

A Global Agenda for International Governance

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EVEN IN A COUNTRY such as India, which began the process of integrating with the rest of the world only in 1991, we not only accept that globalization is inevitable but also believe that it is desirable. We tend to see globalization as a historical process that emphasizes the essential unity of humankind, just as the ancient Sanskrit saying "*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*" asserts that the world, indeed the universe, is one family.

Trade, investment, and technology, especially information technology, are playing key integrative roles in this process of globalization. Air transport, telecommunications, electronic media, and now the Internet have made globalization a reality that profoundly affects the lives of the people in even the most remote corners of the world. At the same time, these developments have also infringed upon the sovereignty of individual nations.

Living in India amid almost one billion people, I see two divergent trends: an increasing integration of diverse elements, both within India itself and between India and the rest of the world; and a greater assertion of unique identities, be they religious, ethnic, linguistic, or regional. We need to better understand the nature and implications of these two trends of global integration and the assertion of unique identities, which are perhaps not necessarily contradictory.

Great concern exists in India regarding current trends in globalization, which some see as selective and designed to serve the interests of rich

countries. For example, rich countries promote free trade as long as they can export at will, but when competition from less affluent countries intensifies, the rich nations raise all kinds of new issues, such as labor standards. Gebhard Schweigler refers to some problematic aspects of rich democracies in his background paper. He begins with the question, "How good are democracies at dealing with the global issues that this process of globalization presents?" In response to his own query, he states that "[i]t is the very nature of self-determination to prioritize the self. Democratically governed societies are thus inclined to give priority attention to their own problems and interests. . . . The decline in the willingness on the part of the rich democratic nations to offer substantial help to poorer countries is only one indicator of a potentially problematic relationship between democracies and issues of global governance. . . . this self-centeredness of liberal democracies is a troubling aspect." Selectivity by the richer nations becomes especially noticeable when examining labor flows. Excepting illegal immigration, labor flows are permitted or even encouraged whenever rich countries experience a shortage of highly skilled manpower. However, these same rich countries demand free access to trade and investment opportunities in the rest of the world, and on their own terms.

The reaction to such selectivity characterizing the globalization process has had a domestic political fallout in India. The Bhartiya Janata Party, the political party most likely to be invited to form the federal government in March 1998, released an election manifesto in February 1998, from which I quote: "Every nation advocates free trade in all global fora, but in practice they compulsively resort to quotas, tariffs, and antidumping measures to protect their national interests. While the declared agenda is free trade, the undeclared but actual agenda is economic nationalism. India, too, must follow its own national agenda."

A widespread fear exists in countries like India that globalization and international governance may again bring back the "might is right" theory of international relations. The mighty and powerful nations have often taken self-interested actions that have caused havoc in many other countries and affected their governance. For example, the Soviet-American proxy war in Afghanistan has not only devastated that country but has also done enormous harm to all other South Asian countries, Pakistan and India in particular. Such proxy wars have fueled fears about globalization and international governance, which today is not properly organized to deal with the problems affecting the vast majority of the world's people.

Also, rich Western countries' advocacy of the menacing "self-determination" theory played havoc until the implications of Bosnia were fully digested. Was this a well-thought-out concept to be included in international governance? Must multiethnic and multicultural nations be broken up? What will happen even to some of the rich Western countries if this truly becomes an operative principle of international governance?

Such concerns have prompted some influential political parties in India to talk of "calibrated globalization," a policy that most rich nations follow.

The full force of globalization in the coming years will create great global churnings and, like the Indian mythological Samudra Manthan, or Churnings of the Oceans, will bring both poisons and jewels. Accordingly, a properly designed framework of international governance will have to include provisions for absorbing these poisons as well as enjoying the jewels, or the shared benefits, of globalization.

Regarding this framework, Richard Haass in his background paper has listed a set of five or six options for international governance, among which are laissez-faire, unilateralism, regionalism, and institutionalism. His suggestions for institutionalism deserve a more detailed study and examination of options. The present system and institutions of international governance are inadequate, not only because of their limited scope and coverage but also because they do not sufficiently represent the views and interests of the vast majority of the world's population. Even the multilateral financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are not good enough, as they are unable to deal adequately with the emerging problems of governance in their fields.

Before we embark upon a new system of international governance, we need a great deal more clarity about both globalization and international governance. It would be useful to think globally, but as always most action must take place locally. If globalization and international governance begin to affect the autonomy of the citizens or, for that matter, of the national institutions of governance of sovereign countries, there will inevitably be conflicts, some even violent. Institutions of international governance must keep in mind the interests of the several billion people on the globe, not just of the selected few who dominate. Otherwise, these institutions will together constitute a new system of colonialism that is at once more invisible and more oppressive. They will not be accepted.

Sitting among the more than 1.2 billion people of South Asia, of which nearly one billion are in India alone, I do not see as yet any acceptable global agenda about international governance. And as I said earlier, any

such agenda will lack both credibility and acceptability if it does not deal with the problems of the vast masses of the world's people. That is the lesson we have learned from implementing our limited domestic agenda of economic reforms in India. Looking after the aspirations and needs of the elite alone is not good enough in a vibrant democratic system, both nationally and internationally.

Fortunately, no great imminent conflicts exist on the issue of international governance. This is all the more reason for global civil society to ponder and think through a truly acceptable international agenda to deal with problems of international governance. We must think in terms of both the institutional mechanisms as well as the processes of dealing with problems of international governance.