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A Fair Globalization: Benefitting All

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Honourable Mr. Hidehisa Otsuji, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan,

Mr. Chair Seiichi Eto, Senior Vice-Minister;

My good friend and colleague Juan Somavia, Director-General of ILO;

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to welcome you at UN House, Tokyo; the United Nations University. It is a great honour and pleasure to have all of you here for such a noble cause: to focus and reflect on the future of youth.

Let me quote Secretary-General Kofi Annan to frame our work today and tomorrow:

- “Globalization: Benefitting All”, and
- “There are no simple answers to complex questions.”

Disappointing as it may be: when we have a real, complex issue to address: we must sit down, take some time and try to formulate real answers. This is certainly true for a topic like ours “Globalization and the Future of Youth”; to make globalization benefit all, in particular the next generations.

This is in particular true as globalization has become such a complex, often contested concept. As globalization has, at the same time, become an ideology, a programme and a process. Trying to address globalization is like a skirmish with a shadow, indeed, like shadow boxing. The world globalization has come to mean many different things to different people, good and bad. Therefore: to have a meaningful discussion, we have to clarify first, what do we mean by globalization.



One way to understand the term globalization more coherently is to look at its multi-dimensional character, or in other words, to break it down into its constituent elements. One such dimension is the geographical: maybe that is even the fundamental one. It is based on location and distance, on the characteristics and qualities of places, both localities and regions, on site and situation.

It is often related to exploration, discovery and colonization: processes we are familiar with from history; but also with commuting and migration, population change and urbanization, location theory and the regional balancing of people, employment, housing, provisions, etc. The moment we do understand the geographical and historical character of globalization, put the process into its proper context, we do understand that there does not exist such a thing as a “level playing field”, as at the end of the day all places are individual, have different resources, different potential, different challenges to address, opportunities to seize.

Other major dimensions of globalization are the economic, the cultural, the social and the political. In discussions and an analysis of the ongoing globalization process each of these dimensions can be placed front and center stage. Either individually or in combination with one or more of the other dimensions. More often than not, however, the economic dimension is given the major importance, almost at the exclusion of all other. This, however, handicaps severely our ability to understand really what is happening.

However, even when there does not exist a level-playing field, and there will never be one, we still have the obligation to do all our efforts to make the process more fair. What is fair is debatable. A minimum condition, however, seems that globalization to be fair should benefit all people in the present, as well as future generations. It should help us to achieve a safer world and a better life for all. To make such a world come true we have to work hard to improve market access, for those who are excluded to a large extent at present; we must rethink how to balance more fairly our regulations with regard to free mobility of goods, money, ideas and people. How can we claim so much freedom for the movement of goods and money and not of people?



We, indeed, live in a world full of paradoxes. A world, also characterized by a huge gap: a huge gap between what we say we want, and what we actually do – every time, when we have the choice. A world of quantity, rather than quality!

One of the major paradoxes of our times is, that we were never so rich, yet still one third of humanity lives in conditions of serious, even abject poverty. We were never so rich and yet we think ourselves poor. Those who have it most in their power to change the situation of the world's poor, continuously claim that they are too poor – now – to do it.

The GNP is rising almost everywhere; yet we let it happen that Africa's GNP is now some 10 per cent below the 1980's levels. In fact: one of the appalling paradoxes is to see that Africa is endowed with very rich natural resources, but yet it is not a wealthy continent. So: what are the root causes for this state-of-affairs? What can we do to address these? And let us not forget: Asia is not free from the scourge of poverty! After all, more than half of the world's population lives in Asia. Even if as a percentage the problem seems less, it still is enormous in quantitative terms, in sheer size. So, we must do what we can to make globalisation fairer, to benefit our youth.

Asia is the mega-diverse continent. Full of opportunities, but also characterized by many places, mega-cities and others, with extremely high population concentration and density. There, environmental issues become crucial. And together we are set on an unsustainable course: when we continue our present line of development – in the current manner – improving the level of living in India and China, for instance – together more than one third of our planet's population – we will soon need two or three planets earth to supply the necessary natural resources. Is that the major reason behind the Mars – Explorer? Who then will own the resources of Mars? When the exploration proves successful? Will we have another Antarctica?

It is, indeed, a time to re-think our course. Do we really want all this? Is this the world we will leave to our children and grandchildren? How come that we know so much about economic growth? but that economists have not yet developed soft



landing models? or equilibrium models? Models focused on quality rather than quantity?

There will always be a place where labour is cheaper, but do we really want to continue this race-to-the-bottom? Did we ever think the consequences through? Did we ever do any serious impact-analysis? In a world of shrinking and – still, but for how long more? -- growing populations? Do we really want to continue to bring people to the places where the work is, globally? Or can we reverse the process? Bring the work to the people? What is in fact already happening, but in an unorganized, almost unconscious way? What will be the social and security consequences of these economic processes? How do we link progress and peace in optimal ways? Indeed, many issues to re-think, to start to formulate policies on.

The report “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All”, is a beginning of the dialogue among various stakeholders and specialists, as well as among citizens around the world. There has been a broad support of the main thrust of the report. UNU and ILO already organized, jointly with the Ministry, a symposium – on 1st July – titled “In Pursuit of an Inclusive Global Community – A Fair Globalization in a Turbulent World.” I am sure that Prof. Takahashi, who organized that symposium with Ms. Horiuchi of ILO, will be able to bring the conclusions of that symposium in the discussion today and tomorrow. After all: the report on “A Fair Globalization” is not the end, rather the beginning of a process, as was accentuated by the Co-chair, President Halonen of Finland in her recent U Thant Lecture on UN Day in UNU. I am eager to listen to what Juan Somavia – at this stage – has to say on “A Fair Globalization and Decent Work”.

Thank you.

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