Dialog Across Cultures
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The World Bank

A Summary of the Proceedings
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Day 1 - Opening Plenary Session

Plenary Introduction

Ambassador Eric Rouleau opened the “Dialogue Across Cultures” meeting by offering his observations on the state of relations between the Arab and Muslim worlds and the West in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Following numerous visits to the Middle East, Ambassador Rouleau observed that a tremendous chasm separates the West from the Arab and Muslim world, larger than any gap he has previously witnessed. The divide between the two regions is not strictly cultural or political, but rather contains elements of both. While elites in many countries hold a greater affinity for the United States than for Europe, they also harbor strongly negative perceptions of U.S. policy in the region. In particular, Ambassador Rouleau pointed out that Arabs and Muslims object to U.S. “double standards” with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They also protest U.S. support for autocratic regimes in the region. They yearn for their democratic rights. While most people in the region do not condone terrorism, they blame the United States for not considering the roots of terror in the region. They also cite the United States for ignoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Touching on the issue of globalization, Ambassador Rouleau said that many in the region fear that the phenomenon will deprive them of their identities and their cultural values. Some also believe that globalization benefits the rich at the expense of the poor and consider the process to be a new form of U.S. global hegemony. Meanwhile, ruling elites in the region fear the positive aspects of globalization. In particular, they worry that reforms, promoting the rule of law, transparency in governance, the suppression of corruption, and equal rights for women, for example, will undermine their dominant position in these societies. Indeed, Rouleau concluded that the lack of fundamental freedoms in the Arab world is a key source of terror. While many among the ruling elite will not admit that the linkage exists, some privately concede that a connection between a lack of freedom and an ensuing sense of despair can breed radical, violent behavior.

Plenary Discussion

Following Ambassador Rouleau’s introductory remarks, Jean-Eric Aubert (World Bank), the discussion facilitator, suggested three principal topics for dialogue and discussion: (1) Misperceptions; (2) Impact of Globalization; and (3) Governance. The following discussion ranged freely among these three key topics. Participants from the Arab and Muslim worlds were the primary contributors to this discussion.
Several key themes emerged from the afternoon’s exchange of ideas. The major areas of discussion can be distilled into four primary themes: (1) Neither Islam nor the West can be simplified into monolithic concepts; each is both diverse and complex; (2) Anger towards the United States is not the result of misperception, but is rather due to an intense disagreement with U.S. policies in the region; (3) Islam and modernity are not necessarily incompatible; and (4) The lack of fundamental democratic freedoms in the Arab world arises both as a failing within the Arab world, as well as, a lack of commitment (“double standard”) from the United States and the West more generally.

The key points made under each of the four themes follow.

**Neither Islam nor the West can be simplified into monolithic concepts; both are diverse and complex.**

An Arab participant captured this theme by stating that, “There are Islams, and there are Wests.” The concepts are not monolithic. The Americans engage in self-deception if they believe that, “the Muslims hate us,” or, “the poor hate us.” Both formulations are too simplistic. Likewise, there is no one West. Many in Europe criticize the United States. The French farmer who attacked a McDonalds restaurant offers one example of the broad range of anti-American fervor. Indeed, anti-American sentiment is felt well beyond the Muslim world.

Another Arab participant cautioned that Americans should refrain from referring to the “Arab” or “Muslim” world because this concept has only limited utility. The region is vast, with considerable variations in nearly every aspect. All manner of values and cultures interact. A Western participant confirmed that there are many Islams, referring to the example of Iran where a majority of Iranians voted for people who strongly believe in the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Similarly, an Arab participant warned against judging Islam by one or two events. For example, the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini should not color perceptions of the religion writ large. The diversity of Islam must be recognized.

The inherent complexity of both Islam and the West underscores the possibility for shared values and mutual interests. For example, an Arab participant pointed out that until the 1980s, the United States (and the West in general) found common cause with Islamic fighters in a bid to oust the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. While some Americans today believe that a cultural clash between Islam and the West is unavoidable, there have been many instances of cooperation in the past.

The simplistic nature that characterizes how each side views the other is inherent in the notion among Arabs that there is no debate in the United States about the war on terrorism. Likewise, many in the United States view Arab societies as stagnant, with no opportunities for public debate. Both views are incorrect and fail to capture the complexity that underlies both societies.

A Muslim participant focused on the Arab and Muslim worlds’ significant information gap regarding the West. He ascertained that the West is producing information
on the Muslim world, but the latter is not generating knowledge about the West. Various societies in the Islamic world are not dealing with the West in all its complexity. A more comprehensive perspective is needed. As long as the Islamic world does not possess the autonomous capacity to produce knowledge about the West, it will not be able to move beyond rhetoric to a real understanding of the West. Social conditions that are conducive to independent production of knowledge are necessary.

Anger toward the United States is not the result of misperception, but rather an intense disagreement with U.S. policies in the region.

Numerous Arab participants voiced their deep frustration with U.S. policies in the region, asserting that the problem is not one of popular misperception, but instead has to do with the popular anger over U.S. policies in the Middle East. As one Arab participant described it, “It’s 80% real politics, not misperceptions.” The primary issue stems from U.S. support for Israel. Moreover, the U.S. presence in the Gulf and the history of American unilateral interventions, contributes to the Arab anger with the United States.

Participants debated the significance of September 11th, with many stressing that the date did not hold the same importance to the region; others disagreed. An American participant cited a recent Pew Charitable Trust poll that underscored the different views of September 11th. The poll established a deep chasm between the American view of September 11th, characterizing the attacks as “against whom we are,” and the views of the rest of the world which described the attacks as being “against what you do.”

An Arab participant held that the region had a particularly difficult time with President Bush’s formulation that “You are either with us or against us.” Others agreed that the statement has its difficulties, comparing Bush’s response to Usama Bin Laden’s Manichean view of a world that is divided between Believers and Non-believers.

Another Arab participant disputed the notion that 9-11 was not significant for the region. He postulated that attacks constituted a critical turning point for the region. The terrorist attacks have shifted the focus of debate from issues related to governance, democracy, and cultural hegemony to questions of political violence. He raised a series of questions such as: How do we deal with political violence? What is it? Who sets the rules? How should we address the issue?. He stressed that the strong will always dictate the terms of reference, rather than establishing these parameters through dialogue. Still, the fact that people are now looking at political violence through a cause-and-effect lens is significant. More importantly, political violence is not rooted deeply in culture or religion. A strong correlation exists between how societies perceive political violence and their threat level. He concluded that the problem is difficult, but manageable.

Another Arab participant likened 9-11 to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, terming it a “political earthquake” with tremendous ramifications inside the United States and beyond. Others, including Americans, also compared September 11th to the Iranian Revolution. Both events exerted a significant influence on how Americans view the Muslim world.

Delving further into the question of U.S. policy in the Middle East, an Arab participant termed American support for Israel, part of “a massive intellectual Achilles’
Heel," in which debate on Israel is stifled. The dilemma, however, moves beyond the question of Israel, to a broader notion that the consequences of American foreign policy are not open to scrutiny. Elements of both racism and neo-colonialism are present in this view that essentially allows for America to act with impunity around the world.

Still others declared that despite the anger over U.S. policies in the region, an innate anti-Americanism does not exist in the Middle East. The region continues to maintain a reservoir of goodwill toward America. The United States is perceived as the country that built the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the American University in Cairo (AUC). The conflict is not cultural or metaphysical, but political.

**Islam and modernity are not necessarily incompatible.**

A Muslim participant framed this question as revolving around whether one accepts the possibility of Islamist modernity or considers the approach essentialist in nature, thereby barring the possibility of the two perspectives being compatible. One's answer to this question has clear implications on how to move forward. A number of participants stated that Islam is not incompatible with modernity. Islam is not an ideology, although it can be exploited for ideological reasons. Rather, Islam is quite diverse; witness the different impacts of Wahhabism in states adhering to this brand of Islam with Qatar, a far more liberal state than some of the others. The key is that Islam is not one thing or another; it's what you do with it.

Some asserted that the separation between religion and state was critical for Islam to adapt to modernity. Islam must be protected from those who would use it for political purposes. Using the example of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, an Arab participant said that people can deal with the occupation by resisting, but that Islam is extremely difficult to address on a political plane. Islam has been exploited and abused by so many over the years. Another participant added that when Islam is hijacked, elements of society, particularly non-Muslims, feel excluded and therefore are placed on the defensive.

One participant offered the view that multiple modernities exist. In particular, there is a distinction between cultural modernity and societal modernity. Societal modernity can be universal, while cultural modernity is more country-specific. Ultimately, however, the process of modernity relates to a society attempting to re-appropriate its destiny in the face of change.

Another Arab participant stated that there is no doubt that Islam and modernity can find accommodation. Yet, it is important to admit that the Arab world in the 20th century failed to integrate itself into modern life, politically, economically, and culturally. Arabs must recognize that neither Israel nor the United States can be blamed for this failure. The Arab world has a lot of work ahead it regarding a movement toward modernity. It cannot move into modernity using a medieval interpretation of Islam. To some extent, Arabs remain stuck in a pre-modern culture. Arab intellectuals are “lost” in many ways, and moving beyond this state will require a lot of work.

An Arab participant expressed uneasiness with the tenor of the discussion on Islam and modernity, cautioning against working with such broad, general concepts as Modernity,
Islam, and Globalization. It is important to break these concepts down into more manageable parts. Often, problems that arise with respect to modernity & globalization, have nothing to do with Islam.

Another Arab participant responded that the principal values of modernity are universal. For these values to prevail and be part of everyday life, they have to be expressed through language and lifestyle. Islamic culture has many treasures that have been ignored or obscured by an anti-modern, patriarchal culture. The Arab world needs time and a fair chance to mature and be accepted on its own terms. The Iranian Revolution offers an example of how Islam can evolve positively over time. It is important to work through indigenous culture.

An American participant stressed that Arabs and Muslims have to believe in their ability to become more modern. They need to have a vision of where they want to go and less patience with the autocratic regimes under which they live.

The lack of fundamental democratic freedoms in the Arab world arises both as a failing within the Arab world, as well as, a lack of commitment (“double standard”) from the United States.

The discussion of the region’s lack of democracy coincided in many respects with the discussion on Islam and modernity. The group’s exploration of the theme of Islam and its compatibility with modernity provided an important segue into the subject of democracy and the region.

An important sub-theme in this area related to the prevalent misperceptions in the West, especially in the United States, that people in the Middle East are not interested in democracy. Yet, a recent Harvard study found that the commitment to democracy in the Muslim world is equal to that in the West and greater than that found in parts of East Asia.

Some participants believe that the U.S. actively opposes democracy in the region. For example, an Arab participant questioned whether the United States was simply operating on misperceptions. She raised the possibility that the United States has no genuine interest in democracy in the region, but instead wants to exert U.S. control over the region and its institutions.

Many others questioned American support for autocratic leaders in the region. Why does the U.S. abandon its own values of democracy and human rights when it comes to the Middle East? One Arab participant warned that American support for dictators in the region who are opposed to change constitutes a serious issue. She stressed that the region’s population is disproportionately young and that students are alienated by their governments and are pressing for change. Another Arab participant highlighted the growing influence of grassroots movements in the region. People at the grassroots level are gaining influence, and the governing elite has no choice but to address their demands.

An Arab participant emphasized that political and institutional reforms are critical elements for establishing a culture of democracy. In the past, these areas have “taken a back seat” to economic reforms. It is time to assign a higher priority to political reform in the region.
An American participant responded to charges that the United States is not interested in democracy by raising the concern that democratic elections will bring undemocratic forces, i.e. the Islamists, to power. He offered the examples of Iran and Algeria to underscore U.S. fears that a true democratic opening in the Arab/Muslim world will unleash forces that are virulently anti-U.S. and anti-Israel.

Arab participants lamented the lack of alternatives that often allows Islamists to exploit political openings. One participant theorized that the Arab world appears to be captive to an “either/or” mentality. No space exists between the Islamists and the autocratic rulers; a middle ground for those who do not support either extreme does not exist. Another Arab participant agreed, saying that beyond the Islamists, no other options are available. In the past, Islamist movements have gained popularity as the only alternative to repressive regimes.

Opening Plenary Conclusion
Following the Plenary Discussion, Jean-Louis Sarbib, World Bank Vice-President for the MENA region, offered some concluding thoughts. He encouraged dialogue participants to move beyond generalizations that often hide more than they reveal. He emphasized the World Bank’s desire to join in development that is respectful of the traditions and cultures of the region. Sarbib concluded by raising the question, “How can we use our time together to move away from looking in the rear view mirror, and instead focus on the road ahead?” The key for the following discussions will be to focus on how the Bank can help people move in the direction they want to go.

Day 2 - Small Group Discussions
On Day 2, participants were divided into three smaller sub-groups to consider the following topics for discussion: (1) Impediments to globalization; (2) Impediments to more open and accountable governance; and (3) Impediments to creating and sharing knowledge in the region. An account of each of the sub-groups’ discussions follows.

Sub-group #1: Impediments to Globalization
The discussion opened with a brief presentation by Peter Berger (Boston University) outlining the key conclusions of his recent book, co-edited with Samuel Huntington, entitled Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in a Contemporary World. Berger summarized the book’s three principal findings:
1. There is an emerging global culture that is American in content. It is powerful and exists on a popular level among young elites.
2. This global culture is not monolithic. It is variegated and contradictory.
3. This global culture is not irresistible or homogenized. It can be and is being modified.

Reasons for resistance to globalization. The discussion then turned to an exploration of the impediments to globalization. Participants highlighted four key reasons underlying the region’s resistance to globalization.
• Loss of sovereignty and power. Many want the benefits of globalization, but are not interested in political change.
• Loss of identity.
• Xenophobia
• Structural isolation, i.e. unemployment

These impediments exist in both the Arab world and the West. Similar responses to globalization exist in both realms. In particular, the response of Islamic forces in the region is similar to the Le Pen phenomenon (Jean-Marie Le Pen is the 2002 French Presidential Candidate) in France. There is nothing specifically Islamic in this response. Islamist groups use Islam symbolically, as a vehicle for conveying their distrust of globalization.

In addition, participants identified other impediments to globalization that were specific to the Arab world:
• Arabs feel defeated and overwhelmed by the injustice of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
• Militarization
• Totalitarianism
• Corruption
• State as key economic player is retreating. People have been taken out of their tribes or other modes of identity and have been linked to the state; yet, now, the state is retreating. How to deal with these changes?

Discussion of Islamic Sharia and political movements and their impact on the evolution of society. Participants next considered the complex interaction between Islamist movements, modernity, and globalization. It was noted that certain Arab countries have witnessed a significant expansion of Islamic discourse. In Egypt, for example, Islamic discourse has dominated the debate to the exclusion of other modes of discourse. Islamic vocabularies have become essential to express political ideas.

Participants raised the question, “Should democratic change in the Arab world be postponed until we get rid of Islamic discourse, or should we move ahead with democracy that would allow legal expression of Islamic discourse?”

A Western participant underscored that there are significant misperceptions in the West about Islamic movements. It is important to differentiate among Islamic movements because some are in favor of modernization. For example, many are pushing for democratization while their secular counterparts are essentially absent.

At the same time, it was pointed out that Islam is used as a political tool to perpetuate dictatorships, so it is unfairly judged and perceived in the West. Islam also offers a cultural identity that people cling to when they feel threatened by globalization, but it need not be an impediment.

Conclusions. Participants arrived at five key conclusions.
• People must consider different responses to globalization: it does not necessarily need to translate into joblessness for the Egyptian vendor. For example, India responded to multinationals like McDonalds with a thriving entrepreneurship of Indian fast food chains.
• Too much attribution to Islam. We should not identify culture with religion. Culture is much richer and serves as the locus of unity in the Arab world.
• There is an emerging polarization in the Arab world between corrupt regimes and political movements based on religion. The region must develop a framework for inclusion that will allow for the diversity that exists in Arab cultures.
• Once the issue of Islam opposing modernity is resolved, then the real problems and impediments to globalization in the Arab world can be tackled. Resistance to globalization emanates not from Islam – rather it emanates from culture, economics, and the perception of threat.

Suggestions. Participants concluded with three principal suggestions for moving forward.

• The World Bank should create a commission of respected personalities from the Arab world who can talk to their people about their true conditions, much as Putin did in Russia, and move forward with reforms.
• Conditionality can be an effective tool. Can the World Bank exercise conditionality on the issue of transparency when working with client countries in the MENA region?
• The World Bank possesses a wide range of tools that includes access to high levels of government, as well as more pragmatic issues at the sector level. The Bank might want to engage in studies and commissions that consider the legal, social, and political aspects of globalization.

Sub-group #2: Impediments to more open and accountable governance

Defining the Problem. Participants opened the discussion by concurring that the lack of transparency in governance is one of the most pressing issues in the Middle East. While insufficient capacity might contribute to this problem, an Arab participant identified four key obstacles impeding progress toward more open and accountable government in the Palestinian case.

1. **Nature of Society itself.** Societies in the region are very traditional and are characterized by a willingness to defer to leaders and accept whatever they say.
2. **Conflict with Israel.** The conflict distorts priorities within the Palestinian society, assigning a lower priority to issues related to governance. Palestinians, for example, will take to the streets in protest of Israeli occupation, but not authoritarian rule.
3. **Legacy of the PLO.** The PLO was essentially implanted in Palestine from outside the territories. The PLO leadership emerged from the context of Arab political culture and had no experience with transparency, accountability, or strong institutions.
4. **Role of Donors.** International donors bring their own priorities. They are not interested in good governance, but in promoting the peace process.
An American participant asserted that while the United States had done a lot over the past fifty years to promote democracy in places like Germany and Japan, it had virtually ignored the Arab world. Still, the emergence of truly democratic institutions is essentially a task for people within Arab societies. The United States can play only a limited role.

An Arab participant identified the issue of governance as an area where the gap between the Arab world and the West is widening. At the same time, he explained that it is very difficult to graft political and economic reforms onto systems that are not hospitable to these ideals. Good governance cannot be embedded into systems that are inherently hostile to the concept. Other participants echoed this view. For example, one participant stated that the problem of governance in the Arab world is 95% an Arab problem. He placed the issue in its broader historical context, reminding others of centuries of Ottoman despotism, followed by decades of colonial rule, and the period of independence that was mired in Cold War politics.

Participants further explored the notion of an Arab-centric approach to democracy and governance. One participant suggested the need for a specifically Arab version of civil society that accounts for the particulars of Arab culture. He raised the question of how to develop an "Arab theory" of positive political change in the region.

**Next Steps.** Participants identified two broad goals that would help promote good governance in the region.

- **Peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.** This will remove a potent excuse used by many leaders in the region
- **Focus on building democratic institutions in the region.** The principal challenge is to work on building civil society

**Concrete Suggestions for the World Bank.** While participants agreed that the majority of work, 95%, must come from within the Arab world, they also identified areas of focus for the 5% that the West can contribute. These areas do not necessarily require significant funding, but rather would benefit from the thinking of those from the Bank and elsewhere.

1. Help the region develop a tolerant Islamic trend that already exists, but needs to be nurtured.
2. Establish a center for Islamic jurisprudence that would address issues such as women’s rights and globalization.
3. Foster greater contact between Islamic non-governmental organizations and their counterparts around the world.
4. Strengthen secular institutions of learning such as the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the American University in Cairo (AUC) through scholarship funds that allow an expansion of the student body.
5. Help promote independent, private media outlets in the region, both radio and satellite television to help broaden the public debate. In addition, establish incentives for objective reporting, e.g. an “Arab Pulitzer”
6. Enhance the capacity of the judiciary and law enforcement.
7. Promote women’s empowerment in the region by establishing a global alliance among key international players, e.g., the World Bank, the IMF, the EU that pools resources for women’s empowerment projects and programs. Women’s empowerment in the region will generate significant positive externalities in areas that include education, health, and the environment.

Finally, participants highlighted the opportunities for positive change embedded in key geo strategic issues such as the future of Iraq and a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Specifically, future U.S. action to remove Saddam could either be a disaster or a tremendous opportunity for democratic change. If the United States insists on the democratic nature of any successor government in Iraq, the demonstration effect throughout the region would be huge. Likewise, if the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is resolved peacefully and results in a more democratic, transparent Palestinian government, positive spillover effects among surrounding regimes could also be significant.

Conclusions. The sub-group distilled their discussion into eight key conclusions.
1. The issue of governance in the region is perhaps the most important to address.
2. The West, particularly the United States, has never “gotten it right” in the region.
3. To make progress, certain areas must be addressed: (a) Palestinian-Israeli conflict; (b) Cease support for corrupt regimes; and (c) Accept the risk of democratization, and short-term disruptions that it may entail.
4. The entanglement between religion and the state that characterizes these societies, in all its inherent complexity, must be resolved in a way that accounts for cultural specificities.
5. Concrete action in support of specific groups including universities, NGOs, women’s groups, think tanks and the media, must occur.
6. Appropriate levels of economic development assistance should accompany support for these groups, without falling into the “sacred trap” of liberalization.
7. International assistance will be more effective if it is coordinated at the donor level.
8. The geopolitics of a “positive domino effect” should be considered. Positive regime change in Iraq and a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would have significant, positive multiplier effects throughout the Middle East.

Sub-group #3: Impediments to creating and sharing knowledge

Education. The state of education systems in the region was repeatedly raised as an important impediment to creating and sharing knowledge. One participant acknowledged that education is the key to modernization. Yet, as Islamic societies try to “catch up” with the West, new knowledge is accumulated elsewhere, broadening the gap. In addition, higher education institutions are often feared as threats to power and therefore controlled by political authorities.

Another participant bemoaned the focus on religion that is present in many Middle Eastern education institutions. This focus comes at the cost of preparing graduates for jobs and real life. In general, education lacks a critical approach. Students are not encouraged to
think independently, or to question. Instead, some people perceive public education as the government’s attempt to “keep people off the streets.” Education continues to be plagued by a “top down” approach, in which authorities dictate the mode of learning and use educational institutions as instruments of control. In addition, public investment in education is typically low. Classrooms are in a state of disrepair, and teacher salaries are low, inhibiting the recruitment of qualified people.

Curriculum content was also raised as an impediment. Some participants pointed to an element of hatred and bias that is present in children’s education. Some children receive distorted views of the world via the public education system. Deep reforms of the curriculum are needed, but are very difficult to implement.

**Media.** One participant hypothesized that new media outlets in the region are actually entrenching autocracy rather than loosening control. Regimes that wield excessive power prohibit media outlets from serving as true relays of information. The media in the region is either government-owned or highly politicized. There are no objective media outlets. The media has more or less succeeded in terms of providing popular entertainment programs, but educational programming is lackluster. Quality programming could have a profound impact on these societies.

**Culture.** One participant asked whether cultural norms impede the questioning of authority. He noted that in the past the Arab world had greater intellectual vibrancy than is found today. Another participant suggested it was important to note the role of values and the link between values and knowledge. How do you go about changing values when you find them destructive? Many of the problems in the Middle East relate to the tendency to submit to authority, rather than question it. At the same time, a participant noted that attempts by international institutions to address these types of problems are doomed to failure; direct assistance is the “kiss of death.”

**Suggestions for the Bank.** The sub-group offered some concrete suggestions for the World Bank to consider:

1. Establish a venture capital fund to help promote private, independent media outlets.
2. Provide English language training.
3. Support educational reform initiatives.
4. Provide assistance for teacher training programs.
5. Promote the use of “virtual” universities as a means of broadening access to education, particularly to housewives.
7. Promote radio as an inexpensive and accessible media outlet.
8. Build a “network of guides” who can help the Bank understand the political and social elements at play, in-country.

**Day 2 – Concluding Plenary Session**

The concluding plenary session began with summaries from the three sub-groups who reported the main conclusions of their discussion to the larger group.
Following the sub-group presentations, Jean-Louis Sarbib encouraged participants to find ways to harvest the wealth of ideas generated over the course of the proceedings. He also asked for specific suggestions on how the Bank should be involved in the future, as well as ways to improve the format.

**Format suggestions.** Suggestions addressing the dialogue’s format were made to include representatives of different paradigms in the discussions. Specifically, Islamists should be invited to participate in order to better flesh out differences between secular and Islamist views. An Arab participant suggested that more representatives from the West be included in the dialogue and that questions of politics and foreign policy be addressed more explicitly.

**Next Steps.** The discussion then turned to the next steps to be taken. An Arab participant enjoined the Bank to be “brave,” and push harder for real reform. While the suggestions put forth through the dialogue were excellent, the fundamental reality is that to move forward, governments in the region must begin to seek the consent of the governed.

Jean-Louis Sarbib responded that the challenge for an institution like the World Bank is to be courageous and take more risks. The current situation is one of a region that is not performing to its potential, as well as an institution that is also failing to help these countries reach their potential. Real change has to come from within. The question therefore becomes, How can the Bank work with a paradigm that espouses real change in the region, as opposed to a dialogue across cultures? The Bank wants to respond to the aspirations of people in the context in which they occur. The dialogue is more between the Bank and those in the region to insure that the Bank’s participation in development is more efficient and culturally sensitive.

**Creation of a “Wise Men” Commission.** The remainder of the discussion focused primarily on the suggestion of creating a commission of “wise men” to address the key obstacles preventing the region from moving forward. The majority of participants supported the idea as holding the possibility of being an innovative approach to change. Some, however, were more skeptical about whether the commission could accomplish anything.

Those who supported the idea offered several suggestions for how to move forward. One suggestion was that the commission’s mandate be broadened to include not only the World Bank, but also the United Nations and the European Union. Some questioned whether there should be any role for the Bank in the commission, particularly since governments in the region are stakeholders in the Bank. As such, it was suggested that the Bank could be supportive of the commission without actually having a role in it. Some suggested that the commission’s composition remain open and flexible. It should not be an association of opposition elements, nor should it be comprised of government officials.

Ultimately, the details of the commission need to be worked out in a separate series of meetings. One participant suggested the creation of a think tank as a first step toward establishing the commission. Another participant proposed the establishment of a forum that produces recommendations leading to the creation of a commission.