Reflections on Professor Richard Falk

2023 Lifetime Achievement Award

Thursday, May 25, 2023
The Music Academy
1070 Fairway Drive
Santa Barbara, California

NUCLEAR AGE PEACE FOUNDATION
Committed to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons
Professor Falk is the Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University where he was an active member of the faculty for 40 years (1961-2001). He is a Research Associate at the Orfalea Center of Global Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a Fellow of the Tellus Institute.

Richard has written more than 75 books, including This Endangered Planet: Prospects and Proposals for Human Survival, which was selected in 2022 by Foreign Affairs Magazine as one of only six Books for the Century. His memoir, Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen Pilgrim, was published in 2021. His accomplishments are seemingly endless.

Professor Falk stands in a class of his own and we are all richer for having him in our lives. We couldn’t be more proud to present our 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award to our dear comrade and mentor, Professor Richard Falk.
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Richard Appelbaum
Professor Emeritus, MacArthur Foundation Chair in Global and International Studies and Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

“Your lifelong fight for social justice - principled, tireless, and often against all odds - has inspired countless activists around the world. Closer to home, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation is deeply indebted to you for your vision and quiet leadership. And on a personal note, although our paths somehow never crossed six decades ago at Princeton, becoming close friends with you and Hilal, after you moved to Santa Barbara, has been one of the great privileges - and joys - of my life!”
Asli Bali
Professor of Law, UCLA School of Law, Founding faculty director, Promise Institute for Human Rights

“It is impossible to reduce to a few sentences a tribute to Richard. Few of us will ever match the high bar he has set, but that he has motivated so many of his students to follow in his footsteps and join him in his pursuits – of a denuclearized world, of a more just international order, and of a deeper commitment to honoring human rights and protecting human dignity globally – is the finest tribute any one of us can pay him. Thank you Richard for your mentorship, your friendship and above all your brilliant contributions in the fields of international law and international politics which turn a critical eye on the geopolitics of hegemony from the Cold War to the present, while preserving faith in the possibility that may yet put us on a path towards a sustainable and just future.”
Frank C. Bognar
Board Chair, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

“In the half century since his 1971 prophetic work, This Endangered Planet, to the 2022 NAPF Declaration of Concern, to his most recent warning that new, ambiguous geopolitical fault lines are endangering international prospects for peace, Dr. Richard Falk has engaged in a lifelong commitment to humanity’s struggle to achieve a just and peaceful world order. Whoever has the good fortune to dialogue with this ever warm, brilliant and affirming teacher, whether a world leader or a college freshman, inevitably comes away the better for it. I would describe Dr. Richard Falk, my colleague and friend, as a consummate teacher, a 21st century prophet with “a fire burning in his bones” – so worthy of the title: “Peacemaker.”
Noam Chomsky
He needs no introduction

“Richard Falk has compiled a remarkable record of incisive scholarship along with dedicated and courageous engagement in issues ranging from human rights to the most pressing concerns of world order, even human survival. His contributions have been inestimable. It is hard to think of anyone so deserving of this award.”
His Excellency Ahmet Davutoğlu
Former Prime Minister of Turkey

“Richard Falk is not only a great theorist who has established his own school of thought in the fields of international law and international relations, but also a devout activist who does not hesitate to step forward to fight for human rights and human dignity all around world. The main characteristic that sets him apart is his ability to integrate the talent for theoretical analysis with a visionary approach. Richard is a public intellectual flowing through history and a pilgrim citizen traveling, mentally, conscientiously, and physically through various societies and civilizations. He is not a theorist living in an ivory tower or an activist driven only by strong emotions. He is a pioneer in synthesizing a rational stance of understanding reality without surrendering to it and a visionary stance of offering solutions without falling into the traps of utopian thinking. I truly savor our deep and sincere friendship for the last 30 years during which we witnessed history together. I wish I was there to share this very special occasion together with my dear friends Richard and Hilal. I look forward to continuing our conversations that are always full of insight and wisdom.”
It was approximately 57 years ago that I first became aware of a professor at Princeton University by the name of Richard Falk. As an undergraduate at Columbia University during the mid-late 1960s, I would visit the university bookstore and thumb through Richard’s two large volumes on international law as pertaining to the war in Vietnam. During the ensuing decades I never forgot those books or the name of their author. Fast forward to 2002 when I first had the honor to meet Richard in person at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. From that day until this, I have regarded Richard not only as a friend but as one of two mentors — the other is David Krieger — who have guided and nurtured me as a board member and fellow pilgrim in the Foundation’s quest for a more secure, law-based world, free of nuclear weapons.
Judith Lipton
Psychiatrist, Distinguished Fellow, American Psychiatric Association, and lifelong antiwar activist

“He calls himself a “citizen pilgrim.” I call him a Great Man. Usually that term is reserved for military figures like Napoleon, scientists like Einstein or politicians like Nelson Mandela, but I think it should be applied to Richard Falk, whose 50 books and numerous activities are always on the forefront of planetary issues. His quest is to help devise and empower a system of international law that is just, fair, and balanced, dissolving the US led northern hegemony. Richard and his wife Hilal Elver have lived in Santa Barbara since 2002. We are profoundly lucky to know them, and to share their company and adventures.”
If you want to be daunted and humbled as a scholar, you just need to look at Richard’s resume - the list of publications is 42 pages long, single spaced. Most of my papers are shorter than that. His wisdom has been greatly sought after over these many years. He has served on over 100 advisory bodies and one reason his opinion is valued so much by so many is that, as his writings and his practice has made clear for so long, is that for Richard Falk, law exists for the purpose of establishing justice. I so wish that I could be with all of you to honor Richard as there is no one more deserving of this Lifetime Achievement Award. Richard, I am there with you in spirit. Congratulations.”
Chandra Muzaffar
President, International Movement for a Just World, activist and political scientist

“As an illustrious public intellectual, Richard Falk has been involved in a variety of causes touching the lives of millions of people all over the world. Foremost among these causes would be his lifelong struggle against nuclear weapons. His commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons emanates from a fundamental dimension in his outlook on life: nothing is more precious than human life itself.”
Radmilla Nakarada
Professor of Political Science Emeritus, University of Belgrade, Serbia

“In a moment marked by global anomie, political and social fractures, “radical indifference” and disciplining of narratives, Richard Falk has stubbornly and passionately pursued a lifelong project of making values matter, addressing urgent issues of our time by reaffirming critical thinking, linking academic endeavors and political activism, cultivating solidarity and empathy, i.e. combining a first-rate mind with a first-rate heart. Thus, his oeuvre does not consist only of prestigious publications and memorable lectures; it is adorned by his capacity to create an impressive transnational web of grateful friends and collaborators, as well.”
Queen Noor of Jordan

“I first encountered you at the podium of your Political Sociology class my freshman year at Princeton and you have remained the one teacher whose thinking resonated with me then and throughout my years since as a citizen pilgrim. Your courage, humanity and empathy with those suffering oppression and injustice and your indomitable ethical voice are an inspiration to so many of us. I wish that I could be with you in more than just spirit, to celebrate NAPF’s Favorite Peace Hero. Throughout your stellar career, you have embodied the values and mission of the Foundation like no other. Thank you for your indefatigable commitment to a more just, peaceful and sustainable world for all of us and for future generations. It is my great privilege to join with your many admirers here and extend my heartfelt congratulations.”
Richard Falk’s immense body of work towards global justice and security cements him as a deeply inspiring role model for my generation. In such perilous times, he demonstrates the critical role of the public intellectual with excellence. With gratitude.”
Elaine Scarry
Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value, Harvard University

“I treasure and revere Richard Falk. The earth is circling the sun at 67,000 miles an hour; our solar system is traveling through the Milky Way at 500,000 miles an hour; and often events on our streets and in our war zones seem to unspool too fast for me to comprehend. But Richard Falk’s steady vision, calm voice, and unconditional courage give me reassurance, and helps me glimpse justice from a universal perspective -- almost from the standpoint of eternity.”
Matthew Spellberg
Dean, Outer Coast College, Sitka, Alaska

“Richard Falk is a brave man, at once unfailingly honest and unfailingly polite, whose achievements shine all the more brightly because of his willingness to share with others the complexities, disappointments and mistakes from which they arose. For decades he has been a secular pilgrim to all the places where hope for the future emerges from the despair of the past. In his heart he is already a citizen of the harmonious world the rest of us can only dream of.”
Setsuko Thurlow
Hibakusha, 2017 Nobel Peace Prize recipient on behalf of ICAN

“You have my most profound respect for your lifelong commitment and contribution to our shared goal of the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Your inspirational leadership has enabled so many to follow in your footsteps. I am one such beneficiary, living in North America as a Hiroshima survivor and speaking out against the horror of the catastrophic destruction and unspeakable suffering. You have my deepest gratitude.”
Hans von Sponeck
Former UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq

“Richard, late in life, we have become close friends. This is reflected in the, believe it or not, 1,271 emails we have exchanged during the past four years. You, a global leader, and I a UN civil servant, working in the trenches, both of us with a deep commitment to the defense of human rights and the rights of the earth. Thank you for your friendship, and, of course, sincere congratulations.”
Cornell West
Philosopher, political activist, social critic

“Richard Falk is one of the few great public intellectuals of our time. His brilliant intellect, courageous soul, and sensitive heart are a rare combination in any time! I am blessed to be his friend, comrade and brother.”
Amelle Zeroug
Graduate Student, Brown University

“Professor Falk’s thoughtful work on human rights, global governance, and international law has been a source of inspiration for generations of intellectuals, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him. As a mentor to many, his unwavering dedication to justice is evident in every aspect of his work, and his exceptional patience, generosity, and kindness have impacted the lives of countless individuals. Prof. Falk’s devotion to supporting the next generation of scholars and activists is a testament to his dedication to creating a better future for all.”
Many thanks to all who sent their warm and heartfelt remarks about Professor Falk.

You may view a video of the evening at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K80x-kkvkuw&t=36s
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