

Facing the dark side of globalization

Rotten apples or banana peels?

by Sandro Calvani ⁽¹⁾



Are they just "rotten apples"? Some observers and political commentators, even some opinion makers, for years discussed the *global predators'* threat with the obvious reasoning that they are just a *bunch of rotten apples*.

I personally heard a comment by a consultant of an International Financial Institution trivializing the issue by saying that *never in the world has a fruit market been affected or closed by rotten apples*. He was wrong.

In the last decade, most political crises, internal conflicts, dysfunctional development processes, and human rights abuses have happened in countries where societies and their economies have been distorted by the various forms of organised crime.

It started with drug trafficking, but soon diversified to corruption, financial scams, trafficking in human beings, money laundering perpetrated by cross border gangs, and extremely aggressive and well organised global predators. They have destroyed the traditional fabric of civil societies, threatening the very foundations of development and peace processes.

This is certainly the case in South East Asia where aspirations for progress are often frustrated by the influence of organised crime in the local economy and where the vilifying effects of illegal activities are inextricably linked with past failures to upgrade civil society infrastructure, leading to a profound dysfunction on how people, particularly the young, relate to society.



Let us face the truth: They are very risky banana peels. Facts have demonstrated that *global predators* are not just *rotten apples* – rather their role is that of *banana peels*. Their illicit activities disrupt the economy: the market becomes depressed, potential investors are frightened off and the trust which ordinary people feel in social and political institutions is eroded. Social "desertification" grows, producing the conditions for various new expressions of disorder and crime to thrive.

When a society slips and falls on *banana peels* made of girls, guns, gambling and ganja, its economy, peace, and development can remain crippled for decades!

The quality of life, respect for human rights, and harmonious development in a modern Asian society depends on people's opportunity to be productive and generate income in the free market where civil liberties are guaranteed by law and order.

At recent summits, the United Nations have called for stronger and more transparent human security based on two main tracks: freedom from fear and freedom from want. Freedom from fear requires the participation of civil society to clean up from evident and hidden "banana peels". It is a complex change from captivity to freedom, from despair to hope, and from darkness to light.

This year the United Nations on the International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking (26 June 2000) suggests it is time for everyone to face harm of drug abuse, corruption and violence. Governments have agreed action plan to face these new challenges. However, they need more people awareness and civil society participation.

Let us do so, because if we do not see clearly the risk of banana peels, we might fall down and break our spinal cord. *Rotten apples* are not so dangerous because anybody can see and dump them. *Banana peels* can kill people by breaking the spinal cord of economies and civil societies.

Corrupted people engage in various criminal activities or facilitate criminals' impunity: fraud, piracy, extortion, industrial espionage, drug trafficking, enslaved prostitution, illegal gambling, smuggling of arms, counterfeiting and money laundering are just the most known of the almost one hundred activities that corruption supports. They break almost all economic and social laws and rules. Only one fundamental law stands confirmed by the criminal universe: the Newton's law of gravity - when rotten apples remain hanging up on government and corporate trees, it is the economy, the social fabric and credibility of politics which fall down in an accelerated way.

⁽¹⁾ Sandro Calvani is the United Nations Representative in East Asia and the Pacific for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (Bangkok, Thailand). The United Nations have recently extended the UNDCP Regional Centre mandates to facilitate also UN activities in the field of crime prevention, fight against international crime including trafficking of human beings, and corruption.