

Convener Statement
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Global Possible Conference, Wye Plantation,
2 May 1984

Dear Friends,

First, let me express my great regret at my inability to be with you in person tonight. Airline schedules simply would not permit me to get from Wye to Tunis within 24 hours, and a longstanding commitment to the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues forced me to make this difficult choice.

You are meeting to consider the possible - and how to make the possible more probable. You will be talking a great deal in the next few days, I suspect, about initiatives in scientific research, technological developments, institutional frameworks, financial arrangements and policy-making. The emphasis of the meeting is on physical resources and the demands for them. The challenges in this area are tremendous, but I do have considerable confidence that human ingenuity can find a technical solution to our most pressing problems of resource availability, environmental protection, and population growth. I do not mean to imply that this will be easy or can be accomplished without concerted and sustained effort, but I do believe it can be done.

I am convinced that the most severe constraints on the possibility of a more secure existence for humankind are not physical limits but limits of imagination, cooperation, adaptability and determination. We must not forget that the fate of the global environment and the disposition of resources lies, not only in the hands of governments, international organizations and corporations, but in the hands of hundreds of millions of people who face constraints in their daily lives that not one of us here faces. Many of us probably have great difficulty even in imagining them. I am talking of the poor peasants whose land-use decisions, made under the most cruelly limiting circumstances, will determine the future of forests and watersheds; of the urban migrants whose decisions to relocate determines the manageability of our cities; and of the politically awakened masses whose refusal to tolerate a status quo without hope for them determines the possibility of a stable political framework within which resource initiatives can be implemented.

We must learn to think of these hundreds of millions as decision-makers, because they are decision-makers. And we must realize that they may not share our values, or have the same perceptions that we have of what their interests are. They may be motivated by passions that we find difficult to understand, or that we simply overlook. Let me mention one example, or rather two examples that affect the same resource-rich area: namely, Australia. In the middle of April, 200,000 people marched in the streets of

Australian cities demanding, among other things, an end to the export of Australian uranium. This demand was based on the belief that the proliferation of nuclear weapons, vertically and horizontally, is encouraged by uranium exports. The Australian Labor Government is sympathetic to this position, and has in fact blocked two uranium mining projects in the Northern Territory. A second obstacle to the exploitation of Australia's vast mineral stores - of gold, silver, copper, manganese and diamonds in addition to uranium - is the control of potentially as much as 230,000 square miles by Australia's indigenous inhabitants. The aborigines attach a deep religious significance to their land, and their land councils have been extremely wary of allowing in mining companies, both for cultural reasons and because of their unhappy history of exploitation. It is perhaps ironical, and certainly points out how complicated the interactions among groups can be, that the two uranium projects blocked by the Government have been supported by the aboriginal land councils involved.

The point of these examples is that they illustrate two very different kinds of forces - one coming out of traditional values, one out of post-industrial values - that are defining the possible contribution of Australia's minerals to global resource needs. Neither of them has very much to do with technological capabilities or global resource strategies. But such intangibles play an inestimably important part in drawing the outlines of the possible. In our deliberations, I urge you to take these volatile, unpredictable, elusive political, cultural and social factors into account. It is no contribution at all, in this crucial period, to arrive at a brilliant technical and institutional formulation that has no realistic possibility of implementation. One might even call it irresponsible to derive a plan of action, hand it over, and then sit back to say "All we need now is political will". The forging of political will, social adaptability, and popular acceptance must be an inherent part of the formulation of initiatives, not a precondition or an afterthought.

In this, we cannot afford to limit our concerns to the policies of governments and large institutions. In many of the most important cases of resource and development problems, these institutions are not in control of the processes of change, whether positive or negative. I think that one of the greatest challenges we face is in learning how to manage a global system in which no one actor or group of actors is in control. In the statement that he was working on at the time of his death, our late friend and colleague Aurelio Peccei wrote about the "absolute ungovernability of society as presently organized ... Despite the system-like nature of humankind's global body," he said, "no political philosophy or institutions have been evolved to ensure its governance." He went on to lament "the mismatch and imbalance between man the inventor and man the administrator". It is in this area of creating institutions or mechanisms or perhaps just new patterns of behaviour for the management of interdependence that the need for new initiatives is greatest, in my view. This may involve attempts to increase the costs to individual nations of non-cooperation.

So we must try to work on several levels at once: the supra-institutional, global-system level; the level of transnational and national

organizations; and the level of the daily lives of individuals, families and communities. The first and third levels are much harder to get a grip on than the second, and that presumably is why initiatives are so much more commonly addressed to the second level. In addressing a policy proposal to a government, an international organization or a corporation, one has some fairly concrete idea of who and where the addressee is. At the global-system or mass level, to whom does one speak? It becomes necessary to engage in the messy, difficult, protracted processes of political action, influencing public opinion, mobilization of the millions of small decision-makers. In addition, of course, we must persist in the attempt to provide constructive alternative plans to governments and international institutions. Any set of solutions proposed must, I feel very strongly, enhance rather than limit the political space for freedom. We must not be seduced by the illusion that short-term gains in efficiency and production can take precedence over freedom without sacrificing long-term progress.

I would like to close with a few specific, discrete points and proposals.

First: In the field of forecasting and global modelling, we need not only to develop surprise-free scenarios, no matter how sophisticated the assumptions on which they are based. We need in addition to develop models that are capable of dealing with adverse surprises, instability, and even catastrophe.

Second: In making assumptions about resource needs, we have to bear in mind how strongly future demands for resources can be influenced by change within just a few countries. In particular, demands will be so strongly weighted by the standard of living achieved by the two giants of the Third World, China and India. If they even come close to the standard to which they aspire, the impact on the competition for resources will be tremendous. It is perfectly clear that the extension of the automobile culture is no more desirable than it is feasible. We need new models of development, new conceptions of well-being. This will lead us to a much greater diversity of views about desirable life-styles, but also to some consensus on mutually acceptable differences in material levels of living.

Third: I think we should consider some initiative to set up additional kinds of independent, international pluralistic bodies to monitor trends and to advise governments, private organizations, and international organizations on global issues such as carrying capacity, land use, atmospheric change, population movements, and so forth.

I am confident that you will have a very full and rich three days of discussion, and I am sorry to have insisted that you try to make it even more complicated than the agenda implies. Again, let me say how sorry I am that I cannot join you. I will be looking forward with great anticipation to receiving the conference papers.

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