Global Governance and New Dimensions of Human Security

SIR SHRIDATH RAMPHAL

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Sir John Crawford
Memorial Lectures

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1995  Sir Shridath Ramphal, Guyana

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Global Governance and New Dimensions of Human Security

SIR SHRIDATH RAMPHAL
Co-Chair, Commission on Global Governance

It used to be a matter of doctrine in British parliamentary circles that a minister should not be a professional in the field of his ministerial portfolio. That has changed a little. He or she is less of an ignorus than earlier, but still, never a doctor as minister of health, never a farmer as minister of agriculture. I seem to be following that principle in venturing to deliver the Sir John Crawford Memorial Lecture without any personal expertise in food or farming; but I hope, like the occasional minister, to bring some insights to the advancement of enlightened policy, in this case, the furtherance of the goals that inspired Sir John's work in agriculture and inspires yours in the CGIAR. There is an abiding appreciation worldwide for that work, and the particular contribution to human welfare made by the network of research institutions which function under the Consultative Group.

I would like to set food security, therefore, in the broader context of the security of people, of human security, and to speak about some of the changes that I believe are necessary in our global arrangements, in arrangements for the world's governance, so that the security of people—including their security in respect to food—may be enhanced. So a word first of all about "security."

Last Tuesday, on October 24, the world commemorated the 50th anniversary of the first meeting—the inauguration—of the United Nations, in October 1945. Within five years we will be at the dawn of the twenty-first century. This is, therefore, inescapably a time for asking questions about global institutions and world governance, a time for contemplating the state of human security in all its plenitude, a time for examining the adequacy of our systems for
securing human survival on our planet, a time for assessing what prospects we are passing on to future generations.

Consistent with the world of embattled states that shaped their ends in San Francisco, the founders of the United Nations saw future dangers to “peace and security” arising essentially from conflicts between nation states. It was the scourge of war between countries against which the United Nations would stand guard. San Francisco was a watershed in the evolution of a world of states. It was precisely with the security of those separate parts that the Charter was concerned. In the 50 years that have passed those parts remain the central feature of our world order. Nation states are not about to disappear, nor the nation state system to lose its centrality.

Yet something has happened on the way to the twenty-first century. Several of the elements of the nation state system have become less creedal, less assertive, less defining, even less hallowed. Sovereignty, self-determination, even non-intervention have had to yield up some of their innocence. We still speak of them in tones of orthodoxy, but global realities have curbed their largest claims, have trimmed their edges; they no longer represent universal truths or undiluted norms. We are in transition from a world still of states to one more of people. As in all transitions, there is contention between old habits and perceptions and new realities and needs.

And something else has happened as a consequence of this transition toward a world of people—their security, the security of people, has come to acquire a truer, larger meaning, something more than a concomitant of the security of states, deeper than was ever implicit in “freedom from fear,” than immunity from the physical consequences of war. That wider meaning was always understood, but in a subliminal way; kept out of sight and out of mind, in the cellar of human consciousness. Articulated in the Atlantic Charter as “freedom from want,” it failed to find entrenchment in the Charter of the United Nations in San Francisco and has been the most critical unmet need in the post-war period—a period that has been marked by the pervasive absence of that freedom, freedom from want.
In the new century it is with those human insecurities in the killing fields of poverty that the world will have to be most intensely concerned. Their insistent claim upon us is the new dimension of “security” to which this lecture speaks. Yet what is most new is that element of insistence; the claim itself was always inherent in the goals toward which Sir John Crawford reached.

The insecurities that afflict the hungry, the homeless, the destitute, the unemployed, those who are ill without healthcare, who are cold without heating, who are old without social support are real indeed. For them security is a meal, a roof, a job, medicines, warmth, relief from poverty in general. These insecurities afflict hundreds of millions of people. The world responds to them when they reach the proportions of an Ethiopia, but, for the most part, it avoids thinking about these human calamities. We can no longer put them out of mind as occurring in distant places, for no place on the planet is any longer far away. Human security has become inseparable. The hopes, the fears, the terrors, the torments of these global neighbors are ours, too. Their crises are not theirs alone. Oases of prosperity in a global wasteland are ultimately mirages. In the longer term, human security has to be just that—the security of all humanity.

The widest source of human insecurity today is a lack of economic security. Physical insecurity, the fear of conflict, the fear of violence from a variety of sources is, without doubt, very wide in its prevalence. We have only recently begun to appreciate the disturbing incidence of domestic violence, particularly against women. For larger numbers of people, economic insecurity, with all the other insecurities that it entails, is an unending curse.

The terrible reality is that the number of people trapped in economic insecurity is continuing to increase—a reality which the World Bank’s new President, Jim Wolfensohn, has been prompt to acknowledge. I applaud the passion and energy he has brought to the old unfulfilled ambition of “poverty alleviation” and to the Bank’s new caring vocation of “putting a smile on a child’s face.” I especially welcome the President’s recent affirmation to the Commission of the
Bank's dedication to the goals of global governance and his personal commitment to help effect change that benefits, in particular, those who are born into poverty in the developing world.

The trends in global poverty will be boringly, if distressingly, familiar to the development community here in Washington as elsewhere. For people generally there is something shameful, even obscene, about the fact that, in the end-years of this century of dazzling progress and soaring affluence, one in five of the world's people should be condemned to live in those abject conditions that the Bank has categorized as "absolute poverty." It raises many questions that the number of people in poverty should be rising in a world that globalization has transformed, and that freedom from want remains unrealized for millions in a world in which the free market has triumphed.

The stellar performance of a string of countries in Asia, starting with small islands like Singapore and Hong Kong and now extending to its most populous nations, the spirited turnaround by several countries in Latin America, the proliferation of funds heralding the investment potential in what have been dubbed "emerging markets," the sharp increase in private investment flows to developing countries—these are the plus factors of economic performance that get public attention. They are the good news that shuts out the bad, that blocks the news of rising poverty and widening deprivation. They are the good news that may provide alibis for governments that slash even the meager provision they have been making for development assistance in their budgets.

Much is claimed for the transformational impact of the process of globalization, deregulation, and privatization that has swept the world in the last decade. The fact is that this era has not been a golden age for a large proportion of the world's people, not just for the 1.3 billion of the absolute poor in developing countries whom globalization seems to have bypassed. It has failed to be a golden age also for many millions in industrial countries, where high and recalcitrant unemployment has created economic insecurity on a scale unprecedented since the depression of the 1930s.
Policymakers need to give attention to all the various aspects of security—food, environmental, social, economic, physical, military—and also to their interconnections. They need to consider them individually and also as integral parts of human security. In the Commission on Global Governance, which I co-chair with Ingvar Carlsson, the Prime Minister of Sweden, and whose report was issued this year, our concern was not so much with policies for any or all of these areas, but with the arrangements for governance best suited to facing the global challenges they present. Other commissions had dealt with development, disarmament, environment, humanitarian, and other issues. Our inquiry was into the ways of improving the global machinery for cooperation so as to enlarge the prospects of timely enlightened action in these and other areas that bear on human security.

This is not the occasion for me to lay out all of our proposals for better global governance; they are many. There is one, however, which requires special emphasis in the context of the new non-military dimensions of security to which the world must respond. There is a gap, we believe, in our structure of global economic governance—what Peter Sutherland, the first head of the WTO, identified, in a public statement at just about the time we were launching our report, as “a structural deficit in the world economy, in terms both of the making of policies and of their execution.” In calling for “revised structures for coordination on international economic issues at the highest political level,” he echoed our thinking.

Fifty years after Bretton Woods, Dumbarton Oaks, and San Francisco, the international community has no satisfactory way to consider global economic problems in the round and the linkages between economic, social, ecological, and security issues in the widest sense. The boundaries between issues of trade, competition policy, environment, macroeconomic policy, and social policy are increasingly blurred. Neat functional segregation of problems no longer works, and traditional institutional arrangements no longer suffice. Global interdependence is growing, driven by powerful technological and economic forces. Political structures that can articulate a sense of common interest and mediate differences have not kept pace.
We do not think that the G7 can play a coordinating or overseeing role, or there would not be a gap, a deficit. The G7 is, after all, only a club—a self-constituted group of industrial countries with no more than 12 percent of the world’s population, which are not accountable to anyone but themselves. It cannot command credibility as a truly global organization. It is not representative enough to mobilize an international consensus. There can, of course, be no objection to such clubs. There are clubs of developing countries as well—the G77 and the more recent G15.

What is troubling is when the G7 is seen as “a directorate for the world,” which is how The Washington Post described it after the Halifax Summit a few months ago. It is questionable if the G7 can now claim even to be the seven leading industrial countries in the world. When GDP is calculated according to purchasing power parities rather than on the basis of prevailing exchange rates—as the World Bank has begun to do—China and India are among the first seven, though not among the G7. Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and Russia are all in the top twelve. The host country at Halifax is number thirteen.

Nor is it credible to expect ECOSOC to provide global leadership on human security—on economic, social, and environmental matters. It might have become a global body with vigor and authority; that might even have been the intention when the United Nations was founded, but that is not how things have worked out. ECOSOC was not allowed to play in the same league as the Security Council; the big players may have been happy to see ECOSOC enlarged, but they never wanted to see it empowered. I say that as a former Chairman of the United Nations Committee for Development Planning—a tenure I shared with a former President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara. For three years we reported to ECOSOC with growing urgency, and unfailing futility. The recent effort to invigorate ECOSOC has yielded some minor changes, but does anyone seriously see ECOSOC discharging even in small measure the role envisaged for it under the Charter of advancing the economic and social development of all people?
There is now little ideological disagreement that most developing and former communist countries are no less committed to liberalization of markets, private investment, and openness than industrial ones. The groups of countries are more varied and less confrontational, and new areas of mutual interest—notably global environmental issues—provide a stronger driving force for consensus.

The time is now ripe, our Commission concludes—indeed, overdue—to create a global forum that can provide leadership in economic, social, and environmental fields. It should be more broadly based than the G7 and more effective than the ECOSOC system. While not having authority to make legally binding decisions, it would gain influence through competence and relevance, and acquire standing in relation to international economic matters that the Security Council has in peace and security matters.

We have proposed, therefore, the establishment of an Economic Security Council. The idea is not original—others have made similar proposals—but we have formulated it in terms we believe have the best prospect of early implementation and a successful outcome. Within our Commission, one of the strongest proponents of the idea of such a body was another former President of the World Bank, Barber Conable; another was Jacques Delors, who, as President of the European Union, had an insider’s insight into the G7 process.

We envisage the proposed Economic Security Council as having the following tasks:

- to continuously assess the overall state of the world economy and the interaction between major policy areas;
- to provide a long-term strategic policy framework in order to promote stable, balanced, and sustainable development;
- to secure consistency between the policy goals of the major international organizations, particularly the main multilateral economic institutions (i.e.,
the Bretton Woods bodies and the proposed WTO), while recognizing their distinct roles; and

- to promote consensus building dialogue between governments on the evolution of the international economic system, while providing a global forum for some of the new forces in the world economy, such as regional organizations, the business community, and civil society.

We believe that with the increasing limitations of current structures, such as the G7, the need for a more representative and effective forum is likely to be widely recognized, even by governments that have in the past shown little enthusiasm for an enlarged economic role for the United Nations. We were encouraged by the support expressed for the proposal by The New York Times in its editorial last Monday, October 23. I could not improve on its endorsement:

The present Economic and Social Council needs to give way to a new Economic Security Council that would be taken seriously by the major economic powers and would coordinate its work with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization.

We have ourselves envisaged that the work of the Council could indeed facilitate the effectiveness and authority of the Bank and the Fund, which have traditionally taken their cue from the G7. The industrial countries may wish the G7 to continue as a forum, but the Bank and the Fund would be better able to proceed in implementing strategies for tackling global economic problems, like worldwide poverty and policies for stabilization and adjustment, if they also had at their disposal the commitment and conclusions of a more representative body.

The ESC would exist to give political leadership and promote consensus on international economic issues where there are long-
term threats to human security, such as growing ecological dangers, economic instability, rising unemployment, the problems of transformation in the former Soviet Union, mass poverty, or lack of food security. It would be concerned with the overall state of the world economy and with the promotion of sustainable development. Its primary objectives would be the evolution of a long-term strategic policy framework and securing consistency between the policy goals of the major international organizations.

Food security is one area where such a long-term approach seems preeminently appropriate. Lester Brown has recently called attention to the possible global impact of China’s burgeoning demand for grain, as both its population and living standards go up. What sort of situation are we heading for as other populous nations, in most of which population is growing much faster than in China, are also expected to face widening food deficits as we move into the next century? Can we prudently leave it all to the market? Can we be confident that technology will fix it? Do we not need within our global governance system a forum where such matters can be considered and a credible effort made to develop the strategies to help steer the world away from danger?

Food is a principal area in which the world needs to be thinking ahead about the implications of the rising demand for resources whose supply cannot be indefinitely expanded. There is also the wider question of the implications of the pressure of increasing consumption, arising from population growth as well as from higher standards of living, on the environment. There are many profound questions the world needs to face. Is consumption on a collision course with the capacity of the planet to sustain life? Does runaway consumerism have to be restrained to avoid environmental disasters? These questions are being raised, and being raised by more people.

They are being raised by serious institutes and individuals both here and in several other countries. They are also being raised by staff of the World Bank. A paper by Robert Goodland, for example, of the Bank’s Environment Department, points out that high-consumption lifestyles take up the production of four to six hectares of
land per capita and that, if all people in the world were to consume at this rate, the total land requirement would be 26.5 billion hectares, and that is without providing for any increase in population. The world's total land area is, however, 13 billion hectares—half of what would be needed—and of that only 9 billion hectares is productive land.

There is at present no representative body of the right kind, at the right level, to consider such questions as these that bear on human security and to determine what policies the world should be following. Unlike the Security Council, we do not envisage the ESC essentially as a crisis management forum. Its central task would be to look at the main trends in the world economy and give signals that could guide the global community, though it will naturally also have a role in responding to acute crises—events such as the oil shocks, the near breakdown in trade negotiations, the debt crisis, and the collapse of the Soviet Union—that demand policy leadership and decisive action at a global level.

One of the valuable roles of the ESC could be in addressing international problems for which there is no clear institutional mandate or several overlapping ones. The Council should not usurp the functions of established institutions, but it could clearly identify responsibilities and ensure that procedural and bureaucratic difficulties do not stand in the way of responding to the compelling need for multilateral action. The ESC would also be the appropriate forum for studying proposals for international revenue raising to supplement national financing for international public goods, made by our Commission and others and now receiving increasing support.

We suggest that the ESC should meet twice yearly, and additionally as required to galvanize cooperative activity. The meetings should be held once a year at the level of Heads of Government and otherwise at Finance Minister level. Other ministers, for example, Trade Ministers, would be involved as appropriate. A supporting infrastructure would be needed of official representatives to ensure that ministerial discussions are properly prepared and followed through.
We have emphasized the need for intellectual leadership from the ESC. An imaginative and probably unconventional approach is required to service it. The secretariat and research capacity should be of high professional quality. Staff would include recruits from outside the UN system, drawing on the experience of multilateral institutions and the creativity of business, academia, and NGOs in a wide variety of countries. Some would be seconded on a short-term basis from other organizations.

The primary qualification should be a capacity for strategic thinking on economic, social, and environmental issues. We are sensitive to the need to maintain vitality and avoid institutional staleness, and one way to keep the institution efficient and alert to outside ideas would be to invite competitive bidding from international and private agencies for some of the work required by the ESC.

At a practical level, the ESC and its staff would expect to work closely with staff from the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, breaking down the institutional isolation that currently exists, as well as with bodies such as the ILO, to underline the social dimensions of its functions.

We expect the ESC to emerge gradually—on merit—as the focal point for global economic governance, and as a forum that both industrial and developing countries would find invaluable. The world badly needs an apex body for the consideration of economic and related issues. Without a representative high-level body developing an international consensus on critical economic issues, the global neighborhood could become a battleground of contending economic forces, and the capacity of humanity to develop a common approach would be jeopardized. Time is the enemy of such reform. The threat to human security is mounting, but the institutional capacity to respond to it is standing still. In the end, human security is about human survival. The cost of inertia could be high.

Much of what I have outlined is in the report of our Commission, Our Global Neighbourhood, and much else as well. Our
recommendations are today's agenda, not because they are ours, but because the issues they relate to will not go away, including some I have not touched on here—whether it is the need for a more representative Security Council in which major developing countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America play a central role along with, but not subordinate to, such new industrial country members as Germany and Japan; or for new limits on the creeping erosion of the principle of non-intervention, which needs modification in the interest of the security of people, but not open-ended flouting in the self-perceived interest of the strong; or for a new mandate for the Trusteeship Council in relation to the global commons and the planet's life support systems; or for the World Court's findings on illegality not to remain pious pronouncements as major countries reject the Court's authority.

The Commission's report, being the work of an independent group, is neither an industrial country platform nor a developing country polemic. Its aim is to reach beyond the instinctive and sometimes entrenched positions of each and to offer a way forward in which both can have confidence.

Time, we believe, is short. The world faces a kind of unspoken ultimatum: either we go forward to a more ordered world governed by the values of caring and tolerance, a world of mutual rights and responsibilities, one of rules and laws which all respect, a more democratic world with power constrained in the interest of all, or—ironically, freed of the constraints of the Cold War—we may regress to a world in which the few who are rich and strong keep in bondage, even by benign neglect, the many who are poor and weak, and in which the selfish and lawless get their bullying way. Given the global reality that cooperation has become not merely an option, but a compulsion, such a world, we believe, would be one of spiralling chaos and ultimate self-destruction.

In the context of the 50th anniversary year of the United Nations, as we stand uncertain on the threshold of a new century,
the options before the international community come down to something like the following:

- commitment to substantive enlightened change;
- minimal, largely cosmetic, change; or
- no change.

The first is the option of serious, constructive reform, the second is tinkering, and the third is “business as usual.”

The first option of radical reform is the route our Commission has chosen. We know it invites knee-jerk opposition from those who have no major quarrel with the status quo, or simply allow contentment with the short-term to shut out all thought for tomorrow. Our task is to persuade them—essentially the North—that even in the interest of industrial countries, now and in the longer term, such changes are necessary. The danger is that between the options of reform and no change might emerge a cosmetic exercise, a 50th anniversary gesture—satisfaction, even self-congratulation, in lighting up and blowing out the birthday candles.

The South also needs change, and also needs to be persuaded. With many developing countries bypassed by the tide of economic progress, subdued by the political and military power play of the strong, and their faith in negotiation mocked as naive, the South, for the most part, is confused and without a vision of the way forward. Yet of all the people of the world, those of the developing world—and the poorest among them in particular—have the least interest in the status quo and the most in change. A “business as usual” scenario is the option of stagnation and suffering for the South—for most of its countries and for most of its people. Change must be the South’s strategic choice. The question is, what change? Change, obviously, that is not just cosmetic, not just superficial, but real change for the better.

Take the example of resources. Does anyone believe that the weakest and smallest and least developed economies—the poorest
people in the world—can look to the twenty-first century with confidence in the future? For how much longer can the poor rely on prompt and adequate IDA replenishment, or a climate of bilateral cooperation propitious to curbing poverty?

The Commission on Global Governance proposes that a serious start should be made with international revenue raising. We call for more work on the “Tobin tax” on international currency transactions as an enlightened basis for raising global revenue for global purposes—like IDA and peacekeeping. We call for “user charges”—market instruments that will mobilize global revenue from fees from those who use the global commons. We suggest using the proposed Economic Security Council as the machinery for allocation and accountability and the treaty procedure to avoid any implication of the United Nations being vested with supranational authority to levy charges. Who in the development community, who in the South, can be content with present arrangements under which the prospects of progress in many developing countries—the prospects for human security—turn on the outcome of elections in industrial countries, even mid-term elections?

As we look to global governance in the years ahead—these end-years of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century—one of the most vital, most urgent needs of the whole world is the empowerment of the South. Just as the empowerment of women at the national level is the liberation of the whole society, so the empowerment of the South is the liberation of all humanity. This may sound pious in the context of an adversarial international system, but that is not a necessary context. Change our angle of vision and everything changes. Thirty years ago Jean-Paul Sartre wrote these profoundly prescient words in his Introduction to Frantz Fanon’s book, *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> And when one day our human kind becomes full grown it will not define itself as the sum total of the whole world’s inhabitants, but as the infinite unity of their mutual needs.
Nothing underlines that identity of interest, that oneness of needs, as the compulsions of human security. Tested by that standard, the Commission's proposals for reform of the Security Council, for the creation of an Economic Security Council, for revitalization of the General Assembly, for democratization of the Bretton Woods institutions, for an end to the global military culture, for global trusteeship of the environment, and for raising global revenues for development and other global purposes are all in the interest of the South and the North alike.

Let me be clear about responsibilities for facilitating change in global governance arrangements in the interest of strengthening human security. Beyond the clear duty of governments there is a quota of service to that cause of change that has to be rendered by the UN system itself, including in this regard the World Bank and the IMF. Sometimes that change will have to be radical and substantial. We cannot change course in the world without changing the United Nations itself. That is why we have suggested a review of the roles of UNCTAD, UNIDO, and the Regional Economic Commissions and the winding up of ECOSOC, all in the specific context of the creation of a truly representative Economic Security Council, taking into account the establishment of the WTO and the changing needs of the countries and regions of the world. The United Nations must develop a capacity to change, to shut down operations that have served their time and purposes, to change the priorities of others, or to simply do things differently. That is the way for it to grow stronger.

If instead, protecting turf, or clinging to old habits, or sheer inertia assumes ascendancy over the United Nation's own enlightened self-interest and its palpable responsibility for self-examination and regeneration, if it is not responsive to the urgings of its true friends among the people of the world to be the champions of change, it will remain vulnerable to the forces already at work intent on destroying it.

To ensure genuine security is to ensure freedom from fear and freedom from want. To enhance human security is to enlarge human
freedom. There can be no higher purpose we can serve than to enhance the security of people worldwide. It is that purpose that we have tried to serve.

There is a great and noble task to be undertaken of furthering human security—one no less demanding of leadership than that called forth in relation to peace and security fifty years ago. In the words of Maya Angelou’s moving verse at the ceremony in San Francisco last June marking the anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, we simply must not put off the time when we come to “the brave and startling truth” that it is within our power to shape human destiny in a manner worthy of our human gifts:

We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

That is the real challenge before us all. It is one I believe Sir John Crawford understood and responded to in his unique way all those many years ago. It is for us now to do so as well. The challenge has become more grave and pressing and resonates of larger dangers. It is for us now to bring to our challenge those qualities of creativity and caring and commitment beyond little plans for which we remember him today.
Sir Shridath Ramphal is Co-Chair of the Commission on Global Governance, a position he holds jointly with the Prime Minister of Sweden. He was previously Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations, headquartered in London.

Sir Shridath is a lawyer by training, an alumnus of King’s College, London, Gray’s Inn, and the Harvard Law School. He entered public life as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Justice of Guyana. As Guyana’s Foreign Minister, he was twice elected Vice President of the United Nations General Assembly, and as Chairman of the United Nations Committee for Development Planning.

As Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Sir Shridath was well known for the success of his behind-the-scenes efforts to promote the cause of justice and nationhood in Zimbabwe and South Africa. He gave the Commonwealth a firm developmental orientation. One of the mechanisms he established was a series of small, expert groups that studied specific problems and offered practical solutions to them.

Sir Shridath served on each of the five independent international commissions which reported on global issues in the 1980s: the Brandt Commission on International Development, the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development, the International Commission on Humanitarian Issues, and the South Commission. He was President of the World Conservation Union-IUCN, and was a Special Adviser to the Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. His book, Our Country, Our Planet, written for the Earth Summit, was published in several languages.