Global Issues and Human Choices
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It is a great honour and a pleasure for me to be able to add my words
of welcome to those of Mr. Kobayashi. I am doing so in a double capacity:
first, on the basis of my long association with the Club of Rome, and
secondly as head of an institution that is committed to research and training
on pressing global problems of human survival, development, and welfare -
the United Nations University. The Club of Rome and the United Nations
University are in fact natural allies, and as one can see from the programme
of work of the United Nations University, the two institutions already share
many interests. I hope that out of this meeting, there will grow a more
concrete and mutually supportive collaboration.

What differentiates the first meeting of the Club of Rome here in Tokyo
with the present one? It is that our continuing concerns with the various
dimensions of the global problems and their inter-connections now are
continuing to manifest themselves in a situation in which the international
system itself is in crisis. Economically, it is very obvious, we are in a
situation of deepening recession. We are confronted with a situation in
which governments show an increasing incapacity to make the hard choices that
have to be made implement the difficult policies needed. In part this is

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because of the confusion within their electorates and the erosion of the

authority and credibility not only of governments, of their policies but also

of many countries' political and social institutions. We are in fact in a

situation in which the rate of change, fueled by economic, political and social

but especially technological factors, outpace and outstrip the capacity of

governments and the political and social institutions undergirding them,

to absorb and adjust to these changes. We see this not only in the continuing

ecological degradation, we see it also in the growing incapacity of many

governments especially in the Third World, to even monitor the degree of

environmental destruction that is taking place in their country. The result

of this is that as never before since the end of World War II we find

ourselves in a situation in which the international coherence that keeps

our global community together seems to come apart. We are in a situation

of dangerous drift manifested not only in the deepening of the global economic

disorder, but also - and I am quoting the words of the Secretary-General

of the United Nations in his recent Annual Report - of a threatening new

international anarchy. We are in the grips of a situation in which the

sense and the actual level of vulnerability, and the level of fear has become

greater than ever, and we seem to be responding to it by an increasing

reliance on violence or the threat of violence both at the global level as

well as the national and even at the sub-national level. We are confronted

with major shifts in the global population distribution; with migration on

a scale that is unprecedented at least in modern history. We are confronted

really with the refusal of millions of people to accept the conditions in

which they are forced to live, and they show it by moving into the cities

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and across national boundaries as well as across intercontinental divides
in search of a better life.

But in addition to these problems which are quite familiar to you - and
I will dispense with the statistics of for instance, arms expenditures vs.
development support in its various forms of the degree to which we have
become prisoners of our fears. For even more importantly, beyond these
manifestations of present human folly, we have in addition to deal with some
new problems that are around the corner, and from which it will be very
difficult to escape. First, even if we assume that we will overcome the
recession in the next few years, I think that it is only realistic further
to assume that the rate of economic growth of the OECD countries will for
a very long time be very low. Secondly, this long period of slow economic
growth is likely to be accompanied by continuing high levels of unemployment.
Thirdly, we will have to bear the consequences, which we do not as yet oversee
in their totality, of the ageing of our populations which will constitute
an additional burden - in a sense at least, given the way our societies are
structured today - on the capacity of a much smaller productive cohort in
the population pyramid. We are also faced with the impact of the longer
life expectancy that at least many OECD countries may expect, namely,
80 years by the year 2000. There have been some very interesting calculations
made here in Japan, that such a life span will include 250,000 hours that will
not be needed for biological functions for schooling or for work. This is
bound to raise new questions about how to use those hours, and the cultural,
attitudinal and social adjustments that we will have to make are bound to
confront us with the ultimate questions regarding the meaning of human life

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and the purposes of our societies and cultures. Whatever the answers that
we give, they will tax the viability of our political systems and institutions.
In addition, there is the question of technological growth, and the rate of
technological innovation and their impact on levels and patterns of
unemployment. In the developing countries we will, in addition to these
problems have to deal with one problem that is different from that of the
OECD countries. We in the South will have to deal with the possibility of
stagnation of the development process at a time when the continued lowering
of the median age of the population in most of the Third World will lead to
tremendous pressures on resources and on the employment market, to the point
where we will have to take into account the likelihood of major political
convulsions, irrespective of the ideological orientations and strategies of
development that these countries have chosen. The problems therefore that
we now face are not only problems of how to manage the international system
better. Our problems in the North as well as in the South turn around our
capacity to make the domestic adjustments nationally, internationally and
personally, that will enable us to shape and re-shape a more viable inter-
national system capable of ensuring the survival of humankind and human
civilisation at the lowest possible levels of violence, for 8 billion
human individuals in a situation of rapid social change, of slow economic
growth and very high rates of technological innovation. The decision
therefore of the organizers of this particular meeting to focus on the
human choices is absolutely right.

We will now have to make very major choices in the next 20 years, that
will determine in what manner human civilization will survive and evolve if

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it is to survive at all. The technological choices that we will have to
make, and which have to do with arms, with energy sources, with strategies
for re-industrialisation, patterns of industrial relations, and with the
organization of our social services and security, are therefore choices
that cannot, and should not, be made as the basis of technological or
economic considerations alone. The technology choices that we have to make
are ultimately culture choices; choices that bear on the question in what
kind of societies we want to live. But over and beyond this, we will have
to address the question of how can we make science and technology no longer
serve our fears but instead the creative impulses of man. More than 60%
of the scientists involved in research and development are engaged in the
arms industry or weapons-related research. To expect that from a dynamics
of this sort we will be able to develop the kind of technological and social
innovation that will be necessary to bring about the structural and
institutional changes towards the evolution into more viable and more humane
societies within in our own countries, as well as into a more humane and
viable international system, requires that we develop ways and techniques
that will make science and technology no longer serve our fears but our
hopes. Already now the degree of automation that will be the key to the
re-industrialization of the North will force the latecomers in the South
in terms of their industrial revolution to re-think their patterns of
industrialization. The original assumption that the marginal industries
in the North would move towards the South closer to the sources of cheap
labour may no longer hold true, and will most likely not hold true in the
coming 20 years, because of increasing automation and robotization. The

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South therefore is now faced with an entirely new set of questions about
the nature and direction of their industrialization strategies that will
enable them to compete in certain areas with the industrialized world as
well as deal more effectively with their high levels of unemployment.
The point I'm trying to make is that we will all be forced to revise our
thinking about the international division of labour and think through the
consequences of the communications revolution on the further industrialization
of the South.

But what is also happening now in the world, apart from the disarray in
the international system and the weaknesses of governmental and inter-
governmental systems to deal with these problems, is that at the same time
new political forces are emerging that reflect very profound value changes
that have taken place in our societies, especially among the young, but by
no means limited to them. The emergence of these new forces in the North
as well as in the South is already beginning to upset established social
and political equilibria. These new movements are now telling the experts
in the world and their governments that the choices and options that they
present are not acceptable, and they tell them: go back to your drawing
boards, because the options that you are presenting to us are inhumane and
are destructive to our cultures and to the basic moral sense of our being
as a nation, as a culture, as a civilization. And I believe, we do have
to go back to our drawing boards and provide new answers, different answers
in the various areas of technology choice, but also in the area of social
organization.

We are increasingly being confronted with the outer limits - the second

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set of limits about which Alexander King has been speaking earlier on - the outer limits of social adaptibility, the limits to the capacity of our institutions - be they political, social or economic - to adjust to and absorb new challenges. We may have to begin to think in terms of institutions that have a built-in self destruct mechanism, in order to make room for new institutions more suitable and capable to respond more creatively to those new challenges.

Confronted with the crisis of the welfare state our only response so far seems to have been to dismantle it and thereby to reduce the burden of the social services and social security in proportion to the production capacity of the nation, at the expense of the poor and the aged. I suggest that the time has come to begin thinking beyond the welfare state towards new ways in which we could organize ourselves and our societies to meet out needs for a more viable and humane society. Low rates of economic growth could be seen as an opportunity to explore different kinds of societal growth and evolution. Changing attitudes towards work, the longer period of leisure time, increasing automation, and the potentials of the new communications technologies, may be made to come together to provide new opportunities to organize and manage our social services and social security system differently, more in line with the changing needs of the different phases in the longer life cycle. Such decentralised, self-managed systems may also be less dependent on large bureaucracies. This however also requires the articulation of different concepts of efficiency and productivity. We will have to develop new concepts and indicators of social and cultural productivity, that may have no direct impact on rates of economic growth. The underground economies that have sprung up wherever there has been the growth of large bureaucracies

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also testify to these needs and opportunities.

Whether one speaks about the North or about the South, or about international organizations, one of the central problems seems to be what to do with our bureaucracies. Our bureaucracies seem to have reached the point where they are becoming dysfunctional, where they are becoming an obstacle to the adjustments that we have to make. On the other hand I also think that the technologies are available - given enough imagination and social innovativeness - to provide more community-oriented, less bureaucracy-intensive solutions to problems of this kind. The difficulties that we are having in making the choices that we have to make as we are preparing ourselves to enter the 21st century are compounded by the fact that the great ideas and ideologies that have shaped and directed the historical processes in the first part of this century have exhausted themselves; they have run out of steam. And we have nothing to replace them in the way of their equivalent that meets the needs and values of our time.

We certainly will have to enhance our capacity for governance, at all levels of society; we will have to learn to manage complexity better than we have so far. Our understanding of how complex interactive systems work is still quite rudimentary. Still we will have to manage our present predicament more intelligently and effectively, as we prepare ourselves to respond to the new challenges that we are now beginning to face.

The choices that we will have to make essentially turn around the question of the evolution of our societies in the North and in the South, in East and West, in ways that will ensure their capacity to survive in the face of a new range of problems that I have tried to at least provisionally

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identify. But in all that, there is one ultimate choice that we have to make:
whether we choose to accept nuclear energy or other kinds of energy as a
major response to our growing energy needs, whether we try to redirect our
arms industries and arms-oriented economies, our science and technology
towards different social purposes, or not, the basic choice underlying all
that is a central one, and that is, can we, and do we want to do so while
ensuring an adequate measure of freedom. Many of the projections that we
have been dealing with in the course of the work of the Club of Rome, often
instigated and inspired by the initial work of the Club of Rome, constitute
scenarios of the future that leave out this question. Either implicitly,
and in a few cases explicitly, these scenarios seem to assume the inevitability
of an authoritarian future. The most important challenge that we face, the
most important choice we have to make, we of the Club of Rome and all those
who have this concern for the global survival of the human species as a
civilized form of human life, is, is there a scenario for freedom? Are we
capable of addressing these other technological and scientific choices, is
it possible to redirect the growth of science and development in ways that
will release us from the fears and furies that now paralyze our capacity
to respond humanely to the problems in the world in ways that preserve and
enhance the essential areas of human choice and freedom at all the various
levels of society. This I believe is the central human choice that we will
have to make. We will have to look anew into the dynamics of the democratic
processes itself, we will have to look into the questions of how to enhance
our capacity to manage complexity and to resolve, the many conflicts that
are inherent in the process of evolution and transformation towards more

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viable societies, democratically. And above all we will have to learn to
manage our fears at higher levels of vulnerability which will accompany
the increasing complexity of our societies and their problems.

The United Nations University is trying to work in some of these areas,
but no single institution, whether the Club of Rome, the United Nations
University or IFIAS, will be able to do this in isolation. A concerted
effort will be needed, side by side with the efforts of the United Nations
that involve capacity building, innovative thinking, inside as well as outside
the governmental systems, capable of responding to the yearnings that now lie
outside the configuration of political organizations in the world, be they
the nation-state, the political parties, the trade-unions or voluntary
associations. This is the central problem, and I hope that out of this
conference some concrete directions for further thought and study in which
the United Nations University could collaborate with the Club of Rome will
emerge. Thank you very much.