

Bandung: The Next 30 Years

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I deeply regret that I am unable to be present in person for this commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Asian-African Conference which was held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. The Bandung Conference was an historical milestone, and still stands today as the symbol of a fundamental process of change in the world.

The process of decolonization and the emergence of new states which found its collective voice in Bandung changed geopolitics, changed the United Nations system, and changed the agenda of international discourse in a fundamental and lasting manner. I had the privilege of attending the Bandung Conference as an advisor to my country's delegation, and I felt at that historic moment that the countries of Africa and Asia had truly seized the initiative in both political and intellectual terms.

I am struck, when I look again at the final communique of the Bandung Conference, by the contemporary relevance of the principles that were expressed in it. This I find both encouraging and discouraging. It is encouraging because it demonstrates the enduring wisdom of the conclusions of the gathering. It is discouraging because it makes so clear the persistence of the same problems even after thirty years of earnest efforts to combat them.

In looking back at Bandung, we can celebrate our foresight and perspicacity in identifying the salient problems, or we can mourn our inability thus far to find durable solutions to them and the problems that we failed to anticipate. But I think it is a more appropriate commemoration of the spirit of Bandung that we indulge in neither self-congratulation nor despair, but rather that we dedicate ourselves to the serious task of reflection, self-criticism, and recommitment.

The heritage of Bandung is very much alive in international political relations. One can trace from it the birth of the non-aligned movement, the coalescence of the Group of 77, the impetus behind the call for a new international economic order, and now the exploration of the basis for global negotiations.

While the fundamental nature of the problems confronting the developing countries of Asia and Africa, as well as Latin America, have not changed, the context in which they must be approached has changed dramatically. The political context is almost unrecognizable. The original Bandung Conference had only 29 participants. Today the equivalent group comprises more than 90 countries from Africa and Asia, and they are more closely linked than ever with the independent countries of Latin America. The political context has changed further in that the strongest countries, rather than being in the vanguard of international cooperation, now show an increasing tendency in dealing with issues of primary importance to themselves, to isolate themselves from the universalist multilateral system of the United Nations, to withdraw from constructive engagement with the Third World, and to go it alone in exclusive groupings of the privileged.

Nations of both the north and the south have failed to respond adequately to, much less anticipate, the changed economic context in which both must now operate. The more advanced countries seem to be operating on the mistaken notion that solutions to their own problems of growth, employment, technological adjustment and structural change can be dealt with in isolation from the problems of Third World debt, poverty and financial instability. The abrupt halt and reversal of the long, post-war period of economic growth and prosperity has been especially damaging to the developing countries, but in making adjustments, they do not seem to have assimilated the implications of the changed intellectual climate in the north, which verges in some countries toward a rather simplistic faith that markets, free trade, and minimalist government can solve all problems. We in the south will have to meet the new conservatism with a new realism, as well as a new determination. We need to get unstuck from the rhetoric of the 1970's, to be more flexible, more pragmatic, and more innovative-- but without losing sight of our vision of a world united in prosperity and freedom.

While the advanced countries engage in less cooperation with the Third World, the Third World countries themselves have not compensated by pulling together, and it is in this sense that we have most seriously failed the spirit of Bandung. The developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are beset with conflicts among themselves: ideological controversies, territorial disputes, attempts at regional hegemony, and others. Even in the absence of overt armed conflict, the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance is often compromised by national or regional self-centeredness.

The principle of non-alignment, which was, one might say, conceived at Bandung and born at the subsequent conference in Belgrade in 1961, was nurtured in an atmosphere of cold war. The idea that refusing alignment with the superpower blocs could help to prevent war is as timely now as it was then. We live again in a time of cold war, and the original *raison-d'etre* of non-alignment has gained new force from the awesome destructive power that both superpowers now command. Confrontation between them threatens not only their own societies but all civilization. For this reason, non-alignment cannot mean non-involvement, for that would be to abdicate responsibility for the fate of our own societies and the fate of the earth.

But how can the countries that are the heirs to Bandung speak with one voice on the pressing issues of our time when we are so rent with divisions among ourselves? It is unrealistic to expect that our differences can be banished. Does this condemn us to passivity? I think not.

I think it is possible for the Third World to be an effective force for peace and human progress, but I do not underestimate the effort that is required. It requires an enormous effort of self-restraint, of positive will, and above all, of the intellect.

The self-restraint applies chiefly to the way in which the developing countries express and pursue the very real disagreements among themselves. We all have a high stake in peaceful resolution of conflicts, restraint on the production and importation of armaments, and the rigorous application and extension of humanitarian law. Above all, the developing countries must determine to wean themselves from external military support and intervention. No political or ideological goal is worth the loss of our political independence and re-subjugation to the interests of external powers. In accepting military assistance, we have in many instances surrendered control over the duration and intensity of our conflicts. The less successful we are in dealing with our internal problems through the restrained exercise of persuasion and accommodation, the more vulnerable we become to external manipulation.

In economic as well as political relations, an effort of positive will is needed to arrive at common negotiable positions that can serve as the vehicles for a constructive re-engagement between the north and south. Again, there is no point in denying our real disagreements, but we can perhaps begin by defining negotiable clusters of issues, either on a regional basis or on the basis of common concern among like-minded countries. It is important that these fragments of cooperative effort be held in the perspective of a coherent global vision of progress: otherwise the risk of working at cross-purposes or drifting into further divisiveness is great.

The intellectual challenge before us is to recapture a clear sense of direction and common purpose among the non-aligned. Where is the vision of Bandung today, the conviction that a new age of justice and liberation was dawning? This was not just a vision of politicians and bureaucrats; it was truly an inspiration to the yearning masses of the post-colonial world. There is no doubt that the vision has dissipated, that there is at the present moment little sense of the direction of history, of the path beyond the present world crisis and toward a better world beyond it. Unless we can recapture this and communicate it in a convincing way to our diverse peoples, I fear that we will be locked into a relationship of dependency on countries that are in material terms richer and more powerful than we.

The message of Bandung 1955 was justice and liberation. The progress that we have made on these two goals with the by now nearly complete process of decolonization still leaves us to face terrible problems of poverty, oppression, militarization and authoritarianism within our own societies. National independence, we have learned, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for freedom and equity to flourish. The fetters that bind us today are, with few exceptions, no longer those of colonial

domination, though both our lands and our spirits continue to show those scars. Freedom and equity, both within countries and among them, are the twin moral challenges of our time. To address them is not just an intellectual exercise, for any solutions that might be proposed must reflect the yearnings of the people if they are to have any chance of being put into effect.

This symposium is cosponsored by a school for diplomats and the university of the United Nations system. It is thus, in a sense, addressed to the new generation of leaders, of the Third World particularly. The premier task of that new leadership, in my view, will be to effect a marriage-- or perhaps it will be a reconciliation-- between political intention and intellectual and moral vision. It is their rather daunting task to regain the intellectual initiative that can carry forward the spirit of Bandung for the next thirty years. I wish you the best in making a modest start to that task over the next four days in Cairo.