

WHAT NEXT? THE VITAL NEED FOR COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN NORMS

The last century was perhaps the bloodiest in recorded human history and the last millennium was uniquely characterised by the dehumanisation of others. This century, too, has begun with one of the bloodiest acts we can imagine, and the new millennium all of a sudden echoes with the familiar cries of hatred, anger and violence.

We have once again come to a watershed in our understanding of each other.

Is it not time that policymakers ponder over the constituent elements of the twin concepts of civilisation and culture? Is it not time to recognise that culture and identity for many in the world represents security? Any global response, in order to have legitimacy for all concerned, must be related to the various historical, legal and religious traditions.

If this can be achieved, globalisation will not be perceived as a western or American imposition on the rest of humankind. If this can be achieved, terrorism will be defeated because it will have no reason to exist.

In the meantime, there is an urgent need to develop – at the global level – a universally acceptable ethic of human solidarity. The term, "ethics", should be interpreted broadly and not be limited to the moral aspect only. It must cover also the common socio-cultural values that are universal and which have stood the test of time. In encompassing the ethics of human solidarity we encompass the forces of change. Human solidarity must include the young, the uprooted, the neglected and victims of man-made and natural disasters. I see a lot of guns, but where is the butter?

It is within this human solidarity that any response to terrorism should be sought. It is this ethic that will allow us to understand the root causes of why man inflicts suffering on his fellow man.

Implicit within this ethic of human solidarity is the requirement for an overarching concept of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law. Every single topic one could think of in terms of the conflict between man and man, between man and nature, between natural disasters and man-made disasters, falls somewhere within this concept. Yet, sadly, despite all our resources, the world has continued to become richer in problems and poorer in solutions.

A distinction must be made between politics and policies. What is needed in most countries is vision and long-term policies. Many nations are today ravaged by armed conflicts, abject poverty and disease. How can ethical change be brought about without remembering this?

Some of the basic concepts need to be revisited. For instance, might we not redefine poverty in terms of human wellbeing rather than in terms of dollars and cents? Perhaps we should try and humanise economics and politics, putting human wellbeing at the centre of national, as well as global, policymaking.

Continuity is required if contemporary challenges, like terrorism and its causes, are to be met. Should we not demonstrate solidarity with future generations by making vision our priority?

Do we need wars to remind ourselves of our common humanity? Why can the defences for peace not be built in peacetime? Why have the international efforts been devoted in recent decades more to *peacekeeping* than *peacemaking*? Can we not speak of crisis prevention rather than crisis management, as though the management of a crisis is an end in itself, instead of crisis resolution?

The time has come to promote a culture of peace as opposed to the mere absence of war. Modern man is at peace neither with himself nor with his surroundings. To begin the process of peace we must learn first to be at peace with ourselves and to recognise that adversity anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere. This is

particularly important since we live in an age where the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer.

This singular yet devastating act of terrorism must not allow us to degenerate into automatons under the banner of nationalism or even religion. Justice must be the order of the day; otherwise the terrorists whom we all loathe have won. Anger is understandable. It always is in times of grief. But such anger should be channelled into an effort to promote dialogue.

It is justice that must be promoted, not blind condemnations of entire peoples and a great religion. Any response must be based on the civilised principles that we should all uphold.

All civilians, regardless of nationality, are protected by fundamental principles of international law, human rights and common decency. The tragic loss of life in Manhattan and elsewhere must not be followed by another slaughter of innocents in another part of our world.

Media coverage has simplified the issues.

We inhabit one world with many cultures. But governments talking down to people will not work. We must listen to the voices of ordinary people however they may be expressed, whether through the NGOs, the UN systems, even through transnational corporations and through all the channels of a civil society and through individuals. We cannot afford to have the voices of the people of the world simplified into the media-happy phrase – are you with us or against us?

The terrorists, who carried with them death and destruction as they crashed did not share my vision of the world. They were individuals devoured by hate and stood only for themselves and their own narrow political cause.

There is a dire need to stop the dehumanisation process that we

have witnessed during the last century, and even the last millennium.

We have to ask ourselves whether we have done justice to what we inherited from our ancestors, not only in terms of ecology but, above all, wisdom and experience; and whether we have done our duty *vis-à-vis* the future generations.

Humanity has to be rescued from itself. Aldous Huxley said, "The most important lesson that history has to teach is that men do not learn from history". Let us learn not from history but from the potential we hand over to our future generations.

When the full implications of the human tragedy in New York and Washington DC have been fathomed and we have shed our tears for the citizens of many nationalities who lost their lives, including those from the Arab and Muslim world, the question will be 'what next?' This will transcend all alliances against evil and invite a common understanding of a need to return to international humanitarian, legal and moral norms.

Let this be the age of sanity and wisdom.

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