MAN IN THE 21st CENTURY

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I have been asked to contribute my thoughts on what kinds of human beings will be needed to cope with and survive in the world of the 21st century. From all available present signs, this future world will be an increasingly crowded, hungry and competitive one; consideration of the qualities we would like people to have, not just to cope and survive, but also to make continuous civilization advance possible, is therefore clearly worth our best intellectual efforts.

But let me stress at the outset that I think it is impossible to postulate the ideal man or woman for the 21st century. And very fortunately so. For if it were thought possible to create such utopian individuals, the process that would then inevitably ensue is frightening to contemplate. It would involve attempts at social, genetic and other kinds of manipulation of the human condition, and a deadening of the human spirit, that are the familiar hallmarks of totalitarianism.

Over the long stretches of history, one finds many examples of attempts to develop new and better societies on the notion of the perfectability of man. None have fully succeeded. Even the most considered efforts to deliberately and rapidly mould new societies to suit preconceived patterns of desirable human and social behaviour have shown that the historical process is much more complicated, much more subtle, than was envisioned by the architects of such societies. The difficulty of such societies to achieve a generational transition of their values and ideas is one example of this. The inevitable disparity between intentions and attainments

seems to leave in its wake a generation of the young made distrustful and disillusioned. One generation's vision of utopia has rarely proved to be an acceptable blueprint for the next.

Nor have the vision and values of one particular civilization proven to be permanently transferrable to other civilizations. This is now quite apparent in the attempts since the end of World War II to impose Western development strategies on other lesser developed countries. The notion that one need only obtain the capital and the equipment and learn the techniques of the industrialized world to duplicate its economic growth has proven tragically false. Hundreds of millions of people in the third world still live in a state of degradation of poverty which stifles creative urgings. Colonial rule has left most of the developing countries with myriad problems that in many cases stubbornly refuse to respond to Western development models.

In the industrialized countries too there are many signs that the pursuit of economic growth is not necessarily coincident with the pursuit of happiness. One sees evidence of the malaise both from its symptoms--such as alienation, environmental degradation or the stepped-up drum beat of terrorism--as well as in the emerging search for alternative life-styles, the turn toward a new fundamentalism, the emphasis on the inner self, or, simply and crudely, the exclusive concern with one's own personal interests and security.

What can be concluded from all this is really an ancient truth: perfection may be the lot of angels, but it is not that of men. We will have to accept that those of us who will enter the 21st century will do so carrying much the same baggage packed with much the same mixture of hopes and fears, dreams and prejudices, as most of us carry today.

What then can we do for future generations to better equip them to survive into the 21st century and beyond? And not merely to survive, but to progress, for clearly we cannot accept, neither morally nor practically, a world community in which, by the year 2000, some 600 millions are living a daily life of hunger, poverty, and powerlessness.

While we clearly, on the evidence of history, must resist the vision of any particular species or corps of übermenschen to cope with the future's complexities, we can take immediate and practical steps to try to define those complexities and understand better how they touch all our lives. We need to familiarize 21st century man with the nature of the problems he will be facing. Basically, therefore, the task involves an educational and a learning process, one that is not only cognitive and individual, but also social.

One of the most important things we must learn, if we are to survive and progress in this increasingly insecure, perilous and fragile world, is the art of existing in a continuing state of rapid social change accompanied by great common vulnerability. All societies, the strong and the weak, are now exposed to many forces and processes beyond their control, and all national boundaries have become permeable to the transnational impact of economic and political decisions taken somewhere outside one's country. This lesson will be perhaps hardest to learn, but is all the more imperative, for the world's powerful countries. This vulnerability goes far beyond the obvious limits of military power--although the limited utility of armed solutions is a lesson still to be learned. There are many other factors at play--such as the increasing complexity of modern society and the global community, as well as rapid and uneven population growth and over-urbanization--which increase the vulnerability of societies.

How are we going to learn to live in such a condition of precariousness? What new kinds of institutions must we devise to help manage a world in a constant state of risk from many directions?

This hard fact of the vulnerability of all societies is really that over-worked term, interdependence, in another guise. Perhaps posing it in terms of common peril will help us recognize it as an inescapable fact of our present and future lives. Seen in this light, it underscores the urgency of developing unprecedented levels of international co-operation, far beyond any of the agreements we have devised to date. What is required is that the world's peoples and their leaders learn to think of the human species as a single and indivisible unit comprising the global society in all its diversity, if it is to survive amid global dangers and catastrophes of its own making. If humankind is to maximize the chances of solving together its problems while enabling civilizations to advance both in increasing unity and enriching diversity, it must be better able to act on the basis of human solidarity.

This will mean learning to live with others who are different--different colours, different cultures, different ideologies. We will have to come to respect the essential humanity of the other side, the better angels in all of us. Or as Barbara Ward put the point: Either we learn to love one another or we will all perish.

Learning to love one another, however, will mean first learning to understand one another and each other's legitimate interests, and the forces that are shaping our destinies, individually and collectively. There are certain clusters of concern which afflict the world now and will surely continue to do so into the 21st century. These suggest where our educational and learning efforts might be best focused.

One of these clusters embraces the process of immense global transformation that is now occurring. In part that transformation is long overdue. The global structural disparities that have characterized the international order in the last century have long ceased to be viable or morally acceptable. Change in the international order has now become inevitable.

Still the men and women of the 21st century are also going to have to live with the uncertainty of change. Change, for many of us, tends to be unsettling and disturbing. In any case, we must enable future generations to develop a better capacity to manage rapid and large scale change.

The higher level of vulnerability which I noted is one of the results of this transformation. It stems, apart from the extremely great complexity of modern society and greater economic and strategic interdependence, from major shifts in the configuration of power in the world.

Another manifestation of instability and change is the present fragility of the international monetary system. The Bretton Woods monetary system established in 1944 has collapsed--and nothing has as yet replaced it. The world's economy runs--to the extent it runs at all--on a sputtering motor ill-designed for the economic fuels of the late 20th century. More effective instrumentalities for management of the international monetary system is long overdue.

A particularly disturbing focal point of instability is the world food situation. So too is the global energy outlook. Projections of food and energy supply and demand indicate converging tracks--with spreading and disastrous consequences as rising fuel prices inevitably push food prices beyond the reach of hundreds of millions of already hungry people. The implications of this kind of grim coalescence speak to the need for more

effective international management capabilities and improved global decision-making ability, as well as to the need for more innovative and equitable patterns of national as well as global development.

A far-reaching transformation process now underway involves a diffusion of power, a general lessening of the capacity of any one nation or group of nations to impose their own will, values and solutions on the world. One can see here also a historical process unfolding that could lead to the emergence of alternative, non-Western, modern civilizations--possibly the Sinitic, Hindu and Islamic as well as other more region-specific ones. They will wish to take their rightful place side by side by Western civilization on a basis of rough parity. That wish must be answered for these civilizations have much that is rich and original to offer an interdependent world. But learning how to manage a world system in which no one country or bloc of countries are in command will involve a major global learning process.

A second major cluster of problems could be grouped under the heading, "The Movement from Below." By this I mean the surging aspirations of hitherto marginalized sectors of society which is manifest on a world-wide scale. These trace their roots in part to the liberation movements during and after World War II as the peoples of many countries sought to throw off their foreign shackles. They also reflect profound and large scale social and value change. The same sort of aspirations fueled the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Similar motivations are apparent in the world-wide response of women to the notion that, representing over half of humanity, women should have an equal say in their own destinies. These movements from below are also in evidence in the evolution of workers and peasant associations in many parts of the

world. Finally, the environmental movement and the peace and anti-nuclear movements are also manifestations of these profound value changes.

While the desire to be heard, to have a vote in one's own future, is certainly one of the most fundamental of all human rights, it must be recognized that these various movements from below often disturb the local, and sometimes even regional, political equilibrium. Like most processes of change, they often escape the ability of governments to control them. They therefore demand of us the task of thinking creatively and innovately about the new instrumentalities that will be needed to accommodate these rightful aspirations of so many of the bypassed of the world.

Both the process of global transformation and the rise of marginalized sectors of the world society stem from a complex of roots and causes. A third major concern springs from one single reality: population growth. Despite remarkable successes in several countries in reducing fertility rates, many of the most populous low-income countries are expected to double their populations in the next 35 years. In Asia alone, by the dawn of the 21st century, there will be one billion more people.

As a result of this rapid population increase, these countries are bound to remain relatively poor for a long time, even when they manage under reasonably favourable circumstances to double their <u>per capita</u> income despite doubling of their population. This is underscored in the statistical implications of the 1978 World Development Report that, as we enter the 21st century, the world's absolutely poor will number 600 million, 540 million of whom will live in the low-income countries.

But the implications of population growth can be read in many other ways than the appalling enumeration of absolute poverty in the year 2000. Hidden within the overall population curve, for example, are the demographics

of the young. Most developing societies are young--with their median age continuing to lower. This will mean the appearance on the labor market in the developing countries of an unprecedented number of young people. Youth employment is already high in many countries, and it will go higher. This will put a tremendous strain on the management capabilities and viability of governments and institutions. Some very fundamental adjustments may be necessary to accommodate these trends. It may become necessary to give youth a socially responsible role to play at a younger age, and to lower the retirement age, with implications for two-career lives and resultant educational needs.

Virtually everywhere in the world, people will have to learn to live under conditions of extremely high population density in the 21st century. This will mean developing a greater capacity to manage, in a humane, just and efficient manner, high concentrations of people. Learning to live in areas of high density, with some degree of harmony and civility, will also require major cultural adjustments. Density, for instance, is bound to reduce personal space. To survive in such an atmosphere, the average man or woman in the 21st century will have to learn to develop a corresponding sense of inner space--through heightened perception of beauty, artistic creativity, or religion as an inner experience.

One could go on almost ad infinitum citing the new educational needs of the 21st century man and woman. But I believe the three I have cited--with all their intertwined complexities and linkages--make the point forcefully enough. Which is that we have reached a point, here on the doorstep of the next century, where the inadequacies of our present instruments for managing our lives and our destinies are chillingly apparent. The inadequacies exist in our understanding of the major historical processes which

are transforming the world. Science and technology, with all their promise, have come to dominate and not serve, and we don't know how to make science and technology better serve social and ethical purposes. At the same time, without science and technology no solutions to the pressing global problems of survival, development and welfare are possible. The reassertion of marginal cultures and groups reflects their insistence on justice, on their human, civil and cultural rights, and their own empowerment. It also speaks to unfulfilled needs of the inner psyche that science and technology have not been able to answer. We don't fully know the significance of these demands because too often we don't listen. Still we know they are saying something, and we must seek to respond to them with openness and a willingness to innovate.

To put it bluntly, we don't really know enough about a great many things--at a moment when global interdependence asks for more hard and relevant knowledge and for much more finely tuned perceptions of the world around us. We cannot escape the recognition that the explosion of knowledge that has taken place in the last few decades has not necessarily added to our capacity to solve some of the most urgent problems faced by humankind. In part this has been the result of an absence of political will. But any attempt to lay all our problems on that doorstep is too easy a cop-out. More importantly, we need to recognize that the knowledge that we have gained has often been irrelevant to these problems. Our knowledge base is seriously lacking. Greater specialization has also led to greater fragmentation of knowledge. Here perhaps is the greatest of all needs for new kinds of institutions--ones deliberately shaped with a world-wide view to deal with global problems of great complexity and of unprecendented scale.

Here I think the role of the United Nations University can be of great importance. It is not the only institution that is engaged in the task of improving the world's understanding of itself, nor should it be. It can obviously not do the job alone. But it may be the first of a new generation of institutions whose role will be to catalyze and synthesize knowledge from a truly global perspective. National perspectives still permeate and influence the intellectual activities of most of the world's traditional centres of learning, even those with highly deserved international recognition of the quality of their scholarship. The United Nations University, with others that may follow in the new generation, will, of course, work very closely with, and draw upon the rich intellectual resources of, the world's existing universities and research centres. In this sense, the UN University might be seen as the focal point for the generation and dissemination of interparadigmatic knowledge--where the relevance of empirical, hard research can be tested and weighed through a dialogue of many cultures and ideologies.

The United Nations University is one of the first universities in the world deliberately established as a global and world-wide institution. It is founded on the recognition of the interdependence of all nations, and inspired by the ideal and the necessity of human solidarity and the primacy of improving the human condition everywhere in the world. The United Nations University has entered the lists against a daunting and awesome challenge, but I would here stress the task of <u>improving</u>, and not <u>perfecting</u>, the human condition. Which means living with the reality that I noted at the outset: that a perfect society, capable of setting the world completely aright in the 21st century, is an unattainable dream with nightmarish implications. What is attainable, however, are better

informed societies in which their members are able to manage their fears, to live with their vulnerabilities with intelligent and critical judgement, and to develop a greater capacity for moral reasoning. That, it would seem, is a goal towards which we all must turn our minds.