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THE FUTURE IS NOW : THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. President of Waseda University, members of the Waseda International Club, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very honoured to address this meeting which has been dedicated to the promotion of international understanding - i.e. the speech competition in Japanese among foreign students. My congratulations go to the winners of this competition.

A University is the most appropriate place to state that the "future is now" for it is here that young people are preparing themselves to assume their role <sup>in society</sup> in a few years time or in the months to come. You will assume this role at a "critical watershed in human history" - the Brandt Commission reports on development, the US government's Global 2000 report and many others, all converge on this basic point.

But the situation is far more unpredictable and unstable than these studies warn us of - for virtually all our efforts to give some kind of road map into the 21st century have seriously underestimated the synergistic and unsettling effect of change in our lives - rapid, fundamental and unprecedented social and value changes throughout the world today.

This has set us into a situation of drift, fragmentation, and uncertainty, both socially and politically, in all dimensions of human life and at all levels of society - the individual,



the family, the village, the nation-state, regional groupings, or the international system. And this likely to continue to be so, until we will - collectively - be able to achieve the reconstitution of the human community on a global scale.

All societies, the strong and the weak, are now exposed to many forces and processes beyond their control. This has led us down the pathway to irrational fears that we must somehow learn to manage lest we regress to a level of barbarianism and violence that would belie all of humanity's achievements and glories over the millenia.

One certain measure of the madness afflicting the world today is the shadow of nuclear annihilation which we have cast over ourselves. Mutual fears and rivalry between the superpowers have led us to a situation in which we have lost control over the arms race. We simply cannot go on for another 20 or 30 years and expect to survive precariously balanced on the brink of atomic holocaust where we are now poised. Already we have a young generation, a disturbing number of whom do not expect to live out their natural life span, an outlook which is bound to have an impact on their psyche. At the same time, we also see an important proportion of young people among the activists for peace and disarmament - it only shows how acutely aware they are of the dangers of the future.

Nor is our reliance on violence and arms limited to the superpowers. We have some of the most impoverished states in the world spending half of their annual budgets on armements. Death squads are taken



to be the solution to political differences. Ethnic and religious tensions and Malthusian population pressures are flash points of sickening slaughter. It is well for any third world person to remind himself that some 130 wars have been fought in developing countries since World War II and most have been over internal differences, although these have been often aggravated by external interventions.

Some of the worst victims of this situation of conflict and drift are the very young people and children. In Kampuchea, children are taught how to shoot a rifle by age 10, by age 12 they are on the battle lines. When such children are asked to draw pictures showing their vision of the future, they draw images of bombings, strafings and killings. Other children have spent stress-filled lives in camps for refugees and displaced persons. Think of the children of ~~Ulster~~ in Northern Ireland.

When children grow up with slaughter all around them, it is difficult to teach them such moral values as "do not kill". One major conclusion of a study of Palestinian and Israeli children was that innconflict ridden societies with jingoistic attitudes encouraged and children victims of aggression, it become very difficult to raise people with mental strength to be peace loving. How to grow up sane in an insane world?



This is an unacceptable legacy for young people. The future is now and it implies that they will have to be on a crusade for peace and sanity in the world of today and tomorrow lest it be worse than yesterday.

Firstly this will mean that we must mount our counterattack against threats deeply embedded in the disorderliness, injustice and violence of our age, a world where time seems out of joint, ~~where time seems out of joint~~ where rapid and fundamental social change has been combined with the build up of a destructive capacity that can destroy all life.

A new perception of old problems under new circumstances and in conditions of greater magnitude will be necessary. This kind of awareness needs the capacity for empathy as we have not known it in the past. Take for example the case of child labour - and child abuse and exploitation - which we thought resolved in the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of this century. It now comes back with greater magnitude <sup>on the threshold of</sup> ~~in~~ the 21st. with the industrialisation of the Third World and - furthermore - combined with a situation of prevalent unemployment. In many parts of the world, the only prospect offered is an empty, lonely and brutal life with little hope of ever finding a job or a productive niche in society. The hopelessness of many young people has either turned them inward to drugs and the road to self destruction or outward to aggressiveness and violence. The loneliness of such young people impels them to the viciousness and destructiveness of the gangs. Overdevelopment in the North and underdevelopment in the South



have created a situation where some tens of millions of youth face the prospect of no jobs anywhere on the horizon.

Many of these problems have been with us for a long time. But again a very strong dose of empathy will be needed before we can even think of policy orientations. By all indicators poverty as well as illiteracy will get worse as we move towards the 21st century. By the year 2000, it is estimated that some 800 million people will be living in absolute poverty. The debilitating effects of ~~and~~ malnutrition among the poor increases as it is passed from generation to generation, with mental growth retarded by both pre-natal and post-natal malnutrition. We are developing a whole underclass of physically and mentally stunted people in the world - incapable of relating to life in any productive sense. Is such a class to be a permanent feature of modern society? - and, if so, <sup>will</sup> what this do to our political systems? ~~What~~ will it do to our sense of humanity and morality.

Poverty is the breeding ground for war, ~~and~~ hunger, and migration. Already we have a flood tide of human migration, millions of people across the globe pouring into crowded cities and moving across national and continental boundaries to the areas of affluence and to the empty spaces of the world. This vast uprooting and resettlement of humanity has led to massive cultural and ethnic interpenetration on a global scale which is severely taxing social adjustment mechanisms in both rich and poor nations. These have raised political, economic and cultural tensions leading to conflicts that erupt along the fault lines of race, ethnicity and religion, and not only that of class.



It is in this situation where life becomes more and more complex and unbearable that young people will have to assume their role in the years to come. They will for example be in charge of cities that bear no resemblance to those of the past. Experts have been predicting megalopolitan growth in third world cities with populations upwards of 30 million by the end of the century. I think it much more likely that long before we get to such sizes, the social system of these urban areas will have simply collapsed. Cities everywhere are already stuffed to a stage of near unworkability with conditions that breed rage and violence.

Young people will have to think now on how to devise more humane, compassionate and, just systems of social organization and governance that enhance and not impede the capacity of the human race to deal creatively with rapid change. This will call for efforts at rebuilding community life, for alternative urban strategies, and for the strengthening of social solidarity to combat depersonalization, isolation and atomization of so much of modern urban existence. We need better social arrangements and institutions to deal with the protection of the most vulnerable against the loneliness and uncertainty experienced, say by rural women newly arrived in the city. We need to give support to various voluntary organizations, either traditional or new, which might help individuals to adjust to radical changes in their familiar life situations and their value systems.



It is really only a very few people - the artist, the writer, the mystic - who can develop the structures of self-directed living on their own. Most of us do not have that capacity. It is the larger environment, which we all shape, that provides the structure of meaning for most of us. It implies the realization of oneself in community and-by extension- the same applies to nations and states in the international community.

Early warning systems such as the recent <sup>environmental</sup> report on the warming of the earth's temperature in future decades already serve us again as a reminder that the earth's resources are finite - ~~even~~ <sup>to</sup> the very air we breathe and the climate we live in. The next generation taking over the management of the planet will therefore have to work with a completely new outlook and ethics. Science <sup>technology and industry</sup> will not only serve the purpose of exploiting the earth's resources but also to face the depletion of resources and counteract against environmental damage. In the past decade considerable research and experience has deepened our knowledge and ability to deal with environmental pollution, ~~the environment~~ ecological balance, conservation of natural resources, better management of renewable resources, and alternative energy resources. In short, we will have to learn at a very accelerated pace how to manage the "carrying capacity" of this planet. According to FAO it would even be possible to slightly increase the food intake of the world population by the year 2000 on the condition that the use of improved crop varieties, pesticides, and fertilisers be maintained. It presupposes however that the flow of exchanges between countries remain at a normal level. Food production projections restricted to individual countries without food trade show that by the ~~year-2000~~ end of the century 441 million persons would be without a food supply. This demonstrates eloquently that war and hunger can only be avoided through an innovative perception of international cooperation and solidarity.