

It is a great privilege for me to be here speaking to this august audience. "La Sapienza" has demonstrated its commitment to internationalism in many ways. Apart from the series of lectures of which this is a part, "La Sapienza" has also joined us in assisting universities in countries coming out of conflict. I thank you for your commitment and for the opportunity you have given me today.

The theme of my talk is on the ethics of social development. It is an area for which I have some responsibilities in the United Nations. However, I am speaking in an academic environment and hence I will speak as a free thinking and concerned person and what I say should not be treated as an official view of the United Nations.



~~La Sapienza lecture~~

1. If we look around the world today and try to characterize the system of values that forms the basis of our social and political behaviour, we would perhaps find the following:

First, for most people the primary locus of political interaction is the national jurisdiction to which they belong for the level at which political parties and other instruments of political expression are most organized.

Second, a democratic polity based on free and fair elections, free speech, the rule of law and the protection of individual rights is considered the ideal.

Third, a capitalist market economy with a wide range of economic freedoms is the preferred form of economic interaction within and between nations.

This belief in the virtues of a world of nation-states organized as liberal, capitalist democracies was so great that at the beginning of the nineties that some saw the emerging global triumph of this model. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism in Europe, the defeat of apartheid in South Africa and the economic miracle in East Asia convinced some that

the era of conflicts and contradictions was over the that it was only a matter of time before we all converged to this ideal.

Today we know better, The conflicts in the Balkans and in many parts of Africa, the persistent and deep-^{seated}~~eroded~~ difficulties of transition in Russia, the collapse of the Asian miracle and the spread of the financial crisis in the past two years, the continuing problems of unemployment in Europe have reminded us that there are deficiencies in our system of political and economic governance for which we do not as yet have the answers. Add to this the persistence of endemic problems like poverty, marginalization, drug abuse and criminality and we must conclude that the declaration of victory was premature.

2. Let me at this stage focus on the first element~~s~~ in the model that I have outlined - the almost exclusive focus on the nation-state as the expression of people's sovereignty. The basic problem is that this over-simplifies the complexity of our motivations. The word "nation" actually originated in the universities of medieval Europe but is, today, the term that we use for the "imagined communities" that seek self-determination and self-government within independence or autonomous political jurisdictions. This is an urge we must respect for it has played a crucial role in the transition from the sovereignty of princes to the sovereignty of people and more recently in the processes of decolonisation.

But is the self that seeks political expression uni-dimensional? Is it the case that we can identify some single characteristic of identity, whether it be language, race, religion or shared history, which must be given political form to the exclusion of others? The fact is our sense of identity is more complex and multi^{all}dimensional. We ^{are} ourselves as members of a family, a clan, a neighbourhood, a language group, a religious denomination and as citizens of a province, a country and hopefully of the world. All of these identities require political expression and not all can find it in a single jurisdiction.



A uni-dimensional definition of "nationality" has a further problem. Migration and communication have now made many political entities multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious. Hence what may satisfy one citizens urge for self-expression may end up denying the same to another.

For these reasons, citizenship and nationality should be simply geographical facts de-linked from other elements that define our identity. There is of course a place and a context for the expression of all of these elements that define our identity but it does not have to be in national political ^s. We must avoid a fundamentalism that often misapplies norms and principles relevant for ~~our~~ ^{one} area of discourse, say religion, to other very different areas like civic relations. We must deconstruct political sovereignty and recognize that the various facets of sovereignty can be exercised in different assemblies - some relevant for religious practice, some for municipal management, some for national policy, some for global action. We must simultaneously be citizens of our neighbourhood, our province, our country and the world. The challenge is to ensure that on any given issue we are all agreed on which level of loyalty is most relevant.

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The need for looking beyond nationalism is all the greater because of the phenomenon that we call globalization - the widening and deepening of economic, cultural and political transactions across national boundaries not just between governments but between enterprises and individuals.

3. Let me turn now to another over-simplification - that of the compatibility of the market economy and democracies. The market organizes relations between persons in terms of the equality of work of the goods and services exchanged. We jump from this to the conclusion that this how persons themselves view their economic relationships with one another. Yes, the pursuit of self-interest is the driving force but the "icy water of egotistical calculation" (the phrase is



from Marx) is modified by the obligations we accept as members of a family, a neighbourhood, a country. The question however is whether civic virtue and solidarity are possible in a capitalist world.

Democracy requires the political equality of all citizens. But can political equality exist in the face of large economic inequalities? We already see major departures from the competitive model. Mega mergers are creating a growing concentration of control in crucial industries. There are some very real fears about the emergence of finance/media/communication empires that would wield enormous economic and political power. A gulf is emerging between the mentality of global business elites and small businesses (and even large businesses in small countries). Confronted by vast corporate bureaucracies and a small plutocracy of corporate leaders there is an understandable sense of powerlessness.

At the same time inequalities between people are increasing. The techniques of mass marketing and the pace of technological advance are creating a winner takes all economy in which a small number of successful individuals and companies do extremely well and a large number of others fall by the wayside. At a less drastic level wage spreads between skilled and unskilled workers widen as the economy becomes more and more knowledge based.

These inequalities are even more acute at the global level. Around half the world's population lives in countries that are not part of a globalizing, liberalising world and even those which are, a large number do not share in the gains. Trade and investment are the instruments of globalization but the majority of developing countries receive virtually no FDI and actually experienced a decline in trade.

The inequalities that we see are incompatible with democracy and, what is even more crucial, are not in keeping with the value systems that most people hold. The challenge, however, is to create space in a market economy for solidarity and altruism.



4. I now turn to a third area of concern - the preoccupation with short-term results that is a characteristic both of competitive politics and competitive markets. There are many things that we do that will have effects a long way into the future. Conversely, there are many things which could happen many decades hence that require us to take action now.

Take the case of our impact on the environment. The scale and depth of our interventions in nature are increasing with the spread of genetic engineering, the development of exotic materials, the generation of highly toxic and long lasting wastes, the large scale modification of hydrological, atmospheric and biotic systems. This is generating risks not just for us but for future generations, who do not have a vote in our political process or any influence in our markets. Often, in the absence of international agreements, the risks and costs are passed on to other jurisdictions.

The calculus of costs and benefit as practices in a market economy requires costs which are unknown or borne by someone else. That is the ethic of individualism. We need to look beyond individualism and look at progress in terms of our responsibility for the common good of the community in our neighbourhood, in our country and on our planet.

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5. There is a common thread that runs through the three areas of concern that I have spoken about. The root of the problem lies in the realm of norms and values. The elements are there in the value systems of many individuals and many societies. What we need is a process that builds on these elements to develop a global ethic of tolerance, of solidarity and of responsibility.

In a recent contribution to a symposium on ethics which is to come out shortly, I have tried to characterize a process for arriving at such a global ethic. I have argued that:



- A global ethic is not the same as the enlightenment^{ised} of a universal morality. In a world where people derive their values from a wide range of religious and cultural traditions, a global ethic must aim at a more modest task of finding common ground in areas of common concern.
- The common ground can be found by revealed preferences when people who are in a position to choose always make similar choices e.g. life to death, freedom to slavery, good health to illness, knowledge to ignorance.
- The process for doing this should take the form of a dialogue of cultures that is sensitive to the similarities and differences and that is conducted in good faith not just by diplomats but by religious leaders, teachers, academics, doctors and all who help to shape the ethical beliefs of each culture
- A global ethic should not be thought of as being in hierarchy superior to more parochial ethics but simply as an ethic that is relevant when our responsibilities as a member of the human race are more important than other loyalties.
- The aim must be an ordered pluralism that harmonized^s moral codes rather than unifies them and allows for some latitude of interpretation. "An ordered pluralism is a way of defining the ethics of tolerance. It specifies limits to tolerance in the form of some inviolable norms that we all accept as a necessary consequence of our humanity. It circumscribes a space for tolerance in some areas where an agreement is fuzzy and leaves a margin for interpretation. It seeks a better understanding of differences in other areas where a consensus does not exist."

6. Do we have a process that has at heart some of these characteristics? I put it to you that the United Nations has the potential to serve this great purpose. Over the fifty or so years of its existence it has helped to shape many global norms that fall basically into five classes:



- The Charter of the United Nations itself enunciates some basic norms that should govern relations between states, principles, of non-aggression and peaceful settlement of disputes, which regrettably are not always observed.
- The UN has also enunciated some principles that lay down what is unacceptable in the behaviour of states towards their citizens e.g. the prohibition of genocide and the accountability of those in positions of authority who are guilty of this crime.
- Closely related to this is the enunciation of the rights that each person has simply by virtue of being a person. I refer, of course, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the various human rights instruments.
- There are certain other statements of principles, similar to human rights like those that deal with disabled persons, older persons, minorities and so on.
- There is also now an implicit obligation to provide assistance to refugees, victims of war and victims of natural disasters.
- Finally, there are a host of rules and codes of conduct that help to regulate transactions in the realm of trade, travel, transport, communication, health, drug trafficking, crime, etc.

Yes, there is a problem of enforcement. But the very fact that governments have publicly endorsed these rights strengthens the hands of those who are willing and able to fight for these rights in local and national political processes and in global assemblies.

The long years of peace in the major power centres of the world have led to an enormous increase in diplomatic, social, economic and intellectual contacts between people. A



particularly valuable example of these contacts were the great global conferences of the nineties - the Children's Summit, the Earth Summit in Rio, the Cairo Conference on Population, the Beijing Conference on Women, the Copenhagen Social Summit, the Vienna Human Rights Conference - to name some.

The global conferences of the nineties arose principally from concerns about environment, the position of women, the suffering of children, the persistence of poverty and unemployment, the problem of population growth that were voiced by activist groups in many different countries. The concern that these activists voiced was not primarily one of national interest. It was more a concern that centered on the human being and on a global interest. These activist groups that fight for the rights of women and children, for the disabled and the elderly, for the protection of the environment, for the eradication of poverty, for debt relief for poor countries, for human rights are driven by ethical impulses, not by consideration of real-politick. The global conferences of the nineties provided a unique type of political process that brought together these activists, other parts of civil society and governments in an effort to take stock of where we are as a collectivity of human beings and where we need to be. This extraordinary political process in the global conferences showed that it is possible to move beyond nationalist consideration of a balance-of-power onto a genuine dialogue and the articulation of a shared ethic that cuts across ethnic, religious and national boundaries.

Time does not permit me to elaborate on the outcome of these processes. But in terms of a global ethic I believe that these conferences have outlined a framework that states that every society must have:

- an economy that provides the material means and public services required for human dignity
- a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, including particularly future generations;



- a commitment to equality of status and opportunity, particularly between men and women
- a respect for diversity, the right of others to be different
- a political process that is inclusive and participatory, and
- a commitment to non-violence, an acceptance that differences can be resolved in peace.

8. I began with a simple ethic of nationalism and liberal democracy. I am ending with a global ethic of tolerance, solidarity, responsibility and non-violence. This is the road that we have travelled during the nineties and in this journey the United Nations was with you all the way. The journey is not over. The global ethic must be applied in our actions as citizens of our neighborhood and our country. It must be developed and elaborated.

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In a world full of inequalities, contradictions and conflicts, we must find common goals that bind us together. This is what the United Nations is meant for. It is a lobby for peace and tolerance, a lobby for the poor and the voiceless and a lobby for the future.

I salute you for your interest and commitment and invite you to join in this great journey.

