

2018 INTERNATIONAL ADVOCATE FOR PEACE AWARD

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ADVOCATE FOR PEACE AWARD

Leymah Gbowee

The International Advocate for Peace Award Recipient

On April 27, 2018, the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* presented the Eighteenth Annual International Advocate for Peace Award to Leymah Gbowee. What follows is a transcription of the award ceremony, including Leymah Gbowee's acceptance speech.

DEAN MELANIE LESLIE: Welcome to Cardozo Law School. I'm Melanie Leslie. For those of you who are not students, I'm the Dean of the law school, and I'm very happy—very privileged actually, and honored—to be able to introduce the event and welcome you here. I first want to acknowledge the students who put this together: the staff members of the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the Cardozo Law Institute for Holocaust and Human Rights, [and] the Black Law Students Association for their work in organizing and sponsoring the event. And I also want to give a special welcome to Abigail Disney. [Applause]. She is also a recipient of our International Advocate for Peace Award in 2011 and she will introduce Leymah Gbowee. Of course, a special welcome to you [pointing to Leymah Gbowee] and thank you for making the time to come. We are very honored that you have agreed to accept the award today.

Since some of you may not be familiar with Cardozo Law School, let me say a few words about our Dispute Resolution Program. In 1985, Cardozo pioneered the establishment of a mediation clinic to train law students as mediators. Now it says there that *we* pioneered it, but actually Lela Love pioneered it, so we must give credit where credit is due. [Applause].

And that clinic has been a vital part of our school ever since, and this year had ninety-three applicants for the sixteen spots in the program. Our Kukin Program for Conflict Resolution, which includes courses and clinics on negotiation, mediation, and arbitra-

tion, has been recognized as a top ten program in dispute resolution by U.S. News & World Report every year since 2000. We also have an LL.M. degree in dispute resolution and a certificate, or a concentration program, for J.D. students and every year we send our students around the world for various competitions where they do very well. I was speaking to the dispute resolution students last night, who had competed in Prague, and they actually said that when they got there someone said “Oh the Cardozo team is here, we’re in trouble.” [Laughter].

The *Journal of Conflict Resolution* will publish the remarks made here today and is the entity that has initiated the International Advocate for Peace Award. It is among one of the top Journals for negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. Our program stands for the idea that lawyers should be trained as creative problem solvers as well as fierce advocates. So, without further adieu, I am going to turn it over to the famous Professor Lela Love who is the Director of our Dispute Resolution Program, and she will explain a little bit about the Award itself, so please welcome Professor Love. [Applause].

PROFESSOR LELA LOVE: This is really exciting to have Ms. Gbowee here to receive this award. I want to say just a little more about Cardozo. So many of our initiatives were started by students and this International Advocate for Peace Award is another student initiative. It has had an illustrious history with seventeen awardees, many of whom—most all of whom—are household names. And on the roster of awardees are people, like our current awardee, who have changed the course of history and countries, for their country or others. So for example, President Bill Clinton, in Bosnia Kosovo in 2001, was the IAP [International Advocate for Peace] awardee; Senator George Mitchell, who changed things in Northern Ireland with his mediation there, received our award in 2002; Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in South Africa, received the 2003 award for his really groundbreaking work in truth and reconciliation in that country which taught the world a lot about possibilities in post-conflict situations; and President Jimmy Carter, for his work in the Middle East, was the awardee in 2013.

In that tradition, and along the same path, a path perhaps we all think trod by Gandhi and Martin Luther King with powerful non-violence, Leymah Gbowee is a tireless successful warrior for peace. I’ve seen her now several times, in person at Columbia and in many videos, and she exudes sincerity, being down to earth, be-

ing tireless . . . though I hear you say you're tired now and then [Laughter] . . . and a certain remarkable humility. That she was a woman in a very patriarchal society didn't stop or slow her down. In fact, she did something that we always advocate, turning a weakness into a strength. She used sex strikes, threats of disrobing herself to shame people, shame men, to stop the brutal carnage that they were involved in in Liberia.

As a mediator, in rooms where people get up and leave, I wish Ms. Gbowee and her compatriots would be outside the doors keeping people in the room. [Laughter]. So I'd just like to say, and I think our students agree, [that] war is the number one threat in terms of being an enemy to human health and to our chance as a species to survive. Displacement, famine, trauma, unspeakable disruptions in families and in the larger social fabric are the result of war . . . it may destroy the human race. So these champions of peace are people that we should be honoring. And so Abigail Disney is going to introduce Ms. Gbowee.

I love these words, so if you repeat them again, this is fine. Ms. Gbowee said "We are tired of war, we are tired of running, we are tired of begging for bulgar wheat, we are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand to secure the future of our children, because we believe as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, 'Momma what was your role during the crisis?'" And she did something about the crisis.

She is now at Columbia [University], the Director of the Women, Peace and Security Program. We are starting a restorative justice initiative next year, here at Cardozo, which is a new direction for us and we hope in some way to be able to partner with you. So thank you for being on this list of incredible people. I want to introduce Ryan Vines. It's the students, as I said, that champion our programs. Ryan is the Editor-in-Chief this year of the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and he is going to say some more about Ms. Gbowee. [Turning to Leymah Gbowee]. You're going to be embarrassed by . . . maybe you don't get embarrassed, I don't know. [Laughter]. And he is going to then be followed by Abigail Disney.

RYAN VINES: Good afternoon. Thank you all for joining us on such a special day. I am Ryan Vines and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*. I am so privileged to present this year's award to Ms. Leymah Gbowee. The *Cardozo Jour-*

nal of Conflict Resolution, which is the publication arm of the Kukin Program here at Cardozo, is one of the most highly touted and highly ranked legal publications on conflict resolution scholarship in the world. In addition to publishing scholarship and hosting our yearly Symposium every fall, annually the Journal presents its International Advocate for Peace Award to internationally recognized leaders for their efforts in dispute resolution. I can go on and on about the past winners, and the incredible work they have done. However, I would like to take a moment to explain how we determined this year's recipient, Ms. Gbowee.

Let's take a step back for a moment. What is an Advocate for Peace? The answer might be more paradoxical than you might imagine. Back in September, Elana, Sarah, Donna, Professor Love, and I met to discuss potential recipients for this year's International Advocate for Peace Award. At this point, many names were being circulated, but almost all of them would inevitably turn out not to meet the definition of what an Advocate for Peace could be. In fact, there was serious debate whether we should consider reevaluating the criteria of the award, or even change the award. There were five people sitting in this room, and not so surprisingly enough, all five had completely different definitions of what an Advocate for Peace was. This is law school. [Laughter].

However, there was one defining moment during this meeting for me. It would turn out to be the first step in me recognizing how incredible Ms. Gbowee was. Elana and Professor Love were in the middle of a back and forth, debating the appropriate merits for an Advocate for Peace—and I'm paraphrasing a little, but Professor Love said something to the effect of: "An Advocate for Peace is . . . well, it's someone who pushes for peace. I don't know why it just seems simple to me." And quite honestly, at the moment, it didn't seem so simple to me. You'll be happy to hear that the criteria for our International Advocate for Peace remains in place.

Now let's fast-forward to February of this year. My girlfriend asked me what movie I wanted to watch that evening. We agreed that the movie we would watch was *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, directed by Ms. Abigail Disney. Towards the beginning of the movie, there was a moment where Ms. Gbowee was quoting a conversation between her child and her, back in 1996. For those of you that don't know, in 1996, Liberia was amid their first civil war. There would go on to be another civil war only a few years down the road. To avoid the pillaging, the raping, and the murdering, that for lack of a better word seemed so conventional at the time,

Ms. Gbowee, her children, and almost fifty of her family members went into hiding. Because of the extreme danger, those hiding in Ms. Gbowee's parents' home took turns running in and out of the home to scavenge whatever they could to help feed each other. It was a team effort at all times. At one point during this ordeal, her three-year-old child looked at her and said "I am really so hungry, I just need a piece of donut." In the midst of all that chaos, Ms. Gbowee's instinct as a parent took over. She knew she couldn't provide her child with a donut at that very instance, but in due course, she would provide her children with something even greater—a united Liberia.

I couldn't even imagine what that must have been like. On the same day I would watch *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, ironically enough I would actually have eaten two donuts before I watched that movie. [Laughter]. I thought I had earned the right for a cheat day. When I saw the scene from Ms. Disney's movie, everything froze—everything. As a son, my heart truly bled. It was then that I knew that we had found our International Advocate for Peace.

So I ask again, what is the definition of an Advocate for Peace? It's complex. But Ms. Gbowee, your strength to stand up for those without a voice, your vision of a united Liberia, and your will to not let anyone tell you otherwise, inspire us all to pursue non-violent conflict resolution at all costs. You survived an unbearable situation facing horrific atrocities, and yet you responded with reason, intellect, fairness, and the strong belief of the united Liberia. You remind us all that in resolving conflict through the course of our own professional pursuits—men, women, and all—need to stand together no matter their differences, big or small.

We are all a part of the same world. We are proud to honor you for challenging the world to respond to such horrors with such valiance. You gave a voice to everyone. You helped create unity. You are a true International Advocate for Peace—through the work you have done, through the work you continue to do, and through future activities you will continue to inspire us all. It is my honor and my privilege to recognize you with the 2018 International Advocate for Peace Award. Before we proceed to give you the physical award, I would like everyone to welcome Ms. Abigail Disney, who will be introducing the eighteenth, and in my opinion our most distinguished, International Advocate for Peace. Thank you. Ms. Disney. [Applause].

ABIGAIL DISNEY: I won't be long, I won't be long, and I will tell you that Leymah is almost never late. That was the first of the many, many cultural stereotypes that she preceded to overthrow for me, [which] was to be totally punctual for everything all the time [Laughter], so know that there was traffic there that she couldn't control.

If you go to the internet and you google precious natural resources in Liberia you'll come up with diamonds, gold, iron ore, rubber, copper, and other things like that. And we are now looking at Liberia's most precious natural resource, Leymah Gbowee. If you google her—and you can do that and find plenty of videos and so forth of speeches she's given over the years, you'll find out everything you need to know and I encourage you to do that—but I actually want to tell you about the things you can't google about her because I am lucky enough to be her sister.

So there are things that you need to know about her. About twelve years ago I was researching the story that eventually became the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, and someone called me and said you know you better call this lady, she seems to know a lot about this story. So I dialed this cell phone number and I said hello, is that Leymah Gbowee? And this tolerant voice said “yes” and we set up a time to meet for coffee. And I proceeded to sit down next to the person that I thought was possibly the most intimidating human being I had ever been next to in my life. She seemed towering, and she seemed distant, and she seemed smart, and she was just barely tolerating me. And what I now understand as *that* quality is that that wasn't that she was intimidating, that was because she was really all that.

This is a woman who combines being made of steel with being made of love, all the way down through the core. And the reason that I know this is because I have come to know her as a mother to my own children and to the children that she has. If you meet and get to know well-known people, you will generally get a very different picture of them if you talk to their children. That's because it's very difficult to live a life in the public eye and still come home to your children fully there for them. And I know each and every one of Leymah's children, and I challenge any of us to raise our children with the kind of love, care, and decent sensibility about human life and their obligations to it that she has done with eight children, for the most part as—almost as—a single woman. She is an extraordinary mother, an extraordinary friend, and an extraordinary human being. She is one of the smartest people I've

ever met, constantly blowing me away by understanding and seeing right down to the roots of things. She misses nothing, and she is good down to her very core.

So she's the first person who proved to me this one important fact—that peace does not come from the people in the offices at the top, right? That's what we've been living for so long. We get the presidents together, they agree about something, they shake hands, and, suddenly, magically peace settles over the land. [Laughter]. And time and again we've seen that it doesn't work that way, which is why we've been talking for so many years about the importance of women in peace processes because, generally speaking, they are not the ones with the weapons. And generally speaking, they're the ones at home finding the water, getting the education, taking care of the children, and making sure everybody lives through the conflict.

You don't assign job with the complexity of making peace to the very people who have broken it time and time and time again. What we now know is that peace bobbles up from underneath. Peace is made by people, and it's made by one person at a time at the ground level. The people living in the clouds above us who exchange money and exchange power, who are for the most part men but not all men, who are for the most part white but not all white, still need the message again and again and again. I think of them as "Pillsbury Doughmen," if you were ever raised on that commercial. You make an impression on them, but you take your finger away . . . [sighs] . . . you got to do it all over again. There are not a lot of people who shuttle back and forth between the clouds and the ground the way Leymah does, which puts her in an incredible position. She just came from meeting with my boyfriend Justin Trudeau in Canada. [Laughter].

And I think that she deserves another hundred Nobel Peace prizes for everything that she's done since the committee recognized her in 2011. I don't think any of you can even imagine what it feels like to go to eastern Congo with this woman . . . what it feels like to go to Sri Lanka or Burma with this woman and watch the way she works with the advocates at the ground level. It's extraordinary the differences from war to war if you talk to the generals, but they are all the same when you talk to the women who survive them. And Leymah has used her position as a Nobel-list not to retreat to the clouds the way many, many people do, but to double-down on the work on the ground, to double-down on grassroots women, to double-down on South Sudan, on Nigeria, on

Libya, on Palestine. She has worked not tirelessly and not fearlessly, because those words are a myth. But she has worked constantly, and with everything that she has, to continue making sure the people in the clouds understand just exactly where and who brings peace to the world. So, I give you my dear sister and friend, Leymah Gbowee. [Applause].

LEYMAH GBOWEE: Thank you Abi, and Abi is so right, I am never late. So, I'm almost like a child, panicking when I feel like I'm getting late for an event because there is so many stereotypes about Africans, and I feel like I'm a representative of my continent and I want to project or try to debunk some of the myth that people have about Africans. And so, I miscalculated—I thought thirty minutes will bring me downtown because I actually flew into New York at 7:30 this morning. I was up at 4:00 a.m. to do this, but I want to first say thank you to Abi. Abi has been more than a friend, more than a companion. She's a sister like she rightly said.

We've been saying we need to write a book together and there is this head of school in New York who constantly says to me "When are we going to see that book?" And I'm sure there will be many crazy chapters that people will really just love reading, but someone said something to me a few years back. I lost a sister in 2006. And this person who's very close to me, a Liberian, visited Abi's house and saw us interacting, and as he was leaving he said "Leymah, God compensated you with Abi after you lost your sister." He said that's the only thing that came to his mind the entire time he observed our interaction. Her children are my nieces and nephews, except for her last child called Forky which is a dog. I can't stand him. [Laughter]. Him and my eight-year-old are competing for the "last child spot" in Abi's life and so they both say each of the other are brats. But it's been a wonderful friendship, partnership, and sisterhood.

I want to say thank you to the Cardozo Law School. Sometimes people say "If you've received the Nobel Peace Prize, what about these little awards?" I said nothing is little in my eyes. That's the first thing. The second thing is that it keeps you challenged, that people continue to watch what you're doing and they recognize that you're still making an impact. So I'm very, very happy and I am grateful for this. I must apologize because I know working with Dina to find a date for this event to happen was really crazy and this month has been crazy. I see my good friend Peggy Kerry here, but I'm grateful.

Abi said a lot of things about me and the one thing that she didn't say was that I'm a troublemaker. [Laughter]. So I just came back from Canada where the prime minister appointed me on his gender equality council for the G7. Yesterday morning we had a tough meeting about recommendations and bringing everything down to help him structure his presentation for the G7 summit and it was really tense in the room, but every other person in that room was being diplomatic. They weren't satisfied about the way the process was going, but everyone wanted to be diplomatic.

I walk into the room with a bright smile, and my co-chair who's the only Lieutenant General woman in the Canadian army wrote me a note: "Do something because I'm so mad." [Laughter]. So I read the note and I smiled, and then I raised my hand and said to the two chairs of the committee, one is Melinda Gibbs and the other is an ambassador, and I said to them, do you all know what day today is? They said "no." I said my daughter is having a recital in New York and I'm here. I'm here because I believe in this process and I'm not going to allow anyone to put me or my fellow committee members in a box. So you asked me to make my remarks short. I am not apologizing, I'm informing you that I'm not making it short. And everyone else in the room were looking like this [Eyes rolled]. I said you know what? I came into this space to speak the truth, to leave an impact, because some of the issues around peace and security for women is not in a box.

So my colleague from Columbia who accompanied me sat on the other side of the room. And so once I was ready to do my defiant thing, she said "As you read that communication, they put a sign up—five minutes more, four minutes, three minutes, two minutes, one minute, zero minutes. And the girl kept holding [the sign with] zero minutes and you kept reading zero minutes, and you kept reading that—this girl just folded this paper, put it in her bag, and sat down." [Laughter].

But at the end of the day, everyone in that room were emboldened to speak up. And the reason why I tell this story is because this is the world that we live in. When it comes to issues of justice and human rights, and women's rights and sexual abuse and exploitation, and all of those small things that tend to make people's lives unsafe, people tend to want to really step around it cautiously, because you don't want to shake it up, you don't want to destroy, you don't want to make a mess. Everything has existed in this space for so long and let's just leave it the way it is. And until we can be disrupters of our societies, until we can decide that we will

look powerful people in their eyes and tell them the truth, we will continue to find and see all of the things that we see today. And there will be young people who will be watching and will be emboldened by everything that we are doing and they will step out, not just to speak out loud, because we have a lot of people speaking out loudly, but to speak out with integrity, to speak the truth when it really matters, even if you're going against those who consider you their friends.

So my journey has been that one. I like the fact that I came from poverty, because then I'm not afraid of being poor. Most times people tend to love these spaces and they will compromise to remain in these spaces. Yesterday the prime minister asked me on a panel "Why did you agree to join this G7 thing?" And I said to him, the first meeting I had with you, I knew you were the real deal. In my over twenty-five years of doing peace work, I can walk into a room, talk to a funder, talk to someone who wants to partner, and know that this person is real or know that this person is nothing but [all talk]. And I said to him, I knew you were the real deal and I wanted to work with you, but secondly I knew that I had a lot of truth from the community that I could bring to this committee that a lot of other people would not be able to bring.

And finally, I knew that I could bring a lot of trouble and make a lot of people uncomfortable because you, Mr. Prime Minister, have a choice: to invite me or not to invite me again. In any case, I would have left a mark. And I think that is the road that we all have. For those of you who are deciding I'm going to be a lawyer, I'm going to go into mediation, I'm going to go into reconciliation, I'm going to go into restorative justice—whatever you choose to do—the point is how well are you going to do it to leave a mark. And you may not win a Nobel, but you may win thousands of "Nobels" from within the communities, with individuals, with young people who will stand up and say I want to be this way.

I'll share a story. Abi and I and thirty other women made the famous trip to North Korea that I think we can lay claim to what happened today at the border because we did a citizen-to-citizen thing. We spent five days in Pyongyang and when we were coming out of North Korea into South Korea there was a huge media upheaval, security upheaval—all kind of things. And there were many people who wanted to be in the front of the line, the back of the line, you know all the dynamics—and at one moment I see my name. I'm from Liberia—this is South Korea—and these girls, about fifty of them, [say] "We've read your book, we love you, we

love you, we love you” and just to say that “you’ve inspired us” from that corner of the world—those are the things that every day I tell myself I can never give up. I can never give up speaking the truth because yes, I love the awards, and I’m grateful for them—but the unseen awards are those young people, that through my work, and through my interactions with them, is helping to make the world a better place.

Justice for me is as crucial as peace is because there’s no way we can say we don’t want peace, except recently in Kenya where “peace and justice” became a very difficult phrase during the elections. The ruling party was “let peace prevail” and the opposition was “let justice prevail.” And for the first time in my life the two words became very misused and abused and it became difficult for us—Abi and I were in Kenya during the elections—for us to easily talk about peace and justice without offending people on either side of the divide. But when we bring peace and justice home, this is exactly what we need in our world. And one doesn’t supersede the other. I think they go hand in hand, because where peace is lacking, justice is also lacking. And I think as we do the work that we do—as I do the work that I do—it’s always in the back of my head. But there can never be justice without truth-telling and Abi says we work the room when we go from place to place. I say to you all that it’s easy to work the room and gain the kind of confidence that you get when people know you to be the person of truth. Every time I walk into a country, whether it’s Israel, Palestine, D.R. Congo, or Libya, I ask myself and I ask God, what is it that you have me do or say at this moment?

I’ll go back to Libya. I was there two years after Gaddafi. It looked as if it were one day after Gaddafi. The debris and everything was still in the streets. I had gone to Italy, spoken to Parliament, and they had given a group five million dollars to do peace and reconciliation work, but with the clause that I make some appearance in Libya with this group, so of course. Dr. Abulage, who is a good friend of mine from Palestine—who wrote the book *I Shall Not Hate*—his three daughters died from one of the Israeli bombs while he was delivering babies in a hospital in Israel and they were in the occupied territory. So he has become a fierce advocate for peace and justice also.

So we go to Libya and we’re in a room with one hundred people—young people—and I asked them where do you see yourself five years from now? They all laughed. I was confused, did I say something or is something wrong with me? They said “No, we

don't even see ourselves thirty minutes from now, we have no outlook of the future." It was enraging, because a lot of people in that room represented my children, friends of my children, and if they can't see their lives thirty minutes from the moment that we're in, that's a tragedy, not just for Libya, but for Africa and for the rest of the world.

And then we go into another room, where we're having a conversation for sexual violence that we all know happened at a larger scale during that conflict. But no one would name "rape." Everyone was saying something—"the thing, this thing"—but no one would say that word "r-a-p-e." So every moment my anger was increasing. For every day I spent in that country, I was angry. The last day they were having a meeting and they said I was going to talk. The speech they needed me to give was the role of women in reconciling post-conflict Libya. I walk into the room and the only women in that room were female ambassadors, maybe four or five. The rest of the people in that room was the president, the prime minister, the justice minister, every powerful person from the Chief Imam to all of the different Islamic groups. Yeah, I stuck with a three-page speech on the role of women in reconciling a divided Libya, and there were no women. But each person who took the stand also talked about "the thing."

And so then they called me up—standing ovation. And I went up there, and spoke the truth and called rape. And I think the first time I called rape, every man in that room cringed, and I kept calling it so that they would have nightmares. And I kept calling it and calling it. I don't remember everything I said, but I remember saying finally that if this regime fails to address the issue of rape in Libya, to provide justice for those who have been violated in such a brutal fashion . . . so let me back track. If you were a woman and you were raped during the conflict and you survived, your family hid you in the basement. War betides you, if you try to come outside to interact with other people you could get beheaded. Boys and men were viciously raped, and most of them were told not to talk about their ordeal. But in those same sessions, these young people were saying "I too had this thing happen to me." Three men did this "thing" to me, four soldiers did this "thing" to me, so the "thing" was across gender.

So after I gave my speech I told them that if you're different from the Gaddafi regime you will provide justice for these people, but if you fail to do so, then you're no different from Muammar Gaddafi. So you can imagine calling "rape" and "Gaddafi" in the

same room in one speech. I got down to a very quiet room. No applause, of course, and then it was time for me to leave. And Dr. Abulage and I—because he had gone to another seminar where he just got so angry and spoke his mind—and he said “Leymah, are you ready?” I said yes doc, because we all thought both of us would be arrested on our way to the airport. I think they felt that they didn’t have any use for me. That’s one case.

But a few months later, I get a call from the Libyan justice minister at the time and he said “I was troubled after you spoke, and I drafted a bill for reparation for victims of sexual violence in Libya. Not just reparation, but giving them rights. Those who have children, for the mothers to be able to get passports for those children and give them last names.” So that “thing” was taken care of.

We go to Congo and I’m sitting with the U.N. [United Nations]. And they tell us very beautiful stories about how they’re taking care of the Congolese people. As a survivor of war, I know when the humanitarian agencies are lying. There’s just something about it that you know. As a survivor of war, I know when survivors of war are lying. So for two days we listen to all lies. So on this last day, we’re sitting with the U.N. and they tell us all these beautiful things that they were doing in Congo, and I grabbed the mike and said you know what I’ve had enough, can you all just cut the crap and tell us the truth? Because I know you’re lying.

And this one Swedish woman stood up and said, “This is what I was waiting to hear.” She said “Our mandate in this country is to provide protection for the Congolese people. We have all these beautiful programs, including a cell phone thing where communities are being stacked. We have a 90% call rate and a 30% response rate.” And on and on, from one group to the other, everyone started spilling out, how this group of people have failed to provide the kind of protection for these people.

And the reason why I tell these stories is not because I want you all to think that I’m any hero or “she-ro,” but because the simple thing of boldness and truth telling, and taking yourself and the whole thought of being in the mix of important people out of the equation, is going to lead all of us to that place where we’re able to turn our world back upright. We can’t do it by being diplomatic—maybe sometimes diplomacy works, but sometimes the hard truth is the most important thing that the world is waiting to hear. In many spaces people do not understand, or see or hear some of the

things that are happening on the ground to everyday women. It takes one person telling the truth.

The U.N. Resolution 1821 was passed on sexual violence because it took a Nigerian general to make all of his fellow generals in that room uncomfortable. The conversation was around peace-keeping commanders making it safe for women in conflict zones. And one commander raised his hand and said “If you think I went to military school to start a firewood brigade for women so that they won’t be raped, think twice. I’m a military man and not a babysitter.” Oh my God! I was so mad.

[I was] sitting next to General Kwuonko . . . he held my hand with a smile on his face. He said “I will have my turn to speak.” And General Kwuonko got up in the midst of his counterparts. He wasn’t civil society. He was a military man in his full general regalia. [He] put a picture on the wall from Liberia. And the picture was of a market woman, who during his time as commander was brutalized by the Taylor forces—repeatedly raped. They took a small plant, inserted it in her, and it came out of her mouth. It was that image that he put up there—that was his presentation. Then he turned to all of his colleagues and said, “Which general, knowing that this happened on your watch, can go home and look at your wife and your daughters and still say firewood brigade is not a part of your mandate!” He took his seat.

Every one of them became very quiet. He risked being isolated, he risked being stereotyped, he probably risked getting another job as a peace-keeping commander for speaking the truth. In our everyday walk as advocates for peace, it’s not just a risk to our personal safety but a risk to our emotional stability. Abi can tell you the countless times that I’ve just been totally, like seriously? Because when you think you’re doing good sometimes it just hits you from nowhere. Those are the risks that you have to take.

So I’m very happy for this honor, but I don’t want it to stop with me. I want the Cardozo Law School next time to give it to some students that really are living the everyday advocates for peace because today there are young people, old people, not so old people, who are doing their bid to turn our world back upright. And it’s up to each and every one of us, but most importantly it’s for us to live our truth. Because as an advocate for peace, there is no way that you can consistently live and do this work if you’re not living your truth.

So the first thing to do is to identify what is my truth? And the second thing to do is to decide I’m going to put my truth out there,

regardless. And the third thing to know is that when I put my truth out there it will have an impact, even if people don't think it's going to have an impact. And finally, my truth will be the legacy that I'm going to leave. Gandhi, King, Rosa Parks—all of those great people who came before us lived their truth. Our kids are using their truth—put it out there, risk emotionally, materially, every other thing—to put the truth out there. Today we read them, we celebrate them, but I don't think we're doing enough putting our truth out there.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our world is looking at us, waiting for us, waiting to hear the truth, your truth, my truth—in whichever form you choose to put it out there. Abi chose film, I chose my voice. I have nightmares of asking myself what if you lose your voice one day. [Laughter]. I've been thinking about it. I tell myself I will write [Laughter], I will have placards, and have someone working with me who will just hand me placards to say what I need to say whenever I want to say what I have to say. [Laughter].

Some of us will use our voices, some will use our artistic expression, some of you will use the law and religion in different things, but the world is waiting to hear the truth from all of us because if we don't, young people will step in that space. But we need everyone to say the truth, to speak their truth, and it's that truth that will one day turn our upside-down world upright. Thank you all so much. [Applause].

RYAN VINES: Thank you everyone for joining us today. We're going to have some food outside just momentarily. Thank you.

