

Stephen Travers – The Hague Address

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In Steven Spielberg's movie, *Close Encounters of The Third Kind*, people from all over the world were mysteriously drawn to a mountain where they felt a significant event would occur. They appeared to have just one thing in common; an instinctive urge to congregate for an important but incomprehensible experience. Today, I find myself among people that I've never met before, from different countries, speaking a variety of languages and from unfamiliar backgrounds. Yet, like the diverse folk in Spielberg's film, I feel a strong bond between us; an inexplicable affinity that can only be described as comfortable and reassuring. I believe this is because, in a unique way, we share a part of ourselves that other people can never fully understand.

In 1975, I was living every young man's dream; I was a member of Ireland's top pop group, *The Miami Showband*. We performed for thousands of people every night and we had a loyal fan-base in every major city in The UK and The United States of America. For its time, our lifestyle was glamorous and exciting. Our records were in the charts and our pictures were in all the papers and magazines and we were constantly on TV. I played bass guitar and I loved every minute of it. We crossed all social, religious and political boundaries and our audience, just like the band, was Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist and drawn from both sides of the Irish border. We were, in fact, the perfect blueprint for social, religious and political harmony. During "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland, *The Miami Showband* was de-radicalisation at its most effective. Unfortunately, we were too effective against those that believe in violence as a justifiable means to a political end. On the morning of July 31st 1975, five members of our band were attacked; three innocent young musicians were brutally slaughtered, one escaped and I was left critically injured with multiple gunshot wounds. Two of the terrorists accidentally killed themselves when the bomb they were secretly planting under the driver-seat of our minibus exploded prematurely. *The Miami Showband Massacre* happened because one section of Northern Ireland society feared losing its privileged status to the extent that that fear radicalised it. Radicalisation is the only appropriate term to use when ordinary citizens murder the innocent and those that support such atrocities are similarly radicalised whether they turn a blind eye to terrorist activity or afford terrorists immunity from prosecution.

None of us here today needs to be reminded what the aftermath of a terrorist attack feels like. Too many of you know what it's like to cradle a blood-soaked child in your arms, to hysterically hold on to a dying parent or sibling or to despairingly console a dismembered friend or colleague. I don't need to explain to you how it felt to frantically shake my mutilated friend and shout in his ear hoping against hope for some sign of life. To vainly comfort and reassure our handsome young singer, for almost an hour, that he'd be okay even though his face had been removed by twenty sub-machine-gun bullets. To assure my guitarist friend with whom I had shared a stage just an hour previously that his hands were fine even though he had been struck, from behind, in the back and in the head by eight or nine bullets and then, to remain in denial for weeks; refusing to accept that they were dead.

I'm sure the experts will explain how normal people become radicalised and, with that knowledge, they can better monitor those who are susceptible to radicalisation but there will be individuals that do not fit any formula for susceptibility. Are all radicals easily identifiable? Do they all fit neatly into one recognisable group? Are there varying levels of radicalisation that require proportionate reaction? Should the response to radicalisation be a one-size-fits-all, when it's clear that heavy-handedness often changes moderates into extremists? We know that some of the men convicted for the murders had been at our concerts and dances many times but we didn't notice anything radical about them! In Northern Ireland today and in many other areas of discord, some self-righteous, benevolent-looking grandparent is bouncing a child on his or her knee and teaching it to hate the family next door because they say different prayers to the same God. What system of de-radicalisation can be employed when the disease is virtually undetectable? Radicalisation usually results from the manipulation of the predisposed by power-seeking individuals or groups to further their own interests but no society or level of society has a monopoly on good or evil: After years of denial and cover-up, the recent Historical Enquiries Team, set up by the British Government to investigate collusion between the security forces and terrorists in Northern Ireland, found damning evidence of high-level collusion, yet, although presented with overwhelming evidence against sections of its army, police force and secret service, the British Government still refuses to acknowledge even the accusations of collusion with Loyalist terror organisations: It continues to ignore the findings of its own investigative bodies as well as those of independent, international tribunals. Of course, it would be entirely wrong to tar the entire British establishment with the same brush. Is there, then, an effective way to target the bad cells for de-radicalisation while leaving the good cells intact?

I believe there is!

One very effective way to overpower radicalisation is to visibly and unambiguously prove the case against the ideology that drives it. But justice must be seen to be done and the case must be presented truthfully for an informed world to judge for itself. There's an old saying "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil" and, as certain as every victim deserves justice, every individual deserves truth. I believe that truth is the most effective weapon against radicalisation because truth is the DNA of civilization.

The great writers have always used engaging stories to convey important messages. Heroic characters are constantly used to implant and establish virtue and morality in society: It's no accident that Superman, Batman and James Bond always win in the end. However, we cannot afford to be complacent; we must courageously expose the falsehood of the philosophy of terror as a valid political instrument, we must prove to terrorists that violence shames rather than ennoble their cause. We must vehemently defame and discredit any ideology that justifies terrorism by disclosing the true horror of violence and highlighting its disastrous consequences for society. Unfortunately, in a world of many distractions and apathy, even such noble objectives must be marketed in a stylish, attractive and seductive way. We must promote peace and reconciliation as civilised, sophisticated and cool; both overtly and subliminally. In 2007, our book, *The Miami Showband Massacre*, regenerated widespread revulsion and disgust for terrorism. Subsequent television documentaries and interviews resulted in renewed condemnation of terrorism by senior Government ministers and a current leader of the terrorist organisation that murdered my friends engaged with me, at a secret meeting that lasted for five hours: It was a productive and enlightening exercise that benefitted both parties. The news of *The Miami Showband* movie is already creating considerable interest in The United States because it combines a powerful anti-terrorism message with the exciting story and music of a young pop group. How cool is that?

Many of us will never find total peace but we can make good use of the energy generated by the turmoil inside us. Let us, today, resolve to combine that energy to become an unstoppable force in the war against terrorism.

Stephen Travers