

Citizen Diplomacy: An Essential Element of Foreign Policy
Speech by Harriet Mayor Fulbright
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Mention of citizen diplomacy happens so rarely that I am going to start with the "why" - what is so important about our efforts to reach out internationally. It has been made clear recently that the rest of the world knows little about life in the United States, about American people and their values and daily life despite – or perhaps because of – the prominence of American films and TV shows everywhere. Aside from the anecdotal evidence one sees in the news and the remarks heard constantly when traveling overseas, recent studies by the both Aspen Institute and the Pew Research Center emphasize the extreme lack of knowledge and understanding about the U.S., particularly in the Islamic world, and stress the importance of exchange programs and citizen diplomacy in helping to overcome that knowledge deficit.

As Michael McCarry of the Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange wrote, "A lack of first-hand knowledge of the United States facilitates the vicious stereotyping that diminishes foreign regard for the U.S. and fuels terrorism. A strong web of person-to-person contacts supports U.S. national security by undercutting these stereotypes. Even a person who strongly opposes our policies will have a hard time hating the United States if he or she has had dinner in an American home, worked cooperatively with American counterparts, learned English from an American teacher or attended an American school."

In other words peace through international understanding has become the business of not only governments but private citizens the world over. And who are these emissaries of peace, these citizen diplomats? Some, as this audience knows, come from the academic community. Both professors and students travel by the thousands to foreign universities, research institutes and other places of learning to exchange ideas and collaborate on books and other projects. The business community has also become a prominent member of this group. American corporations both big and small have done outstanding philanthropic work in countries where they do business and understand the value of reaching out to the communities they serve. Others are members of our most respected and energetic private nonprofit organizations, many of whom are represented right here, established right after World War II and run by citizens to ensure that we never again have to resort to worldwide deadly destruction.

For example, two well known organizations are Sister Cities International and People-to-People. Just about half a century ago President Eisenhower announced their formation to connect the US with cities and people abroad, to promote both understanding and trade, exchange methods of doing business and make friends. Then there is the World Affairs Council National Council of International Visitors or NCIV, which is government sponsored but is nonetheless a private nonprofit entity that invites people from all walks of life to the United States to visit citizens throughout the country. They are welcomed into American homes under the auspices of 95 regional chapters scattered all around the country and run by volunteers. And there are many other organizations and groups, more than you might realize, often strapped for funds but determined to fulfill their mission of international outreach.

Still another group that might not leap immediately to your mind but is important: namely the Olympic Games. I attended an anniversary celebration of the Fulbright Program in Athens, Greece, and the whole country was still euphoric over the success of the Games. As a friend of mine said, no other worldwide event better illustrates the people-to-people power of informal diplomacy than the Olympics. In ancient Greece, the Olympics marked a time of peace. As the torch traveled from city to city to announce the games, there was general agreement that no matter what manner of conflict was in progress, the games would bring an end to it while young athletes competed. In fact, sports in general are becoming more and more international and its practitioners must be considered citizen diplomats.

Artists are a section of our population not often associated with citizen diplomacy, but their role is especially important because, except for creative writing, language is no barrier, and these art forms can speak volumes. For example, when I lived in the Soviet Union in the early '60s, the New York City Ballet came to perform at the Bolshoi Theater. Ballet was very popular there, and so the opening night audience was huge. What they saw had them clapping and shouting. The freedom and innovation in the dances were so different from their own carefully controlled traditional steps that the Russians were dazzled.

The same was true of music. Jazz was a favorite underground form of musical expression. It was banned by the Communist government, but it, too, spoke of improvisation, experimentation, and yes—freedom. I attended the opening performance of Shostakovich's 9th Symphony and, again, there was a standing ovation at the end, and even tears flowing down many cheeks as Shostakovich and Yevdushenko walked on stage and embraced. Because the government detected Western influence in the piece, that performance was not just the first but also the last until after the collapse of Communism, and there was not one word about it in the news the next day. The ideas conveyed by the artists were profoundly moving because they spoke to the heart, and they were therefore considered dangerous.

There is another type of person that deserves to be considered as a citizen diplomat, and that is the activist. Activists are not often included in discussions of diplomacy or peace because they serve as an irritant to our complacency, the grain of sand in the oyster that often becomes the pearl in the form of greater awareness of a real problem or action to right a wrong, but we are short-sighted to dismiss them.

One such person received worldwide recognition not too long ago as the symbol of a broadening of the definition of diplomacy and peacemaking, and as some have said, a widening definition of peace itself. Last year the Nobel Peace Prize Committee named Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai as the winner, and it was a controversial decision. Her supporters have long called her brave, outspoken and "the green militant", but never a peacemaker. The nomination highlights a growing recognition that women in civil society and issues like human rights and the environment are crucial to promoting peace. '

In announcing this year's award, the committee chairman said, "We have expanded the peace concept to include environmental issues because we believe that a good quality of life on earth is necessary to promote lasting peace." "The committee and others are starting to address the issue

of peace at its roots." said Sanam Anderlini of the Massachusetts-based Women Waging Peace. "By choosing Maathai," Anderlini said, "the Nobel committee seems to be saying 'Peace comes through constructive engagement at the grass-roots level. ",

In other words, the concept of peace is expanding beyond an absence of war into the idea of "human security," into the assertion that a good quality of life is essential to avoid the headlong rush into conflict. "Peacemaking has broadened to include dealing with elements that undermine fulfillment of human life" declared Chadwick Elder of The International Journal of Peace Studies

All citizen diplomats are important not just for their programs and contributions but for the manner in which they can expand the minds and touch the hearts of others as well as their own. Scholars, young and old, under the Fulbright Program, the Rotary Club, the Muskie Fellowship and soon-to-be Lincoln Fellowship initiated by the late Senator Paul Simon, all travel to foreign lands to do their own research or lectures, but their very presence changes attitudes. Countless Fulbright scholars have told me of their own transformations, their realization as a result of life in another culture that there are ways of looking at the world and living in community with others that are different from those at home – ways that are equally valid. Countless collaborative projects have changed the lives and attitudes of the communities these scholars lived in and learned to love.

Citizen diplomacy not only transforms individual lives, but helps to form global networks that in turn change the very nature of foreign policy, of the conduct of international business and politics, of human relations between people of differing cultures. Recent events prove that even the most powerful cannot "go it alone," and that furthermore, understanding and empathy are the basic requirements for successful collaborative activity – an understanding of the values and attitudes of the potential collaborators and an ability to put oneself in another's shoes.

This is all very well, some say, but in this age of mass communication, why do we need to take the time and money to move people across borders to accomplish this? The first and most obvious answer is that communication - visual and verbal- has passed through the filter of the producer. Seeing and hearing through the eyes and ears of another means learning one point of view. It is the difference between looking through a keyhole and walking through an open door for whole view and even a dialogue.

Another equally important reason for working internationally I found in a fascinating book about the future and its possible directions. It starts with an impressive description of what it calls The Curve, or the accelerating rate of change thanks to modern technology. The earliest human's life remained essentially the same for millennia, until the advent of farming. Even after that, real transformation occurred slowly over hundreds of years, the pace stepping up only after the onset of the Industrial Age. It took the Age of Information to develop warp speed, and the curve of exponential change continues today. Some futurists are convinced that technology now drives history, that unimaginable good things will occur, and predictions that seemed like science fiction are routinely exceeded. Others focus instead on the onslaught of the growth of dark violent events and are convinced that *they* will predominate, causing unimaginable disaster.

The author then focuses on a third scenario. The proponents here insist that the prime force

driving history is not technology but is the will to prevail, to resist catastrophic negative forces. Basic to human nature is the need for community, which today includes the whole world, and the urge to be a part of something much larger than oneself. The need to create a larger community was what inspired Senator Fulbright to establish the program which bears his name. As he said, "The Fulbright Program aims to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship." It is this need to create community to establish something larger, something we can give back to, something that has the potential to make this world a better place that compels so many of us to turn from more lucrative projects, sometimes with a sigh, and link arms with one another to engage in yet another international activity.

I would like to end with a story from a trip I took to Japan. At breakfast, a longtime Japanese friend showed me an amazing large scrapbook, put together by his father. It contained stories and photos describing his experience in an American POW camp. Both the stories and the pictures showed mutual respect and even friendship between the prisoners and their American captors. He then handed me a letter he had written to me the night before because, as he said, these thoughts were so important to him that he needed to create a written record:

"Today is the 33rd anniversary of my father's death." He wrote. "The 33rd Memorial day is a very special occasion for Buddhists.

"My father was a P.O.W. in the Philippines during World War II. He used to tell me that he thought he and his colleagues would either be killed or mutilated so that he couldn't have children, but neither of those things happened to him. Therefore my six children and I exist today. It's all because of the humanitarian treatment by the American troops in the Philippines. I don't know how I can express my gratitude to the American people. My life was made possible by your countrymen. I hope someday you convey this message to the children in America. Humanism is what makes America a truly great nation."

And so, returning to our original premise - that peace through mutual understanding is the purpose of citizen diplomacy - it is clear that every one of us can become citizen diplomats. Everyone can connect in some way with those from another culture and raise the level of empathy between individuals and communities from differing cultures. Often the citizen diplomat can and does keep the lines of communication open when governments and their diplomats are in conflict.

This is reason for the establishment of the US Center for Citizen Diplomacy. It was clear to a sizeable group of us three years ago that more Americans needed to know and understand the essential role of citizen diplomacy and to join the growing movement towards international activity of private citizens in a myriad numbers of ways. I applaud Iowans for taking the lead in establishing a center for the whole nation, to act as a driving force, a clearing house and a source of valuable information, and I am deeply grateful. Thank you and congratulations!

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