WELCOME DINNER ADDRESS

by

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New Vulnerability and New Vigilance

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For the past two decades, the concept and application of sustainable economic and human development have been increasingly adopted and embraced by governments, business, industry, academia and non-governmental organisations. The imperative need for policies, programmes and projects to move towards the path of sustainability was unanimously adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and further renewed at last year's World Summit for Sustainable Development at Johannesburg.

It is well recognised, in principle, concept and practice, that with more intensive and extensive integration of the economic, ecological and sociological components of development, the greater will be sustainability. Implicit in this integration is that conflicts need to be reduced and/or prevented. When there is conflict over natural resources, the environment, social and cultural differences, it will be difficult, if not impossible to attain sustained economic and human development.

The causes and sources for conflicts are becoming more diverse, interacting and complex. Traditional analyses viewed from a lens of inter-state conflicts are now reoriented toward assessing conflict from the increasing intra-state perspective and expanding the scope of inquiry beyond conventional paradigms often rooted in a framework of political economy. Thus, conflict is increasingly analysed with a view towards not only their

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economic, social and religious roots, but also to discern specific or related precipitants such as natural disasters, or resource based causes such as water scarcity. More often than not, the common denominator underscoring all conflicts, are practices and policies that advocate or foster discrimination, inequities and intolerance.

Many, if not most analyses, view water as the looming cause of conflict. Whether it is due to lack of access; insufficient supply caused by increasing demands of urbanisation; population increase; pollution and contamination of supply sources; perceived inequities over proposed pricing; diversion of water or its impoundment by reservoirs and dams are some of the many sources and causes that trigger conflicts.

With global climate change, precipitation patterns are expected to also change. Hence, water would be scarce and not be where it is needed most for human and economic development or, equally devastating, there would be deluge with wide spread inundational flooding. Every year we continue to learn that in the same country or region, droughts and flood records are being exceeded and shattered. Climate change has adverse consequences on water supply and availability. As water is central to human welfare, well-being and health, changes in quantity and quality have significant social and economic effects. These, in turn, will have political consequences, causing instability in a society and thus making it more prone to disputes, conflicts and violence.

I note that this Executive Programme will address the linked issue of climate change and water. I also note that a number of important topics related to land, energy, forest and marine resources will also be presented.

Take the case of energy, another key and critical issue for development and poverty alleviation. On the one hand, there is grave concern by scientists and many political leaders that the increasing use of fossil fuels, particularly coal and oil, will increase the amount of carbon dioxide emitted to the atmosphere, causing global warming. There is no scientific disputes or disagreement of the properties of carbon dioxide gas to produce the green house effect. This was postulated and demonstrated over a century ago by the Swedish scientist Arhenius. The argument by a powerful minority is the extent this anthropogenically formed gas is responsible for global warming. An equally potent argument is the very high costs of reducing the carbon dioxide emission and the impacts the reduction measures will have on GNP and employment. We already see the serious disputes over the Kyoto Protocol.

The burning of fossil fuels produces other pollutants as well. These also have impacts on human health and the ecosystem.

On the other hand, however, the lack of affordable energy will have significant consequences on the economic and social development of countries. Without sufficient energy, transportation for commerce and trade; the mobility of people; electricity for lighting to increase literacy, for water treatment and purification plants, etc, will also be affected.

Clearly the solution to overcome this dilemma of the need for energy, but not with the associated health and environment consequences, can be achieved by the use of cleaner and clean fuels. Hydrogen is increasingly mentioned as one such major clean fuel. A hydrogen fuel economy is, according to experts, decades away.

In the meantime, every effort is needed for energy diversification, more efficient use, conservation and changing production and consumption patterns, so that more time will be available for a transition towards a clean energy economy.

If this is not done nationally, regionally and globally, then we can expect more tensions, disputes and conflicts over energy within a country and between countries. We need to remember how the shortage of gasoline in gas stations during the 1970's oil crisis, provoked violence amongst the motorists queuing up to fill up their cars.

There is a lack of understanding what are the sources and causes of conflicts. In conflict prevention and resolution, experience indicates that, often, responses and remedies are proposed without a sound understanding of the root causes. Hence, the solutions implemented do not provide a lasting peace and the conflict erupts and recurs. This is similar to applying a band-aid over a wound without treating the causes of that wound so as to prevent it from festering. A better understanding of the root and trigger causes of conflict, and they will vary from country to country and, indeed, from place to place within a country, will enable more appropriate prevention and resolution measures to be conceived, planned and implemented. This understanding has the potential to provide a better-informed base for a longer lasting peace.

I am also very pleased to see in the Executive Programme that the subject of traditional methods for preventing and resolving conflicts will be addressed. It is observed in many countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, that institutions and legal procedures used for dispute settlements and conflict resolution are the legacy of colonial rule. There is now increasing interests in Asia and Africa for forms of indigenous institutions, local customs and precedents for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. The Adat systems in Indonesia, the Shuras in the Islamic world and the recent revival of the Lorya Jirga in Afghanistan are some examples.

These traditional forms of institutions and methods draw upon the social, cultural, ecological patrimony of a country and its people and they are location-specific, making it even more relevant. Solutions proposed are often more acceptable because they address the socio-cultural experiences and needs of the communities.

Powerful monitoring, measuring and sensing technologies now enable us to measure substances in nanograms and parts per billion with incredible accuracy. At the other end of the scale, geographical mapping systems provide detail bird's eye view of large areas. These techniques, with the expanding advancements in information technologies and the concomitant use, not only in academia, business, industry, governments but also in the homes, are surely making us more and more connected and informed.

We now have the means to be kept informed speedily, instantly and accurately at any site-specific location or globally on threats and risks posed to human health and the ecosystem. The international awareness of and effective containment of SARs is a case in point.

I believe that there are good opportunities to combine the best features of traditional mechanisms with that of "modern" technological means to meet the fast changing globalised world we are living in. With increasing use of information technology, participation, transparency and accountability would be increased and improved.

I hope that this Executive Programme will provide the fora for continued interactions, fostering the sharing and exchanging of knowledge. I hope in the interactive sessions, the priority areas that need further information and understanding can also be identified so that a collaborative research programme can be established.

Identifying potential sources and triggers of conflicts, minimising, preventing and resolving them will be very important for sustained economic and human development.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to wish this important and timely Executive Programme a success.