United In Diversity

by
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The World Bank
Washington, D.C., July 31, 2003

Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador... Indonesia is an extremely important country for us. It's a country that six years ago ran into very considerable difficulties and a huge change in its political framework.

I remember the first time I gave a speech on corruption in Indonesia, President Soeharto had the honor of speaking first. He was not interested in hearing me, but he did speak first, and then to follow was to be my contribution and the contribution of Zhu Rongji, who was then the deputy premier of China, subsequently to be premier.

And Mr. Soeharto, at tea just before he was leaving, called me over and said, "I know you're going to give a speech on corruption, but you're a young man, and I would like to tell you about corruption and your speech."

And I said, "What is that, sir?"

He said, "What you call corruption, in our part of the world, we call family values."

[Laughter.]

MR. WOLFENSOHN: Which is a phrase that I shall long remember, but we're still fighting on about the corruption issue, but that is not what we are discussing here today. I have many memories of this great country and a great affection for it.

And the reason that I'm particularly interested in this conference is that Indonesia is at a peculiarly important stage of its development after a very, very difficult period, and it is transitioning out, sharing the qualities of Indonesian business and Indonesia character it exemplifies, which is sticking to it, trying to get the job done.

But there is clearly a need to build trust and confidence in the society and cohesion in the society, and that is why this conference on "United in Diversity" is so important. It is not just a question of the government leaders. It's a question of building a consensus in the society and a unity in the society, which if it is brought about, will allow the 200 million people in this great country to overcome the difficulties of growth, the difficulties of 120 million people who are on the edge or are in poverty and need to be brought back from it.
And the theme of this conference, speaking from what Les Thoreau said about if you have a wheel and don't use it, the theme that we, at least in the Bank are wishing and anxious to talk about, is the wheel that we have learned works in development. It is bringing together government, civil society and the private sector in a coordinated approach to the development of the country, of the sharing of values, the sharing of objectives, in a way that the old contradictions and competitiveness between civil society, private sector, and government did not allow.

We have discovered, in the work that we're doing in so many countries, that it is possible to overcome stereotypes of one group vis-a-vis the other, it is possible to put aside for a moment the views that civil society may have of governmental organizations or of institutions like my own or of the private sector, it is possible to bring groups together in a shared objective, which is an objective that needs to be set, but which is clearly understood by the organizers here, which is the one of addressing the question of poverty, addressing the question of social equity.

Where you can bring those groups together, that is the wheel. That is a winning combination. And I believe, from my understanding of this conference that the objective is to indicate, from group to group, in the meetings, between government, civil society and the private sector, that while there are differences which should not be taken away, while there are points of view that may remain critical, that you have actors, you have critics, you have people who have their own objectives, nonetheless, it is crucial that each recognize that you need everybody to try and bring about a consensus in the society, a motive and driving force in the society to bring about equity and to bring about growth.

And I believe that this conference is directed to that. It is a chance to let everybody understand that, in a country as significant as Indonesia or any other country amongst the 5 billion people to which Les referred, for any country to move forward, it requires a coming together.

And so this united in diversity, in terms of the objective, means united in similarity: the contributions can be different, and the positions can be different, and should be different because it strengthens. If we can get to the point where there is this unity in terms of objective, then you have a chance of moving the society forward. And it is not just the participants at the conference that need to know this.

It's usually easier, in our experience, to get the main players to come to a general agreement on that. The issue then becomes not just the agreement of that principle, but how then do you scale it up in the country? How do you roll it out?

And in Indonesia, which is showing now a significant move forward in decentralization, in terms of moving decisionmaking into the country, and trying to engage the people, not as objectives of direction or of charity, but as participants in the process, this conference will allow not just a recognition of the unity in diversity, but also of the
mechanisms which apply to rolling this out in the sort of scale that's needed for a country of 200 million.

So we, in our institution, are extremely interested in this conference and anxious to participate, anxious to be one of those that are united in the diversity, but also anxious to bring the experience that we've had in many countries and to participate in assisting our Indonesian friends in setting their objectives.

As Les Thoreau said, it's not for us to decide what the Indonesians want to do. That's for the Indonesians to decide. But we can give, I hope, useful commentary, the benefit of experience for them then to make the decisions and then to commit for a long-term association that can help them achieve those objectives.

So we are committed to this conference. We think that the notion of "United in Diversity" is something that does work. We are fascinated and will be fascinated to learn how it is applied in Indonesia, which is such a rich country, culturally, and so diverse in many respects, although a single country. I have an anthropologist friend at the Institute for Advanced Study who has spent his life looking at these matters and continuously tells me of the richness and diversity of the country.

I'm anxious to learn of that, to learn of its diversity, but also learn and contribute to our Indonesian friends, setting a set of objectives that will unify the country. And speaking for my institution, we're anxious to participate, and comment, and to be as helpful as we can to all of you.

I congratulate you on the concept, and we are very anxious to participate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.