

Round Table on Global Governance (Jesuits' Annual Conference) Geneva, 26-08-11

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What visions can sustain daily actions in the governance of global institutions?

- From the beginning, it has been the understanding of the ecumenical movement that global governance (earlier termed as the “international order”) is concerned with bringing relations between and among states out of the domain of pure power politics – where military and economic strength ensure dominance – and into the Rule of Law. The Rule of Law refers to principles, institutions and procedures which protect individuals, peoples and states from arbitrary action and oppression as well as safeguard human dignity. It is closely related to the modern notion of human rights as expressed in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which essentially define the minimum standards for securing and maintaining human life, dignity and freedom.
- Especially in the current period of globalisation, the intertwined economic and ecological crises (think of financial contagion and climate change) confronting our planet today and their implications for security heavily underline our common vulnerability. As these crises are global in nature, they cannot be addressed by one government alone or just by a few governments, but demand cooperation and coordination by many of if not all nation-states to mitigate the “common bad” and advance the “common public good”. This objective of ensuring and furthering the “common good”, not just the good of some individuals or some countries, has always been a focal point and served as a powerful argument for global governance.
- Moreover, in the context of hunger and poverty, ecological stress and destruction, wars and violent repression that not only threaten the lives of millions of people but place the very survival of human kind itself at stake, the vision of a world founded on the values of justice, peace and sustainability cannot but deeply inspire the continuing search for effective global governance.

Where is the quest for values and how strong is it?

- The expansion of ecumenical thinking on global governance is reflected in the statement issued by the WCC Canberra Assembly (1991) on the

Gulf War, which nonetheless continues to resonate in today's environment: "For the sake of all peoples, it is time to build a new world order of justice, the foundation stone of peace". The WCC has consistently advocated for a new world order based on the values of justice, peace and care for creation. It has called for:

- a) A global economic and financial architecture that ends the domination and exploitation of the poor by the rich, discourages greed and invests in the common good. The global financial and economic crisis that struck in 2008, and that continues to undermine livelihoods, erode social support, and thus generate poverty in both the developing and developed world, clearly highlighted the dangers of financial liberalisation and the glaring need for global regulation of capital. Yet, to date, proposals to reform the international financial system put forward by international financial institutions such as the IMF and WB (where the bulk of voting shares are still held by a handful of powerful nations) as well as the G20 (which is comprised of rich, industrialised nations and emerging economic powers) have been largely cosmetic and fail to address the injustices and imbalances at the root of the crisis. Meanwhile, more substantial and deep-seated changes (including the formation of a Global Economic Council) recommended by a UN panel led by Joseph Stiglitz have been largely discounted in the dominant policy discourse. One cannot but ask: Where is the quest for justice?
- b) A global environmental policy framework which respects the integrity of God's creation, addresses the industrialised nations' insatiable thirst for oil, and promotes an alternative energy framework that takes into account the health and renewal of ecosystems. Even as the adverse impacts of a warming climate are already being felt, especially by poorest nations and small island states, the annual summits on climate change are still dominated by a "business-as-usual" corporate programme that prioritises profits over ecological protection and by the interests of powerful nations that year-after-year prevent the realisation of legally-binding commitments for substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and the provision of resources to address mitigation and adaptation in poor countries. Again, the question arises: where is the quest for justice and sustainability?
- c) An information and communication systems which offers all peoples truth in place of distortion and a media disposed to peace rather than violence; as well as redresses the concentration of control over global communications media in the hands of a few powerful nations and corporations. The recent scandal over "hacking" by a giant media conglomerate, however, only underscores the increasing dearth of ethics in this field. Where, indeed, is the quest for justice and peace?

- In the end, however, the quest for values must be a quest taken up by an informed citizenry, civil society organisations and people's movements (of which the ecumenical movement and other faith-based movements and organisations are but a part of). The political and moral will to transform the status quo and to build a more just, peaceful and sustainable world does not necessarily have to start from governments, but must, if it is to be genuinely effective and viable in the long-run, emanate primarily from the "grassroots".

Are our global institutions mainly sustained by common interest, or largely by a sense of Realpolitik ("What is to be done is what can be done") or is there more to it?

- Observing the lack of political resolve to tackle in any meaningful manner the plethora of financial, economic, social and ecological issues in the world today, it would seem apparent that the powers-that-be are mainly focused on pushing their own narrow national or corporate concerns. Take for instance the failure of the WTO to level the playing field in global trade and to promote development, and the subsequent proliferation of bilateral trade and investment agreements that continue to be one-sided, with benefits accruing largely to the already rich nations. It is perhaps only the global threat of terrorism that has managed in some ways to generate a sense of common interest and a degree of cooperation among governments, but even then the "common response" has often been reduced to military solutions and policing of populations that, in the end, aggravate rather than address the problem.
- Here, the rise of non-state actors in the international scene, particularly transnational corporations must be mentioned. TNCs operate across borders and wield considerable economic power, exceeding that of governments, and, as a corollary, have much political clout both in states as well as in multilateral institutions. On the other hand, TNCs have no formal recognition as international subjects and cannot be held accountable for compliance with international treaties and agreements that aim to uphold people's economic, social and cultural rights as well as protect the environment. The fact that realpolitik is more and more shaped by a corporate agenda therefore presents a conundrum. Attempts such as the Global Compact to strengthen social responsibility among corporations are doomed to fail because of their voluntary nature. The reform of the existing global governance structure composed of UN and its related agencies must have to address the development of TNCs as increasingly powerful players in the international policy arena.

What is still alive of the spirit of the Human Rights Declaration?

- Notwithstanding the gloomy picture that has been painted just now, I believe that the spirit of the Human Rights Declaration is still very much alive. Despite the many challenges, economic, social and cultural rights continue to be an integral part of the global governance agenda. It is worth mentioning the MDGs, which is a universally-endorsed framework to halve poverty by 2015 and to promote sustainable development. While the goals are commendable, the proposals and measures to achieve them are still based on palliative, growth-oriented economics. More work will have to be done under MDG 8 (development cooperation) to lay the foundations for a just environment for trade, investments, and the deliverance of aid that is conducive to poverty eradication and the building of sustainable communities.
- The international Court of Justice also deserves notice for prosecuting former leaders and perpetrators of genocide and massive human rights abuses. It has to be empowered further including perhaps through a global police force which would have the power to arrest such criminals.
- But, more importantly, peoples' protests against injustice, war and ecological destruction and mobilisations to assert their rights continue to flourish everywhere in the world. The construction of a good global governance requires democratic participation by the people not only through their representation in intergovernmental entities that make decisions concerning their lives, but also through the development of people's parliaments.

The Role of Churches

Internationally, the Christian churches represent the largest religious community, but they are a minority among minorities. While the Roman Catholic Church through the Vatican enjoys international status and can directly participate in intergovernmental negotiations, the WC lacks any such international recognition except its consultative status with the UN as a non-governmental organization. Its member churches have very different forms of relationships with their governments. Generally the power of churches to influence actions and decisions about international order has been decreasing since the beginning of the century. The World Conference on Religion and Peace has tried to bring the united world religions to bear on the questions of world community. The results have so far been very limited.

The Ecumenical understanding of the role of churches in the search for international order has changed radically from Christian leadership role in holding the community of nations together, through the notion of the church as "a factor" or a "sign" and instrument of the coming unity of human kind to the recognition the churches meant to live as confessing and witnessing communities among the nations of this world.

In their ecumenical solidarity, especially with the poor and the victims, the churches are called to manifest God's unconditional love for humankind: This task implies both **the priestly calling for reconciliation** and the **prophetic calling for resistance**. The relationship

between these two dimensions of Christian Witness for international order poses the same problems as the relationship between justice and peace.

The tension according to Konrad Raiser (The Former WCC GS) is resolved in the messianic perspective of the witness and praxis of Jesus announcing the presence of the Kingdom of God.

Churches should however be full involved in the debates on forging a global governance based on peace and justice.