

**A Few Words of Thanks to Ken Epps
On the Occasion of his Retirement from Project Ploughshares
Saturday, October 18, 2014
Waterloo, ON**

I have been asked to say a few words about Ken on the occasion of his retirement from Project Ploughshares. It gives me great pleasure to do so.

I understand Ken has requested that any comments about him should be no longer than the characters in a tweet. There is some dispute as to how many characters there are in a tweet, but this is irrelevant to me as I do not tweet and have no intention of tweeting. So, with a clear conscience, I will dispense with Ken's request.

I have had the good fortune of knowing Ken since the early 1980's. He and I worked together at the Global Community Centre in Kitchener-Waterloo. One issue that Ken was concerned about was the impact of conflict on human development. Recall that during these years, the apartheid regime in South Africa was causing such havoc and misery in South Africa and in Southern Africa. Central America was in flames, largely fuelled by the U.S. Administration. There was a Cold War and little progress had been made in reducing nuclear weapons.

As the coordinator at the Global Community Centre, Ken began to collaborate with Project Ploughshares. In 1986, Ken accepted a position with Project Ploughshares. For the next 28 years, he brought his considerable gifts and skills to Ploughshares, the churches that support Ploughshares, the Canadian Council of Churches, and to the ngo community in Canada and around the world.

I am not going to list all of Ken's accomplishments with Project Ploughshares. I will note a few here. In these past 28 years, Ken has served as editor of Ploughshares' annual conflict maps. His annual reports on Canadian arms sales were clear and well written. One wonders about the wisdom of (Government of Canada) approving the sale of millions of dollars in Canadian weapons to a number of governments including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

Ken was deeply involved in the global campaign to ban the production, sale and use of anti-personnel land mines. As you know, we now have a treaty.

More recently, Ken has worked with colleagues in the ngo community here and around the world in pressing for an Arms Trade Treaty.

I checked the UN Disarmament web site earlier this week. To date, 121 member states have signed the Arms Trade Treaty and 53 have ratified it. Once 50 states ratify a treaty, it comes into force. On December 24, 2014, the Arms Trade Treaty will come into force. This merits a cheer and a toast. On a more sobering note, the Government of Canada has not signed the ATT, the only member of NATO not to do so and appears indifferent to signing the ATT. This is regrettable.

Those who give their lives in the pursuit of peace have little power and little influence, especially in these challenging days. What peacemakers have and what can never be taken away from them however, is the power of their imaginations to believe that a different world is possible. Their vocation is to struggle for such a world with relentless and persistent hope. This is what peace activists offer to the world. Ken certainly shares this hope - why else spend years working for an Arms Trade Treaty or the Land Mines Treaty.

Following an international conference on land mines in Maputo, Mozambique in February, 1997, Ken had this to say:

"Of all the features of the international campaign to ban landmines, perhaps the most surprising has been the degree to which civil society, at least as expressed through the work of ngos and some international organizations like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), has influenced and indeed driven, government action and policy regarding Anti-Personnel mines..... International Coalition to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and Canadian Government cooperation has been a real partnership in which both (participants) have contributed real strengths not available to the other. It is hard to imagine that one actor could have pushed events so far and so quickly".

Ken goes on to say that.... " the Maputo conference was important testimony to the reality and the potential of civil society..... Individuals representing groups from around the world worked together (for four days) comparing experiences and (demonstrably) moving an important issue forward. More significantly, by the attention and presence of governments it commanded, Maputo represented a new plateau in the outward reach and strength of civil society".

Today, in some quarters, civil society, international cooperation, international law, international efforts to de-escalate conflict and to put in place the pieces to build peace with justice are not taken seriously and occasionally sneered at.

More than 150 countries have ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (or Mine Ban Convention), adopted in 1997. Not every member state of the UN has ratified this Treaty, but as a result of this Treaty, thousands of people have not been killed and thousands of people have not been maimed. Much credit is also due to those involved in de-commissioning land mines.

Our international institutions are not perfect, but when they work effectively, human suffering is reduced. This Treaty exists because of men and women around the world believed that this Treaty was necessary. Ken you contributed, with many others to be sure, in making this Treaty possible.

Ken, you have worked with colleagues in Canada and around the world in the development of the Arms Trade Treaty. You have done so on behalf of Canadian churches. We are confident that in time, this Treaty will be signed by a Canadian Government. In time, it will have an impact in ensuring greater international control in the global weapons market. The Arms Trade Treaty will never be a perfect instrument, but on December 24, 2014, there will be an Arms Trade Treaty. Lives will be saved. Suffering will be reduced. A start has been made.

So, Ken for these and other contributions you have made, may I say on behalf of many people, thank you.

I understand that while you have officially retired, you will be working on a contract with Project Ploughshares for the next few months. Samuel Johnson, the English poet, essayist and writer had this to say about retirement:

Don't think of retiring from the world until the world will be sorry that you retire. I hate a fellow whom pride or cowardice or laziness drive into a corner, and who does nothing when he is there but sit and growl. Let him come out as I do, and bark.

On a more personal note, I have on occasion, supped an ale with Ken. It seems appropriate to share this verse from a song written by Ian Robb, a folk singer in Ottawa. The verse is from a song called *The Old Rose and Crown*. The verse goes like this:

*So come all you good people who like to sup ale
Here's hope to a happier end to my tale
For there's nothing can fill a heart with more cheer
Than to sit in a pub with a pint of good beer.*

Thank you.

Stephen Allen
Associate Secretary
Justice Ministries
Presbyterian Church in Canada