

Poverty, Development and Collective Survival

(Private and Public Responsibilities)

*Note: This is the welcome address by Shri S.P.Ahuja, then President Society for International Development (Delhi Chapter) delivered on 25.3.1988, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi to welcome Shri Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India at the SID 19th World Conference. **

I feel greatly privileged in welcoming you to this 19th World Conference of the Society for International Development. This is also, the 30th Anniversary of the Society.

The Society for International Development is an association of individuals and institutions - concerned with accelerated and equitable development - making it consistent with nature - so as to be sustainable.

The Society, which is Chapter based, is spread in 83 countries of which no less than 66 are represented here. These countries and others who join us at this Conference share almost four-fifths of the world population and a slightly larger proportion of global GNP. Also present here are representatives of almost all UN agencies and several voluntary organizations.

This fraternity of development experts and practitioners gathered here would like to discuss, what causes poverty that persists and suggest remedies thereof, to identify sources and impulses of development and help strengthen them so that development becomes self-sustaining. And to ensure that gains of development are not lost by any threat to our collective survival, from whatever source.

To help this assembly in its tasks we propose to share with its distinguished members our experience in development in India.

We may not yet have succeeded in eradicating poverty but have certainly made progress in taking destitution out of whatever poverty remains.

Poverty, Development and Collective Survival

Most rural household have been reached with some or the other form of development assistance - and this extensive outreach of our several programmes has given us considerable strength and stability. Through their involvement in development, the alienation of the poor has been avoided.

We have just lived through one of the worst droughts of the century without the suffering generally attendant upon such calamities. Even inflation was contained. This suggests that much greater production and productivity lies hidden in rural India than statistics has captured.

We have also travelled considerable distance in industrial progress, urbanization and development of human resources.

This level of development, though moderate, has been achieved in a democratic framework. Democracy is known to be a post industrial institution. That our almost pre-industrial society decided four decades ago to use democracy's institutional framework as a vehicle for development and succeeded in doing so is perhaps unique in history.

But even then there is scope. And we shall be listening to the experiences of other countries and their prescriptions for development with humility and respect.

Globally, means exist to meet reasonable needs of all. The fact that needs of many - specially in this part of the world are still not met, suggests that the international economic order as it has evolved needs mending. How, when, where, and how much are the questions posed?

Society, increasingly appears to strive for self-contained and self-sufficient economies at national, community and domestic level. In this process it tends to seek equilibrium in ever smaller entities. In economics the sum total of all partial equilibria inevitably falls short of the benefits of a total equilibrium. More the partial equilibria obtain, the greater the loss to the world society. Global

reordering, therefore, is necessary to bring about greater efficacy and equity in matters economic.

World economy as it functions does not automatically provide for the poor or the weak. Nor does it provide for self correction, except at great cost. It is for this reasons that men of goodwill from all over the world have come together to look at the need and scope for social and economic reordering and its magnitude and direction.

World society has earlier seen men of goodwill set up an international institutional framework, largely under the UN system, at a time when global inter-dependence was somewhat limited. Today, when the global inter-dependence is of far greater proportions and far more complex, the international institutional framework appears increasingly constrained. This is a matter of great concern and will receive special attention of this Assembly. More important, it will try to ensure that the world system that had been created to correct the then prevailing angularities and to provide a resource base for the future does not become a hand maid of an emerging neocolonialism, in which declining incomes and consumption standards in some countries, especially in the South, are combined with net outflow of their invisible resources. This will require men of goodwill taller than others.

There is a view that future is with those economies that have access to highest levels of technology or to substantial sources of minerals and metals. Those using middle level technologies with large base in agriculture will face increasing difficulties in the emerging international economic environment. If this be the prognosis for the future, leading to 21st century, it needs attention and re-direction, because left to itself it augurs ill for many countries and a large part of humanity. This Assembly will most certainly take stock of this.

Studies suggest that levels of consumption which currently obtain in some parts of the world have far more serious implications for long-term sustainability of the world economic system than addition to numbers in some countries.

Poverty, Development and Collective Survival

Whereas substantial attention is being paid and suitable institutional framework has been created to contain population, sufficient effort for limiting consumption has not even been initiated. Nor the institutional framework in this regard created. Action on this will bring about more faith among those being required to "Adjust". An adjustment with human face will call for sacrifice from all, both developed and developing.

In the context of preparatory work for this Conference I have had an opportunity to visit a few SID Chapters in some of the developed countries. I am happy to say that their work programme, which they kindly shared with me, largely concerned itself with solving problems associated with poverty syndrome, and reactivating slackening internationalism. They wonder, as we do, as to how more arms get sold when increasingly barriers are raised against goods that ought to be traded in public weal. In brief their concerns read like an appeal from all peoples of the world to all Governments of the day 'Oh thou who lovest me set thy love in order'.

As I and my colleagues share our experience with this august assembly and dialogue on global perspectives it may also be useful to have a closer look at our neighbourhood-the continent in which we live-Asia-and the Asian Perspectives for the future. Because a regional networking may be one possible answer to the betterment of the emerging global village.

Nearly two-thirds of the poor live in Asia. We may want to know how historically it has come about, who and what has caused it and what are its remedies?

Since the 2nd World War most wars have been fought in Asia. On whose behalf these wars have been fought, with whose weapons and for whose benefit?

Asians have been unfortunate victims of the only atom bombs that have been targetted on human habitations. This must not happen again anywhere.

Poverty, Development and Collective Survival

Some member countries of this continent are also experiencing about the highest rates of growth in relation to most third world and even first world countries. How these rates of growth are obtained needs analysis, understanding and perhaps replication.

Three ancient civilizations, the Indian, the Japanese and the Chinese belong to this region. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have also had their contributions from this region. In this background there is reason to expect that Asia contributes from the depth of its experience some useful elements in the new development paradigm which is more humane, more sustained and which takes better care of all, born and unborn.

With these words, Sir, I welcome you. I welcome you to share the tasks of this Assembly- the task of increasing the area of light and reducing the area of darkness and laying the guidelines for our deliberations over the next few days and beyond.

*** S.P. Ahuja**
Hony. Director-CERPA