

Ms Fabiana Mazza-Carson (Taylor, 2017-18).



Speech delivered at the Armistice Commemoration at the Auckland War Memorial Museum on Sunday 11th November 2018, to mark the centenary anniversary of the Armistice that ended the First World War.

When I was a child my father told me to look at my hands and realise they were the same as any other persons. He told me when I grew up, what would separate me from every other person, what separates each of us from every other person is how we choose to spend our time using them.

Today, when I think of war, when I think of this war, I do not think of soldiers dressed in green or grey. I think of hands. White hands and brown hands, big and small ones, men's hands and women's hands and children's hands.

What was this war if not fingers resting on triggers, fingers pressed to buttons, dropping bombs, hands grasped tightly around the handle of a spade or the wheel of a tank, digging trenches, holding gas masks over faces, held straight to foreheads in salute.

What was this war if not a mother's palms, reaching up, cupping a son's face, palms pressed together and raised like psalms to God, lowered to benches, shaping biscuit dough.

And what was this war if it was not brothers carried, clasped to backs across minefields, hands throwing footballs onto minefields turned sports fields, lifting flagpoles, waving pride or regret.

This war was more than the black hand that ignited it and the hands thrown up in surrender that ended it. To me, it was humans dead on both sides, bleeding the same red, the same hands rendered useless. To me, there is nothing more tragic than the image of hands with so much potential to create, to express humanity forced for a short time only to destroy before becoming too stiff and cold to hold tools or each other.

I learned in primary school that humans are made in God's image. To me, the greatest proof of this is that just as God flooded the earth with a wave of his hand, humans too have cried one hundred years' worth of tears of anguish and pain over this war and we have created oceans. There are seas of graves separating different sides but if we grasp the oars tightly enough perhaps we can row ourselves across them to meet each other. On this one hundred years past since the guns fell silent, let us remember those who fell and those who were left behind and what they all died and lived for. For peace.

This war, if nothing else, was one of the greatest examples of man's potential for destruction in human history. But it was also one of the greatest examples of how destruction can inspire creation. All we have to do is look behind us to see the evidence of that. It was human hands who killed the men those crosses represent. And it was human hands that laid that field, created the building that stands behind me. When we look at those buildings. When we look at that field. When we think of this war I hope we can think of the hands that fought it, remembering only in armistice can we move forward. I hope we can remember that it was these men, our men, who built the rockets that put man on the moon. Whose hands that broke down the Berlin Wall, liberated Auschwitz, liberated us. And lest we forget that.