interest in the United World College movement convinced him that there must be such a college in Canada – a place where: *Students... will be welcomed without regard to race, religion or politics.... Students ... from all levels of society [who] will be genuine representatives of their own peoples*.

Pearson College, founded in 1974, went on to become the first UWC in the Americas, and one of the first IB programs in the world.

Every year, thousands of students – most of whom are on scholarship – from over 150 countries graduate from one of 15 United World Colleges. These students live and learn together through a program that **fully engages their heads (learning in the classroom), hearts (learning through service) and hands (learning through experience)**. For an intensive two-year period at a formative time in their lives, students are transformed into global citizens. And many have gone on to transform the world around them. Our young people aren't students forever, they are future politicians, teachers, economists, many of whom go back to their home countries to put what they've learned into practice.

**Through the decades – from my engagement as a youth activist on global issues to engaging young people from around the globe – I have learned that educating and empowering the next generation of leaders is not a 'nice-to-have'.** Much lip service is paid to youth engagement – and the rhetoric is rarely matched by concrete commitment. At the same time, many expect the next generation to solve many of our problems. I believe neither in paying lip service nor in passing the buck. I believe in working in partnership across generations to tackle big problems.

It is essential to changing the world, to addressing the *Ingenuity Gap* identified by Canadian author and academic Thomas Homer-Dixon: as global problems grow in scale, scope and complexity so must humans' capacity to address them. We need a new generation – one that embraces complexity, innovation and above all diversity not as something to be tolerated so much as to be celebrated – to keep pace with and ultimately overcome these challenges.

It has been my great and ongoing privilege – really, my life's work – to engage with these young leaders from every corner of the globe. This vocation also plays to my identity as a practical idealist – a

characteristic I'm told [by his family] that I share with Lester B. Pearson: that is to aspire to be true to your ideals, and work hard and smart to achieve them. Working with youth also feeds my inherent “operational optimism”: even if the reality of the problems humanity faces is cause for intellectual pessimism; we have a responsibility to act with a strong sense of hope.