HUMAN VALUES IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

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The discussions at this Conference have been unusually rich and broad-ranging. Yet I feel compelled to note that there have also been some omissions and lack of adequate emphasis -- at least to someone who comes from a developing country.

Much of the discussion on science and technology has centered on the problematique of the industrialized countries -- and certainly the problems that these nations face are immense, deep-rooted, and consequential to all our lives on this interdependent planet. Yet listening to the discussions from a Third World perspective, I was struck by how little they dealt with problems that are equally grave and disquieting in the developing countries.

By the year 2000, an estimated 700 to 800 million people, virtually all of them in the developing world, will be living below the poverty line. The combination of this endemic, large-scale poverty with increasing density is likely to force upon the Third World a different trajectory in its process of industrialization and modernization. This process will likely be accompanied by a different perception of the values by which any society, civilization or culture justifies itself and its existence.

Culture, of course, is defined by the answers it gives to the eternal human questions: about death, life, loyalty, love, fear, and so on. Culture also creates the climate in which science and technology develop -- and thus the cultures of the Third World may provide some very different answers than those which governed the development and modernization process in the present industrialized countries.

When it comes to the future, moreover, both the industrialized and developing countries seem, in different ways, equally unprepared to deal with it. None of us is prepared to deal effectively, in humane and

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tolerant fashion, with many different aspects of the historical transition in which we are now involved.

Humankind so far has only a very limited capacity for understanding the ways in which different cultures and environmental settings provide different answers to problems. Yet if the human society is to move into the 21st century with a measure of dignity and justice, it will have to develop that understanding, based on the recognition that there are many different sets of responses that might be made to problems of survival and hunger and to the yearning among hundreds of millions of people for freedom and equality. This understanding will have to be nurtured in a spirit of far greater international co-operation. But our knowledge base for developing such a capacity for understanding is severely lacking and, the institutional framework required to generate the sort of knowledge needed is seriously inadequate.

Those institutions which once taught us how to tolerate, accept and love people who are different from ourselves have largely lost their credibility. They were essentially religious instituions and in the process of growing secularization they have been bypassed and are now withering. We have thus far been unable to create new institutions to perform their function of helping us identify with those who are different in race, colour, religion or ideological perception and consider them part of ourselves, all as a single human species.

The crux of the problem really -- that which will in all probability determine our capacity to survive -- is whether we can come to learn to respect and love each other with all our differences. As Barbara Ward has said, either we learn to love each other or we will perish.

As social change seems to escape our capacity to manage it, and uncertainty and anxiety begin to take over, the inclination to respond out of fear will grow ever greater. The desire for clear-cut answers to complex problems of unprecedented scale will become more insistent. The institution that we will have to develop to enable us to live in this culturally, ideologically and religiously pluralistic world must be able to withstand stresses of that sort.

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The pluralistic world into which we are now moving will become even more difficult to sustain in orderly and harmonious fashion due to increasing population pressure. There will be an increasing and deepening sense of limits that was largely absent from the ideological and social forces that dominated and shaped our lives in the first part of this century. Humanity now faces the future with a great deal less certainty about its ability to cope with life than it did in the past.

There are, of course, and particularly in certain of the affluent nations, those who continue to believe in the technological "fix" -- the view that there is a technological answer to all our problems. But I think that kind of optimism is increasingly turning out to be very fragile. The technological optimism that exists in Japan, to take just one example, turns out to be seriously questionable when it is weighed against, for instance, the problem of resource supply and security -- a consideration far beyond the control of any one nation.

It is very easy to imagine that countries which have previously felt a virtually full sense of confidence and superiority might come to feel threatened and strike out irrationally at real or imagined threats to their existence. In the kind of world we live in now, which is undergoing considerable shifts in the configuration of power, we have seen these responses take various form. Some, for example, are religious responses. Others can be military in nature. But whatever their form, they frequently tend to raise the level of fear. We will simply have to learn to live with our fears -- and not let fear command or guide us. To accomplish this, we will need to develop institutions that can enhance our capacity to cope with an uncertain future replete with an array of seemingly threatening responses. The role of such institutions will be to find ways to reduce the danger of violence and the inclination towards violence in an uncertain and perilous world.

Thus as we move towards the 21st century, it is clear that we are faced with myriad problems of social transformation -- in both industrialized and developing societies. We must find ways to structure this transformation in order that it can come about at as low a human cost as possible.

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One thing is clear. The world of the 21st century will not be determined by any economic or technological projections that we make, but by moral choices. In the area of energy or communications, for example, the morality we bring to technological choices will decide whether the future will be a totalitarian one or one in which technology will serve to enhance human freedom, decentralize power, and humanize anew those large structures which have so depersonalized and dehumanized existence.

The problems that we are going to face cannot be dealt with only in the context of a single culture or only in the context of the anxieties, interests and needs of the industrialized world as it moves into an uncertain post-industrial phase. Nor can they be answered only by the Third World countries, whatever their impatience and anger over the unjust distribution of resources and power in the world. We will have to develop new concepts which enhance our capacity to work together and to restrain our own needs out of respect for the needs of others.

As all our societies attempt to grapple with the problems of entering the next century, and as we seek to evolve technological responses to those problems, we must ensure that those responses are not threatening our collective capacity for international co-operation and for understanding the legitimate needs and interests of other countries. This will require that we develop greater empathy, individually and collectively, with other cultures and civilizations.

The solutions to problems of global survival cannot be valid to only that one culture or society which happens to develop a given response. They will be valid only in so far as they have significance, at the same time, for other cultures. This pluralistic validity will need to be tested in new kinds of institutions, capable of weighing and evaluating ideas and responses within the context of different cultural and ideological paradigms. This will only be possible through dialogue and the exchange of information at far greater rate and intensity than has been the case in the past.

What these institutions will have to nurture is a sense of cultural relativity, free of moral paralysis. It would be the height of intellectual or moral hubris to think that we could look far ahead into the 21st century

and establish in normative or a priori fashion the set of values that will enable a future global society to live in relatively happy and collective harmony. We have to move into the future step by step, restricted only by the dictates of moral reasoning, as we test possible responses in a multicultural setting and adjust those responses to the legitimate needs of others.

Here, I believe, is where the United Nations University could have a function. It obviously cannot take on this immense and far-reaching task alone, and it would be exceedingly presumptuous to think it is going to have all the answer. I see the UN University rather as simply one of the first institutions committed to fulfilling this need. We will need a great number of institutions capable of addressing these global problems in a culturally and ideologically pluralistic setting.

The United Nations University would also very much like to address one other problem which was emphasized only once or twice in this Conference. That is the need to reach out to the young -- young scholars, young workers, the youth of all parts of society everywhere in the world. For the future is not ours, it is theirs. The greatest contribution we could make to the 21st century and the future of humankind would be to help the young realize that they still have the freedom, however limited, and therefore the responsibility to create the future.

It is the young ultimately who will make the choice in developing alternatives to a mode of living that is now seen not just as non-viable but plainly immoral to hundreds of millions of people. We must hope in the capacity of the young to make the right choices, because, for the time being, I don't see that the major powers of the world are capable of responding adequately to the problems we face. The answers must be found by those not suffering from notions of great power who can learn the humility of smallness and the limits to man's power. It is only out of that kind of humility that we will develop the capacity to respond in ways that are valid for a plurality of cultures and social situations.

This Conference, I believe, has been a very important step towards the kind of dialogue that this pluralistic and interdependent world so badly needs. I congratulate Tsukuba University and the organizers of this

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Conference for the initiative they have taken and for the opportunity
they have given the United Nations University to be a co-sponsor. I hope
that this will inspire other efforts to ask new questions and seek new
directions. There is in the world today much innovative and fresh thinking
going on below the surface of the dominant ideologies and schools of
thought. I think it is important for us to uncover this thinking and
nurture it. It just might contain the seeds of a brighter future for all
humankind.

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