

CRISIS GROUP FOUNDER'S AWARD PRESENTATION

Response by Professor the Hon Gareth Evans, President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group to presentation of Founder's Award by HM Queen Noor of Jordan, Gala Dinner, New York, 26 October 2015

Your Majesty, Queen Noor, colleagues and friends, I am absolutely thrilled and privileged to receive this award – my thrill and privilege only being tempered by a sense of guilt, I guess, first of all at being *paid* for doing this job, and now being *honored* for doing what unquestionably was one of the most stimulating and satisfying jobs anyone could possibly do.

I am particularly delighted to be receiving this award, moreover, from Queen Noor who, as most of you will know, has done as much if not more than anyone in this room, in her own right, to make this world a safer and saner place, not least through her passionate advocacy for ridding the world of nuclear weapons – the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever devised, and weapons whose benefits are way outweighed in today's world by the risks that they generate. Thank you, Noor, for everything that you said.

Crisis Group has been a wonderful organization to work for, for reasons that I think speak for themselves but that are common really to all successful international NGOs. First of all, it had from the outset a very clear idea of the need that it was meeting. And the need, that was being unmet by diplomats or anybody else, was to provide a combination of field-based research, to accompany that with very sharp edged policy prescriptions, and to accompany that with high level advocacy which would actually get those prescriptions into the heads of policymakers.

The second thing we did apart from having identified a need, was the need to stick very firmly to that mission throughout the course of our life as an NGO, something that NGOs don't always do. They lose their way: Crisis Group has not. The third thing we did was to be fiercely independent, providing advice that wasn't always what our government and other supporters wanted to hear, but it was what they needed to hear.

And above all finally, I think what made this organization so successful, and what makes it continue to be so successful, is its sheer, relentless professionalism. Professionalism in the product quality, the administration quality, and the governance quality. And that's a product of many different things. It's a product overwhelmingly of the marvelous quality of Crisis Group's staff. It's a product of the marvelous quality of Crisis Group's Board of governors, all famous people, and justly famous, people in their own right. So without stopping to single out any one of them, just let me say like Casey Stengel said of the New York Yankees in 1958: 'I couldn't have done it without my players.' And nor could I have done it without the Board over successive years, who even though they were once described by the New Left Review as "a gang of poachers turned game-keepers", and in one other left-wing blog as a "blood-soaked elite". Well, as blood-soaked elites go, they've been a pretty substantial contributor to world peace, and I am deeply grateful for them.

Crisis Group stuck throughout that last 20 years to the task that it was so brilliantly equipped to do. It stuck to task of ringing early-warning bells, and of identifying the appropriate policy responses for a myriad of different crisis conflict situations as they arose. And it stuck very often, as well, to the business of identifying and reconceptualising answers to intractable

policy problems – one notable example being our development of an approach to solving the Iran nuclear problem ten years ago which, if the powers that be had taken notice of what we were prescribing, would really have saved ten years of awfully protracted misery.

Just one final word. This award I think is capable of being misconstrued, being described as it is as the “Founder’s Award.” I might have had something to do with building the organization, but I do want to make it clear that the foundations upon which this organization has been built were really laid by others. Jean-Marie Guehenno has already identified them but let me say it again. There was the role played by Mark Malloch Brown, our co-chair who was present at the creation. There was fantastic intellectual and financial support given to us from the outset by George Soros. There was the indefatigable support given by the late and sadly-lamented Steve Solarz, who generated, worldwide, incredible support for the organization in its fledgling days. But, above all, there was the indefatigable energy, the vision, the determination, and the perseverance of Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, who really does deserve the title as Founder in Chief.

So to all those people, and the wonderful staff of this organization, I owe a debt of gratitude. I think we all owe them a debt of gratitude. And with the continuing support and generosity of people like you in this room, I think Crisis Group is destined for another wonderful 20 years at least. Thank you so much.
