



17.2.2017 – “It is difficult to overstate the gravity of the crises we currently face”, stated UN [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, during his speech after having received the annual Trainor Award from Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.

In a particularly strong-worded speech, entitled “ [The Impossible Diplomacy of Human Rights](#) ”, he targeted populist leaders and dangerous waves of hatred, feeding off terrorism and fear of the Other.

“To many of us it appears the international system could become dangerously unstable. Fresh shocks are opening up unsuspected fault-lines, weight-bearing pillars are in danger of collapse.”

The High Commissioner sounded the alarm, as instead of dealing with common challenges, the trend seems to be to turn away and look inwards.

“Key international and regional institutions constitute a consensus which has for decades maintained, supported and regulated the relations between states and their behaviour. That system was always flawed, but for more than 70 years it had the undeniable advantage of staving off the prospect of World War III. Now we are witnessing a sudden and massive erosion of the commitments underpinning it”, Zeid underlined.

Zeid also addressed French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen directly in a response to her [open letter](#) that featured arguments of the need to protect and “amplify” the French culture.

“The question is: protect it from what? From whom does her country need protection?”, Zeid asked. “It would appear her intended targets, at least in the letter, are not the terrorists from whom we all need protection, but the international and regional laws and institutions my colleagues and I promote and represent.”

“The nationalists fail to acknowledge that the perpetrators of most recent terrorist attacks are takfiris (=Muslims accusing fellow Muslims of apostasy), who have taken up a militant ideology, clearly identified. The vast majority of Muslims are not takfiris – not in France or here in the U.S., or anywhere else; nor do they come even close to supporting the takfiris, who have murdered tens of thousands of Muslims, and displaced hundreds of thousands of others, in the pursuit of their ideology. To thwart the takfiris, would it not be far smarter to tap into the huge number of Muslims who despise them, instead of alienating the very group most likely to unmask their operations?”

“Time and again, humanity has lost its bearings on the back of half-truths and lies”, Zeid said. “Can we be so reckless, so stupid, as to risk the future of humanity, simply for the sake of ballots? Are we not being marched back to a Sarajevo? To a Sarajevo of 1914, when the flammable competitive bristling of ethnic nationalisms eroded balances of power and any sense of compromise, to the point where a relatively obscure event at the margins of European politics triggered global catastrophe? In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we understood if this could happen in Europe in the 1990s it could still, given the right stimuli, happen anywhere. But those more recent lessons too, we seem to be forgetting.”

But rather than giving in to populism, Zeid called for strengthened action and determination.

“Our work changes not just laws, but lives. There is simply no alternative – we must continue our work, if human life and well-being are to be maintained. We need – all of us – to defend international law -- international refugee law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law. For they – and the institutions that uphold them – are the very distillation and sum of human experience. They are not, as some would have you believe, the outcome of post-war bureaucratic doodling.”

“I want to believe the human impulse towards a greater good will always eclipse those menacing instincts lying deep within us all, that makes us vulnerable to suggestion. I want to be part of a movement beyond my affiliations to family, to tribe or nationality, beyond my ethnicity, race, religion or gender, my professional affiliation, my sexual orientation or the like. To put it another way, Ladies and Gentlemen, eclipsing all the other identities I may have, I want to feel human first – human first.”

Read the entire speech [here](#) .

Watch the webcast of the speech (starting at 26 min) [here](#).