

The Power and the Responsibility
Opening Talk for the 12th Symposium on Victimology
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Honorable Members and Patrons,

I'm privileged to talk to you this evening. We are in a glorious venue – Orlando, Florida, with insightful educators and energetic practitioners, and wonderful company, each other, members of the World Society of Victimology. I feel a great deal of humility in addressing you.

Abraham Lincoln said something like this: “We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving justice to the victim, we must assure justice to the accused – honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth” *Paraphrase of Lincoln’s Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862.*

I paraphrase this because Lincoln was talking about freedom and slavery and I’m talking about freedom of life as opposed to trauma, and justice as opposed to slavery, oppression and violence with impunity.

There is no doubt about the dangers that one confronts in this world.

It may be the danger of a neighbor who suddenly becomes an aggressor and rapes his neighbor.

It may be the danger of someone lurking behind a door at a convenience store trying to rob it but, inadvertently killing a store owner or an unsuspecting customer.

It may be the danger of terrorism, war or internal conflict.

It may be the danger of nature mowing down thousands through earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, internal and external conflicts, and such killing thousands or millions in the aftermath.

We all know the dangers, and most of us try to prevent, mitigate and thwart the happenings.

So, on the opening of this Symposium, there may be little more I can add. Although I am expecting you, my friends, to add your thoughts, your imaginations, and your experiences as we convene to face the dangers.

While such dangers can be identified concretely as I just did, they may stem from powerful emotional imperatives including:

Demonization is the result of hatred and xenophobia directed at those we do not understand.

Dispirit is an apathy when people do not think they can do anything in the confrontation with heartache and want.

Despair is when you give up hope.

For you, here, at this Symposium, I want you to revive your understanding of other cultures. I want you to rejuvenate your investment in spirit. I want you to live your hope.

I think that there are four ways to do this:

1. Remember your responsibilities to all other peoples and their human rights with particular regard to victims, justice and truth.
2. Remember your dedication to excellence in advocacy of victim rights and services in all countries.
3. Remember your courage to dare to challenge ideas, consider other opinions, and to seek a brave new world.
4. Remember your ability to dream. Dream of what can be, not what is.

If you can put those principles together, and I think you can, then dream not of danger, dispirit, or despair. Dream, instead, of a world which makes violence unacceptable; which makes violence towards children an abomination; makes gender or racial violence an atrocity; that dares to try to abrogate the conflicts in Darfur, Nepal, and Iraq.

Dream, my fellow citizens, of a world without violence: where people may live free from want; free from epidemics; and free from subjugation. Where they may pursue their basic rights of justice and live in peace and harmony. Keep on dreaming, but make those dreams a reality.

Enter into all our exchanges of information this week with thoughtful compassion. Our business here is to think and act. We sometimes may not be logical or wise, but working together cooperatively, in agreement on our goals and principles, we will be able to take this world to new heights in the field of victimology and victim assistance.

It may sound overly ambitious, but I sincerely believe what Lincoln said: “We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility.”