

## 2012-4-23 Kerry Kennedy Remarks at opening of Nobel Summit

Thank you.

On behalf of the Host Committee of the World Summit of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, and my fellow co-chairs, Terry Mazany and the Chicago Community Trust, Bob Gallucci and the MacArthur Foundation, Michael Sacks and World Business Chicago, and my extraordinary brother, Christopher Kennedy, welcome to this amazing gathering! We are joined today by 5 heads of state, 21 Nobel Peace Prize winners, Governor Quinn, Mayor Emanuel, Sean Penn and some of America's greatest actors, RFK Compass, leaders from the financial and business communities, foundations, activists for social justice, union organizers, teachers, makers of peace all.

My Father, Bobby Kennedy, said "Speak up Speak out for Justice and Peace." That is the theme of this conference. We have many luminaries here, but I'd like to address my remarks to the students from U of I and the 15 other universities, a multitude of high schools across Illinois, and millions joining us via cyber link in the United States and throughout the world. Let's hear it for the students!

As you listen to the stories of the Nobel laureates, you will note they all have one quality in common -- Courage. Courage is bravery — a willingness to overcome fear, *combined* with compassion - a willingness to act on behalf of others. Many of them have faced imprisonment, torture and even death for their activism. Moral Courage takes this a step further. Moral Courage means standing up not just to governments and armies, but to friends and family; it is the willingness to be ostracized by your community, for what you believe is right.

Moral Courage is the rarest form of valor in the adult world, and yet it is the one that you, as students, are called upon to muster every day.

Because, every time you hear a sexist joke or a racial slur, every time you hear the words faggot or slut or fatso or retard, you must make a decision. Will I be a perpetrator, a victim, a bystander or a human rights defender? And each time you make the decision on which role you will play, you are exercising a muscle, making that muscle stronger. And that muscle is defining who you are at your school, in your family, in your neighborhood, in your life, and most importantly, when you look in the mirror. So as you hear the stories of the Nobel Laureates, listen carefully. They have chosen the role of defender. They are the Martin Luther Kings and Jane Addams of their countries. Again and again they enter the mouth of hell in local communities and come face to face with unspeakable human agony. And while others respond with indifference or hand wringing, **they** relieve suffering and save lives.

Martin Luther King said "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." Over the past 30 years, these men and women, and their small groups of determined people, imbued with moral courage, in the quest for peace, have bent history itself, and transformed the world.

30 years ago, right wing Military dictatorships ruled throughout Latin America. Today, virtually all of Latin America enjoys progressive democratic governments.

Communism dominated Eastern Europe. Today, there's not a Communist government left in the region.

South Africa suffered under the agony of Apartheid. Today, South Africa has had a series of freely elected leaders, elected by the majority of its people.

And, at the time, women's rights weren't on the international agenda. Today, CEDAW, the women's rights convention, has been ratified by 183 different countries.

All these changes came about, not because governments wanted them to, governments tried to stop them. And not because militaries wanted them to, in fact great armies tried to stop them. And not because multinational corporations wanted them to, multinational corporations tried to stop them.

All of these changes came about because people with few resources beyond their own determination fought for human rights. Individuals banded together and created change. They harnessed the dream of freedom and made it come true. And their efforts created a ripple effect, encouraging others, building a tidal wave which swept down some of the mightiest walls of repression and resistance.

Those individuals and small groups of people are the Nobel Peace Prize winners here with us today.

Just as they challenge governments, they challenge each of us to move beyond physical comforts to higher aspirations.

Their determination, valor and commitment in the face of overwhelming danger, challenge each of us to take up the torch for a more decent society.

They are not saints, frozen in some fresco, but the living, breathing embodiment of the values that we need to propagate in a world growing ever more violent.

Remember, as you hear their stories, that it is not the harrowing experiences that are the lesson, not the torture, not the rape, not the death threats. This is not about being a victim.

The real story is not the repression but the resistance, not the terror but the courage, not the futility but the power of one to create change.

So this summit is more than a series of information sessions. The laureates and the lives they've chosen to live are a challenge to all of us. Who among us is willing to speak truth to power? Bobby Kennedy said "those with the courage to enter the moral conflict will find themselves with companions in every corner of the globe". Let's band together with the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, with every person in this hall, let's muster that moral courage that resides within, let's stride confidentially into the moral conflict, and let's speak up and speak out for justice and peace.

Thank you!