



Opening Comments at Covenant House Program for Mothers and Children
20 November 2012

Good evening everyone and thank you so much for the opportunity of speaking to you today. It is truly a pleasure to spend this quality time with friends at Covenant House at a time of Thanksgiving, a time of sharing – a time of prayer and action for children.

I was born in Luanda, Angola and after five years my country became Independent from Portuguese colonization. I had a normal childhood supported by my parents and three brothers and many cousins with whom I share memories that still bind us. My childhood was not very different from the childhood of many children living in the city - Luanda at that time. We went to school and played and any child.

What made our situation unique was that a civil war after the independence and last for 33 years. During those years, while growing up as a child and then as young woman i witnessed destruction of our roads, schools, churches, factories and buildings and the country could not progress at all as the civil war spread to all eighteen provinces. I also lost my paternal grandparents and other relatives. Life became different to us.

We lost above all human life – thousands of children and women died and thousands more were made homeless. People, who once had a stable life, suddenly became destitute and poor. Like for example because of landmines as a war result children died when they went to fetch water and firewood and those who survived lost legs, arms and endured severe injury. A culture of violence on a large scale emerged... Many children who knew nothing about violence before became direct victims –

Nonetheless I still grow up knowing my principles and never took anything for granted. Maybe this influenced my decision to work for Unicef and make differences in helping others. during the civil war i worked supporting the emergency Health programmed to buy and distribute relief supplies - organize vaccinations against measles, polio and other killer childhood diseases – I got more familiar and more aware of the children’s rights. The violence I was seeing around me – the violence in the war, physical abuse of children and the neglect of children in many homes, sexual abuse, raped and how those who committed these abuses got away easily – this all took on a different meaning for me.

I learned about the Universality of children's and women's rights: I discovered the fact that all children and women have the same rights, everywhere, all the time and that regardless of who you are, regardless of the colour of your skin and where you were born you have the same rights as everyone else.

I met my dear husband while working in UNICEF we both share the same passion when it comes to children.

We have two sons Andrew is 12 and Matthew is 11. Having Andrew was first of all a blessing a dream come true to become a Mom like my mom specially because in both occasions I had my mom by my side and I was so happy to transmit all I learned to Andrew and then Matthew of course. Suddenly I became the only girl at home again, growing up with 3 brothers I kind of developed survival skills among boys.

My experience as a mom in disciplining my sons is ruled by "respect my children to earn respect from them." They now live in a different world so many things I didn't have access like to a cell phone a computer that they have now so we tend to adjust and transmit to them the base principles of always been respectful as we learned from our parents. Every day is different and every day we learned from them. We don't believe in violence at home, there are many ways to make a child understand. The most important for us is What we help a child to love can be more important than what we help him to learn.

my son maybe because of many stories I told him on how it was like to live in a country under civil war or his dad stories of how it is to live in a small village

Andrew wrote at school when he was only 8 years old. He wrote and I quote:

Peace is non-violence to all and no wars or murders to anyone.

Nobody should be fighting.

There should be peace and no guns to shoot.

If there is a war always surrender.

Never get involved in wars.

Instead make friends with one another.

So, would you rather have peace with friends or war and death?

There are four essential and lifelong values that guide my parenting and which I am trying to pass to my sons. First the value of self-worth and self-awareness: which means know yourself and be true to yourself – know what you stand for - value and respect yourself; second equal respect for all which means ...the respect you give ...is the respect you get; third is honesty above all in everything you do in life, in love and at work everywhere; and fourth is hard-work.

As I carry on as a mother, a wife and a world citizen there is one thing that I have found comforting to me at a very personal level. And, that is that I have the memory of the things that have shaped my life.... and I think

about the possibility of creating the same memories for my children. And I hope that they too can create those memories for their children into the future. This is the reason, I continue to teach my sons these same values that I learned from my parents – we lived in different countries as a family we lived in Kenya, Philippines we have family in each corner of this world but the children in both our families all share the same values we got from both our parents.

Like the anonymous African proverb – a wise saying among my people that goes something like this: “the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago – the second best time is now”.

So if we want to see any real change in life we need to start today. Through our daily struggle as parents or single parents we also have to cope with our own issues and own lives.

Beijinhos/Hugs

Ana Mabel Prado Alipui