THE UN ROLE IN ECOLOGICAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

North-South Roundtable on the future role of the UN system

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We all have , more or less suddenly , become aware how vast , profound and rapid the changes are that have affected us in almost all aspects of life , and that have , at an accelerating rate, taken place in the last few decades. Some see these changes as of such a fundamental nature that they speak of a "mutation in the human condition." It is in any case certain that we can no longer afford to think of the future merely as the continuation of present trends. We now know that there is no "surprise free" projection into the future We are now - and it will be even more so in the course of the next decade- confronted with new sets of problems that are in many cases global in scope and that are in a most fundamental way new to the human experience. Our collective responses to them may well determine whether there is a future for humankind or not. The solutions to these problems all require unprecedented levels of international cooperation. These problems also raise the question whether we are, collectively speaking, organised to deal with these problems effectively., and how we could collectively, better organise ourselves.

Nuclear war, the destruction of the environment and the global life support systems , the threats to the ozone layer,a run away technology, continued international poverty and the global dualism undergirding it, the Third World debt problem, unemployment, the international drug traffic and deliberate as well as random violence ,have been on the international agenda for some time. The recent thaw in superpower relations and the first real cuts in nuclear armaments have given rise to a renewed , but still uncertain hope that nuclear disarmament will finally become a reality, and that a number of global problems can and should now be addressed. Recent rises in global temperature and unpredicatable weather patterns have added to the urgency of collective action along this wide front of global problems.

The new set of global environmental problems that have come to the fore, have

clearly shown the interdependence of these global problems, how they interact; how in some ways; they mutually reinforce , and in other ways delimit each other.

The globalisation of national economies , for instance, and especially the global recession in the early part of this decade have clearly brought home the degree to which national development efforts have become part of, and dependent on events in the world economy. In fact, under present conditions no country ,big or small, developed or developing, will be able to realize its national and social objectives on its own. At the same time have we reached a stage where such efforts have to take into account various ecological limitations, of both a local and a global nature.

We all owe a great deal to the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development for our understanding of the centrality of the concept of sustainable development. A great deal of work remains to be done to make the concept fully operational. One of the needs now is to develop a globally accepted national accounting system that not only registers the increase in the production of goods and services, but also fully takes into account the reduction in the stock of a nation's natural resources, resulting from their utilisation in that nation's economic activities. There is also a need for methods capable of integrating economic development planning and natural resource planning. In all this the World Bank could give the lead.
In the longer run it will be necessary "to work " upstream" and , in the words of Gus Speth of the World Resources Institute, in a Washington Post article in November last year, "to change the products, processes, policies and pressures that give rise to pollution." But most importantly, and more immediately, sustainable world economic development , and the economic development of each developing country, now have inevitably to confront the limits to the global life support systems 's capacity to absorb the impact of human actions which now threaten them. Humankind collectively, and all countries seperately, will have to take into account the impact of global warming on those life support systems, if humankind is to survive. Development may improve the quality of life, but only after human survival has been assured.

Most often the calculations about the scale of CO2 emissions as one of the major factors affecting the rate of global warming , are based on data in the industrial world. They leave out the likelihood that the drive towards industrialisation in the 3d world is bound - with present technologies- to add substantially to the level of CO2 emissions in the world. Already now China - not even halfway into its industrialisation - is already the 3d largest CO2

producer after the USA and the USSR. The impact of greater energy efficiency in the industrial countries on the atmosphere's CO2 level may well be cancelled out by the industrialisation effort of the developing countries. This is especially so because on the one hand public reluctance to accept a more sober life style in the industrial countries may well prevent the maximally efficient technologies from being used to the full, and on the other hand the widespread and inefficient use of coal in many parts of the developing world

.One important point not taken up by the Brundtland Commission concerns what the impact on world economic growth might be, if - using present technologies - the increase of CO2 levels is deliberately limited or held constant. The initial calculations which Prof. Kaya of Japan discussed at at a recent Aspen Institute Conference on Energy and Global Warming, and which he will present in final form at the forthcoming conference on :Global Environment and Human Response:towards Sustaiable Development,in Tokyo (September 11-13) suggest that for a sharp limitation on the rate of CO2 emissions world economic growth will have to be reduced to levels which both the industrial world and the developing countries , for different reasons, will find unacceptable. It certainly would doom the 3 world forever to live in poverty and dependency .

It is also obvious that any effort to reduce the rate of increase in CO2 levels, has to be global in scope in order to have any appreciable impact on the rate of global warming. The Western industrial nations cannot hope to save themselves from the effect of global warming by themselves. Unless the 3d world fully cooperates, and is scientifically and technologically capable of doing so, 3d world industrialisation and continued destruction of tropical forests will continue to push towards global warming. This suggests the need for a collective effort, global in scope, towards the abatement ,if not prevention,of global warming. This would mean a global energy regime that aims at 1) greater energy efficiency the world over, 2) a less destructive mix of energy sources (i.e. less use of coal and more use of other energy sources) and a massive international effort at developing alternative energy generation and energy consuming technologies.

For this reason, and in order to reduce the poverty gap,, the building up of an indigenous science and technology capability in the major third world countries is a major requirement for any global energy regime to be effective. Otherwise the vast difference in perceived and real interests between the industrial and the developing world will be too great to-overcome. In fact the poverty gap may well turn out to be the greatest obstacle to any affective international action of the kind that the contemporary set of problems calls for.

A precipitous flight into nuclear power would face wellnigh insurmountable problems in terms of political support, cost and safety. Whether this globalisation of scientific and technical capability will be possible in light of the growing commercialisation of scientific knowledge and technology remains an open question. On the other hand the much greater costs of moving large urban and rural concentrations of population in various parts of the world to higher ground ,as ocean levels begin to rise, alone should make people realise that the dissemination of science and technology cabilities to third world countries directed towards the global and national problems of human survival, development and welfare, and the continued sharing of the products of science and technology is a much cheaper alternative for all concerned.

With regard to measures that could be taken in terms of human adaptation to the effects of global warming, a major effort, again made collectively, should be made in the area of scientific cooperation towards looking into to impact of,for the moment, unpredictable changes in wheather and therefore in agricultural patterns in the most vulnerable countries. The locations and migratory patterns of fish are also bound to change as temperatures of the ocean rise. The development of plants that are more resistant to higher temperatures and water salinity, but also less dependent on chemical fertilizer and pesticides, are also problems which hopefully the application of biotechnology would make possible. It would hovever be a fallacy to think that marketforces by themselves will lead the application of biotechnology in such directions. Here too collective efforts through the UN system are also called for.

Another problem that has begun dramatically to force itself upon our consciousness and that lies at the root of several of the global problems is population increase.. Despite the success of a number of developing countries to reduce their birthrate, worldpopulation keeps increasing and will most likely only stabilize at levels between 8 to 10 billion people in the second part of the 21st century. The disparity in population growth rate in combination with the disparity in rates of economic growth between the industrial world and the developing countries is striking.. It may in the first part of the 21st century , well lead to major population movements from the poor to the richer areas in the world, between as well as within countries, a process that will be difficult to stop Already the pressures along the Mexican and US border and between the northern and southern riparian states around the Mediterranean Sea. are considerable and are bound to get worse. Other reasons for such movements , are insecurity, continuing poverty, exhaustion of land and shortage

of water on the one hand and continuous or regular flooding on the other.
To avoid population influxes beyond the absortive capacity of the receiving country , with all the dangers of social, ethnic, racial or religious conflict, the economic and social gap between the rich and the poor in the world will have to be substantially narrrowed. This means not only the speedy resolution of the 3d world debt problem and the restoration of a net resourceflow to these countries. This will also require a major collective effort on the part of the major industrial countries to help building up the scientific and technological capacity of the major developing countries as an essential condition towards the reduction of the poverty gap.

These consideration bring out very clearly the need for the UN system to prepare itself for the major tasks it will face in the next decade and into the 21st century. These turn around the need to develop more effective ways towards bringing about the kind of international cooperation that will make possible the establishment of a global energy regime , as part of a more general effort towards the abatement of global warming processes; international cooperation towards 3d world development and the reduction of the poverty gap, and finally for the effective enhancement of the scientific and technological capability of the 3d world , all this not as a matter of charity or export promotion, but as part of organizing ourselves collectively for human survival and for life in the 21st century

Major adjustments have already been proposed, like expanding the mandate of the UN Security Council so as to include environmental crises, and to replace the mandate of the Trusteeship Council with one for the maintenance of the global environment.Also procedural changes that would make General Assembly decisions in certain fields binding upon all members. These ideas certainly merit serious further study.
However, one prior problem needs to be resolved, i.e. the lack of representation of the Third World in the economic summits that has become one of the very important factors affecting the global economy.

So far macroeconomic policy coordination of the world economy has been primarily done by the Group of 5 (or 7). The various statements at the end of their summitmeetings have shown how much their concern with the coordination between their own economies has marginalised their interests in the economic conditions of the 3d world.—
These problems have in effect become residual problems, to be dealt with only after the coordination of their economies has been able to maintain the growth

level of their respective economies, and only to the extent that the 3d world economic problems do not constitute an additional burden on their economies. The Group of 5 (or 7) exercises a de facto veto on issues to be discussed within the IMF or World Bank, because of their reluctance to see decisions reached among themselves, being reopened for discussions within the UN system. This role of the Group of 5(7) as sort of a Global Economic Directorate , operating outside the UN system, may look to the 5 (or 7) an expression of the natural order of things. The depth of global interdependence and longer term economic and political common sense however does not make this arrangement very tenable in the longer run. There is a need to involve the rest of the world, developing and smaller industrial countries In Global Economic Summits in which all the other countries are represented by a small number of countries through a system of voluntary groupings, say not more than 5 or 7. This would not be unlike the one now in operation at the IMF. In that way economic summitry coordinating the global economy would become part of the UN system., restoring its legitimate paramountcy in the world. A proposal of this kind has been developed by a UNU economic institute, WIDER,in a study entitled "World Economic Summits: the role of representative groups in the governance of the World Economy."
Mr. Lal Jayawardane, who is the Director of the UNU's WIDER institute, and who is here among us, will undoubtedly elaborate on this proposal. Suffice it for me here to simply refer to the study.

Another major problem results from the fact that more and more social changes have become global in character and have moved beyond the effective control of any single government acting on its own, or through the intergovernmental system that is the UN. It is not only the workings of the global aconomy and especially its transnational sphere with the priority access its corporations have to capital, to science and technology , to the higher technical and managerial skills, markets and information, that have thus far escaped accountability to any other institution but themselves . It also includes the massive and rapid transborder movements of capital, no longer related to trade, but rather to the interests of major institutional investors and speculators; it includes the transborder informationflows as well as the dissemination of arts, culture and lifestyles., from which no government can effectively insulate its population.

These universalising and homogenizing transnational processes have brought about major value changes in almost all countries. They have however brought with them a set of problems resulting from people's legitimate insistence on preserving their distinctive national, cultural and religious identity, and hence

on a degree of cultural privacy. . This insistence revolves around the desire for cultural continuity while accepting change, for the preservation of a sense of selfworth and selfconfidence that constitutes the bedrock of authenticity and creativity, and that is essential for the kind of cultural openness that is so crucial for international understanding and creative interaction. Experience in the postwar years have clearly shown that these valuechanges are reflected earlier in people's aspirations than in the consciousness or programs of governments. In this respect governments have followed rather than led popular movements for peace and human rights, for the environment and for women's rights.

It has been the custom to have UN world conferences accompanied by seperate fora of NGO's and interested individuals. However unruly and confused these may sometimes have been,they have been important in bringing governmental positions closer to those aspirations. It has been these popular movements that have ultimately shaped the agendas of their governments. Such a forum could be turned into a nongovernmental body capable of making governments and transnational entitities accountable to world public opinion for their actions or failure to act on questions concerning human survival ,the destruction of the global environment and human rights violations. Eventually it might be possible to see such fora grow into quasi transnational parliaments of a regional and even of a global character,that keep an eye on intergovernmental bodies within and without the UN, and their actions and failures to act.
The example of the European parliament shows how it has been possible for such a parliament gradually to grow in power and effectiveness.

Finally , if and when the detente between the superpowers continues,and reduces the compulsion on their part to extend their power and their competition to all regions of the world, it is not unlikely that new conflicts, hitherto submerged,of a more regional and indigenous character will manifest themselves. Some of these conflicts will be impelled by environmental factors, like access to water resources, to arable land, or somewhat later in response to the kind of environmental disasters that result from global warming and its impact on weather and oceans.
In light of the close linkages that are developing between security, environment and development, it might be useful also to consider the desirability of expanding the mandate of the UN Regional Commissions so as to enable them to at least air the security and environmental dimensions of their development problems, without infringing on the international security mandate of the UN Security Council.

How ready the world is to bring about the adjustments in the UN system that such global problems have made necessary, remains an open question. One certainly can not assume that , internationally speaking , the political will is already there.. There are a number of reasons for ihis. One has to do with the degree of scientific uncertainty that exists on quite a number of issues, including the question of global warming itself. A major research program would be able to reduce those uncertainties. Still it is quite likely that uncertainties will remain, because of the long leadtime necessary before clearcut evidence becomes available. Governments will have to learn to make decisions under conditions of scientific uncertainty, because certainty may arrive too late. This calls for a willingness to take sequential decisions that do not permanently foreclose options that could be relevant later, after more evidence has come in.
Even then we should realize that the world's complexity has now become so great that one can find for every discernible tendency a countertendency. As a result it is often practically impossible to develop a consensus on what is really happening to and with the world, as a basis for collective action..Some have called this condition a "crisis of intelligibility".

Moreover the many problems attendant to processes of regional integration, like the formation of the European Common Market, including the development needs of the European South and the question of Europe's common social arrangements will claim , during the nineties ,the greatest part of the political and social energies of the countries concerned. The painful redressing of fundamental imbalances in the world economy will also continue to absorb major power attention.
Little energy will be left for new global initiatives that are bound to be quite difficult in any case. The Ottawa Treaty on protection of the Ozone layer may unfortunately, well be one of the exceptions.

Nevertheless the period of the nineties may be useful for the preparation and development of the concepts and public understanding , as well as the building of national and transnational constituencies needed to mount and sustain such global initiatives.
The stakes are high; they concern no less than the survival of the human species, and if succesful, the nature of humankind's next step in the process of human and social evolution.