

Development of Global Political Values

Draft remarks by Joris Voorhoeve, 11 December 2008, Peace Palace, The Hague

Global communications encourage global values. The ideal of global values gives us a warm feeling. Growth of common ethics across borders correlates to some extent with economic, cultural, religious and other contacts. But we know from the relations between France, Germany and Great Britain in the 19th century that intensive interchange in commerce, academia, religion, philosophy and the arts does not simply lead to peaceful progress. Violence and war, even irrational mutual destruction, is as much an aspect of internationalisation as feelings of mutual interest and community. The First World War came after many decades of progress and rapid internationalisation.

We have to be realistic when we dream of a global ethics as a result of globalisation, and be alert to possible risks. Prepare for the unexpected is a good maxim. There are positive and negative drives. Let me start with the bad news but end with the good.

The bad news is that the world is not at all a global village. That is too romantic a view. It is rather a noisy, polluted global megacity, without a municipal government. There are rich streets with beautiful villas and fine schools and hospitals. They amount to about 20 % of the global city's population. In these neighborhoods, people live well into their seventies and eighties.

Close by, there are slums infested with rampant diseases, brutal violence and dismal poverty. But the well-off don't like to walk there, except to drive to exotic markets and restaurants. On average life lasts about half as long in these slums.

The slum dwellers form about 30% of this Civitas Mundi. The difference between the rich and poor parts is clear from the staggering discrepancy in maternal and infant mortality. They correlate with oppression and contemporary armed conflict. Street gang violence in the slums of the global city is a breeding ground for destructive thoughts and behaviour. Masses of unsocialized, poorly educated and unemployed young males can be mobilized for crime rings and neighborhood wars. The streets are saturated with small arms.

Our Global City sees decay next to progress. High growth in middle income areas does not reach many of the slums. Old atrocities take on new, even uglier faces. Killing population groups by bullets is replaced by genocidal rape of women and girls, which is more malicious than straight murder of combatants or prisoners of war.

We need good news. We see gradual growth of a global ethos. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN treaties of 1966 on human rights, as well as several other treaties and declarations signed and ratified by a majority of UN members support this positive trend. I think of the treaties and declarations on refugees, on the protection of children and the rights of women, as well as the jurisprudence of war crimes tribunals and the establishment of the International Criminal Court. The exchanges between major philosophies and religious movements show a growth towards universal values and shared grounds for important beliefs which may underpin a global ethos. Global communication and mutually shared, enlightened self-interest of many states and peoples in the values of peace, progress and respect for human rights encourage this development. The internet connects people all over the globe. Fine ideas spread faster than Avian flu, up till now.

We see gradual development of regional cooperation in Europe, leading to a still weak but politically relevant awareness of a common European identity, and a small degree of solidarity which binds dozens of states together in international cooperation in many spheres of society. One might even speak hopefully of the gradual rise of a European social contract of societies which accept that they are in the same boat, sharing a similar future. I wish that were possible on a world scale.

The spirit of new hope which now engulfs many in the US, Europe and Africa after the recent election of a new American president offers of course new chances to many. Democratic politics hinges on the management of hopeful but realistic expectations about possible progress. There are new opportunities for mitigating the violent conflicts in the wider Middle East and Central Asia. Perhaps they can be transformed in less destructive ways. We hope for new initiatives concerning Palestinians, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan. We hope for new initiatives to assist the many countries and peoples in Africa. On the positive side I mention also growing awareness of the value of global public goods, such as clean air, safe water, preservation of nature and defence against the consequences of climate change. Measures of mitigation and adaptation are urgently needed. This brings their advocates together, from Norway to New Zealand and from Chile to Japan.

Some see the possibility of a global social contract to make the necessary policy changes and improve international organisations in the direction of global governance. I wish it would all come true.

When I think of the hopeful atmosphere and enormous intellectual progress in many fields in Europe at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century with the two Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 , I recall reading that nobody could see the First World War coming. No government wanted this war. No particular state can be blamed for it. The war took 25 million lives and its ending with the Versailles Peace Treaties sowed the seeds of the Second World War, which took some 50 million souls.

The Second World War was perhaps largely the result of the rapid fall of Germany in the 1920's, the deep frustration of its middle and lower class, which was mobilized for pathological policies. In only about ten years, Germany transformed from a ruined state into the largest military machine in Europe. This transformation was organized during the Great Depression and used new technologies of mass communication and new military tactics.

When I look at today's world, the dismal poverty of 2 billion people, the deep sense of disrespect and hate which motivates militant jihadists, the increasing income inequalities in many countries and the powerful sense of injustice which lives in many countries, I cannot conclude that we are safely on the road to a global social contract and step-by-step construction of international governance.

Our city is turbulent, highly unequal, unjust, violent and explosive. Many politicians may be on the side of well-understood self-interest, rational politics and realistic idealism. But there are plenty who estimate they can mobilize frustration, and ride the tiger of hate and fear.

It is surprising how often predictions about international developments are wrong and how important changes and crises were not expected by the majority of the experts, even though they know precisely how to explain them afterwards. So let us be cautious, which is a conservative virtue forgotten by neo-conservatives.

Let me try to conclude on some political points about what might help to prepare for the future.

We should develop new targets for international cooperation. The contribution of various states to global public goods like peace operations, development assistance and environmental care is enormously unequal. Some very rich states contribute little. Some contribute much in one area,

but perform poorly in another. Notions of fair international taxation are needed to help improve our global municipal government and support the primary schools, public health services, police forces, sanitation, park services and social housing. I suggest we join performance indicators on peace operations, development assistance and expenses for international environmental cooperation into a composite ranking of national and per capita contributions to global public goods. Some large and some small but rich countries will be surprised to see how little they are contributing to the common wealth. Take for instance the number of troops sent by countries to UN peace operations and divide it by population size. Many large countries are doing little. Some poor countries are doing more than is thought. Such a ranking, and an international benchmark, might encourage improved burdensharing, and perhaps shame some into action.

Let us not assume that there is little money for international cooperation. The world is full of resources. The hundreds of billions which could be found all at once to help brake the banking crisis were seemingly not available in the past to finance a coherent development plan for sub-Sahara Africa.

Governments say they have no troops for a peace-operation in the East of Congo. There are well over 20 million standing military in the world. About 150.000 are active in UN peace-operations. That is $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1%. The US has in addition 150.000 in Iraq. So adding both, we can say that 98 % is kept at home. I do not underestimate the difficulty of mounting urgent peace operations in Congo or Darfur. But general lack of resources is no valid reason for most states. If all agreed on making available just 2 % of active troop strength for peace operations, the UN would have 400.000 to employ.

Similarly, the lack of resources for development assistance is appalling. Only three-tenths of one percent of income of the rich countries. They can double to reach the target of .7%. Is their a lack of tax income? If the US puts one dollar additional tax on a gallon of petrol, it raises 100 billion for its schools and health insurance, reduce its budget deficit, curb emissions and increase development assistance. I know this is not the time to do it, but the figure indicates the effect of small changes that could have been made, and are possible in the future. The war in Iraq costs altogether about 3 trillion. If only a part of such money had been spent on international cooperation, the US would be the most influential leader in the UN, have a strong balance of payments, much less debt, earn wide respect and serve its national self-interest in a rational fashion.

Let me add a note on development cooperation. We know that the Millennium Development Goals will not be reached unless a major new effort is made. The number of hungry people is not going down to 400 million, but recently increased to 963 million. It will go up further if nothing happens. Now national governments are discussing Keynesian investments to combat the recession. Why not combat the recession by investing in the poor, who can contribute much more to national and global GDP if they get a chance. Marginalized people suffering from hunger and malaria are not good for the economy. Use the present crises to focus on pro-poor growth measures which benefits billions. Let us also take the cost of climate change and environmental decay and depletion into account. Several recent studies estimate that between 30 to 70 billion of investments are needed to adapt to the changing climate and mitigate its negative effects. The northern countries do not yet take fully into account that the effects of sea-level rise and droughts will manifest themselves mostly in the poorest areas and populations. The shrinking of Lake Chad may have more to do with the violent struggles among marginalized people and their governments in Chad and Darfur than we realize. The fate of hundreds of millions living in vulnerable river deltas, and many millions on low island states, needs little debate. Enormous investments are needed to save millions of people from drowning in the near future.

Again, it is not a lack of resources which keeps governments from tackling this. The question is: for what purposes will people be mobilized? What do opinion leaders and politicians encourage them to focus on? Resources are plenty.

What is altogether spent on outer space, on doubtful new armaments, on exotic holidays and luxury items of little significance for human well-being? Many times the amounts needed for the purposes I mentioned. Money is another word for priority.

It would be useful to meet internationally on the burden sharing for climate change adjustment programmes, apart from the discussion of curbing emissions estimate.

The target for international environmental cooperation expenses set by the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1973 of some .1 percent of GNP or now perhaps between .1 and .2%, is needed of all countries in the middle and higher income categories. One can see this as investment in the future. One can also see it as reparation payments of overconsuming parents to children and grandchildren, who will inherit a dilapidated house and a stack of bills.

The US financial crisis was the result of a generation which spent one dollar twenty for every dollar it earned. The difference was consumed by depleting savings, increasing mortgages to unsustainable levels, and neglecting maintenance of infrastructure, schools and public health systems. Other highly developed states, and countries like Russia and OPEC members are certainly no better. The use of natural resources in the world amounts to 125 % of sustainable levels. Politics can apply the true conservative value of saving and protecting.

Governments are concerned about the burden of national debt for the next generation. A similar approach to natural resources and the global environment would be logical.

My third suggestion is not to wait for national leaders to take governmental action and not to wait for the collective decisions by the members of the UN, the European Union, the World Bank and the IMF to reform. Official institutions adapt very slowly to changing realities. Many governments will use their possibilities to slow down needed change, as they want to negotiate benefits in return for historical privileges. These organisations are convoys whose speed is often set by the slowest ship. Civil society organisations and citizen-action networks all across the world can adapt much faster and mobilize many people in many countries for improvement. They can also pressure the official institutions and improve their agenda.

Examples are the rapidly growing NGO's and global action networks. Take for instance Oxfam International, which two weeks ago welcomed Oxfam India and Oxfam Mexico within its confederation of now 14. It is rapidly de-Westernizing and adjusting to the new realities and world agenda. There are many other examples, like Amnesty International, Care, War Child, the Red Cross societies, Doctors without Frontiers, Education International, and so on. The anti-landmine movement is a fine example how citizens across the globe can break a 50 year stalemate in official arms control negotiations. The coalition for an International Criminal Court serves as another example.

Political leaders will follow their influential citizen groups and civil society, in the end. Many civil society leaders and International advisory Commissions have improved awareness of governments of urgent changes in world affairs. Examples are the Brundtland Commission, the reports named after Brandt and Palme, and the High-Level Panel appointed by Kofi Annan. Corporate social responsibility has improved in many areas of production, under the influence of civil society and the leadership of the UN

Secretary General. I wish an independent international commission had looked in time into fraudulent banking practices and warned people with mortgages and savings what was going on. Hundreds of millions of people all over the world will have to pay for mistakes made by financial "experts".

So my best hope lies with civil society, which advocates better policies and draws the attention of government leaders. Democratic governments follow good advice, after some time. Authoritarian regimes try to suppress civil society but in the end follow slowly. Military dictatorships clamp down on civil society, but not forever. The leaders of North Korea and Birma cannot last another generation, and Mr. Mugabe will soon retire.

Mr Chairman, I am neither a pessimist nor an optimist. I just like to look at what can and should be done, and enjoy seeing so many chances. Thank you for listening.