The Responsibility of Scientists for the Survival of the Human Species

Speaker: Dr. Andreas Toupadakis

Ladies and Gentlemen, my fellow Earth Companions,

From nearly every nation of the world we have gathered here for a single reason. Many of us have realized that the human species has become an endangered species. We are running out of time. What should each one of us do? How many more times will we be able to gather here together to reassess the progress we have made towards peace?

More than 55 years ago a physicist, Sir Joseph Rotblat, a member of the Manhattan Project, faced the same question. What should I do? The project he was working on was intended to build something new, never invented before, and it would be so powerful that it would be able to bring about unthinkable destruction and suffering. The instant killing of about 200,000 innocent people, and the suffering of even more to this day, had not taken place yet. But the question kept coming back to him. What should I do? Today we know that he resigned and he was not a part of the slaughtering and suffering of the subsequent mass murder. For his act and his tireless work for peace, he was honored with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995. He is the only survivor of the eleven signatories of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto of 1955. It's words are well worth recalling today:

We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death.

The general public, and even many men in positions of authority, has not realized what would be involved in a war with nuclear bombs. The general public still thinks in terms of the obliteration of cities. People can scarcely bring themselves to grasp that they, individually, and those whom they love are in imminent danger of perishing agonizingly.

There are a number of people worldwide who have followed Dr. Rotblat's example since 1945. Some are well-known, but there are probably many more whose names we'll never know. Two of the better-known examples are Dr. Theodore Taylor from the USA and Dr. Lev Feoktistov from Russia, former leading nuclear weapons designers from Cold War enemy nations who recognized the potentially disastrous consequences of their occupations, and who now devote their energies to the abolition of nuclear weapons. At the dawn of the new millennium, I myself faced the same question, as a member of what should be called the "Manhattan Project #2." While many people were celebrating the dawn of the new millennium, I was going through the most agonizing time of my life. What should I do? I had a wife with a part time job with no insurance, and two children. What should I do? I followed the highest call, the call of my conscience. I saw the omnicide which is about to be committed against all forms of life on our planet. On January 31st of this year, 2000, I resigned from a permanent, highly paid position in the Stockpile Stewardship Program at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, where I was working on the long-term maintenance of nuclear weapons. My act was an act of love for all humanity, all life.
Great thinkers of the past have commented on the meaning of life. "An unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates. Einstein the physicist said: "Only a life lived for others is a life worth while." Since my resignation I have been poor, but happy. We do not know how we will make ends meet, even with my wife and I teaching part time in four different colleges between us. But I believe that I have found my calling: to inform scientists and the public about the deceptive ways new scientists are lured into weapons work; to remind people that nuclear weapons are the perfect tool for humanity to commit suicide; and to call on each person to do his or her best to prevent that from happening.

My resignation has already created a great response. Many newspaper articles have appeared here and in Greece. Some articles even called me a hero! I’ve been interviewed on numerous radio shows, and have received invitations for speaking engagements across the country and around the world. Individuals I’ve never met have written to me from many nations to express their support and gratitude for my act. I believe that this excitement shows the aspiration of the human soul, which cries for peace despite the terrible plans of a few. Preparing for war in order to have peace is not the will of humanity. Trusting in bombs instead of the Creator is not the will of the people. Preparing for peace in order to have peace is the will of humankind.

"Science without virtue is immoral science" Plato said, yet, the scientists are at the heart of the new arms race. Therefore, I appeal to all scientists worldwide whose work supports the war machine to give up their jobs as I did, to follow my example. We have an obligation to our children and grandchildren. Every citizen must see to it that life will go on without unnecessary suffering. Mordechai Vanunu, a nuclear scientist and prisoner of conscience, has warned us: "Stop the train. Get off the train. The next stop: nuclear disaster."

Today I am appealing to you not as a scientist to scientists, but as a human being to human beings. Upon leaving this conference, I beg you to "remember your humanity and forget the rest;" to go back to the leaders of your countries and speak to them with determination and sacrifice. We have paid the price for war for too many years. Let us become willing to pay the price for peace.

Andreas Toupadakis, Ph.D.
May 3, 2000