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## **New Ethics of Global Governance**

Speech presented by  
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Excellencies, Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

It is a real honour to be here today to talk with you about new ethics of global governance within the context of values, means, institutions and policies for a different world twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The world today is faced with complex and interrelated threats, challenges beyond what we could have imagined back in 1989, when the world as we knew it was changing before our very eyes. As the pace of globalization started accelerating as the world opened up, so did our interconnections and interdependencies, along with the need for greater responsibility towards the global public good and enhanced cooperation in confronting challenges without borders that affect us all. However we must be intellectually honest and admit the sad truth that interdependent issues or global problems without passport are still confronted mainly with solutions with passport.

### Rebooting Global Governance from its core principles

During this year's World Economic Forum, experts suggested that in order to address these transnational and increasingly complex issues, the world should re-examine the operating system driving the economy, politics and society. They called for a global rebooting and the creation of a new platform, with clear and transparent rules, based on accountability, coherence and sustainability. Global governance<sup>2</sup> is therefore crucial and, to this end, the search and adoption of new ethical values is cardinal.

In my opinion the core principles upon which this new form of global governance should be rooted on are:

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<sup>2</sup> Global governance: “the complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships, and processes between and among states, markets, citizens and organizations, both inter- and non-governmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated.” (Thomas G. Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *The UN and Global Governance: An Idea and Its Prospects*, Indiana University Press, forthcoming)

1. **Respect** for human dignity and Human Rights, and equity in accessing basic necessities and decision-making processes;
2. **Responsibility** for the global common good, but also greater local and environmental responsibility;
3. **Sustainability** in meeting “present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs;”<sup>3</sup>
4. **Solidarity**, not just generosity, but also being just and participating to justice;
5. **Subsidiarity**<sup>4</sup> between institutions, public authorities, civil society and citizens;
6. **Coherence** of global rules and engagements so that they do not contradict each other;
7. **Transparency** in decision-making processes, policy application and access to information;
8. **Accountability**<sup>5</sup> of national and international authorities, as well as of the private sector and civil society in reporting and being accountable for their actions, successes and failures;
9. Greater **credibility** from leaderships at all levels (from local to global), stemming from the combination of coherence, transparency and accountability.

### New Ethics of Global Governance

These core principles of global governance are embedded with ethical values. Of these, there are two or three in particular which I would like to emphasize: fortitude, altruistic leadership, and adjusted equal opportunities.

Attitudes of too many leaders tend to be short-sighted in terms of time span and geographic outreach: in saying that something is too complex or doesn't depend on them alone, some leaders end up being part of the problem, instead of being part of the solution. This idleness or slothfulness is indicative not only of negligence or lack of courage towards innovation and change, but it also connotes a possible lack of ethics because leaders are the only ones who can bring about change. The risk is that those who have the capacity are not implementing change when and where is needed.

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<sup>3</sup> Sustainability in terms of the impact of development, human actions and society on the environment (pollution, depletion of natural resources, energy consumption, and so on). Definition provided by UN WECD (1987) <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Principle of subsidiarity: The idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks that cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. In this case, responsibilities, decision-making and resources should be allocated “at the closest appropriate level (local, national, regional or international) consistent with efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This will maximize the potential for inclusion of the citizenry in the governance process. Decentralization and local democracy should improve the responsiveness of policies and initiatives to the priorities and needs of citizens. (source: UN Habitat).

<sup>5</sup> Accountability: When an entity (an individual, a group, an organization or an institution) is authorized and entrusted with some resources (financial, human or other), it ought to give a transparent account of the use (or non-use) of the resources, taking responsibility for decisions, policies and actions taken.

What is thus needed is **fortitude** in confronting the ever-changing challenges, uncertainties and fears that we face in today's world or that are brought about by change. We need an **altruistic leadership**, taking on an ethical attitude in managing global public goods for the benefit of the most needy in human kind. This sort of leadership, unlike the more traditional one, is outwards-focused: it is not targeted to achieving personal gains or to benefit one's category, class, community, country. On the contrary, this is a visionary guidance that should go beyond the immediate interests in terms of both time (a longer-sighted vision beyond the present or short-term future), and space (vested not just by proximity, but at a more global level).

Therefore this concept, also known as "extrovert leadership," encourages countries to have at heart "the wider good of the global commons," to be "willing to sacrifice elements of self-interest and ready to make a commitment to the global public good."<sup>6</sup> Cooperation and coordination are also very important: mutually beneficial and accountable compacts will have a more effective chance of promoting peace, development and sustainable local capacities.<sup>7</sup>

The **ethics of adjusted equal opportunities** is rooted, instead, on the concept of ethics as advanced cognitive processes and attitudes to justice.

The traditional concept of justice is based, among other things, on the principle that we are all equal before the law and are all endowed of the same basic rights. Applied to our contemporary times, threats and inequalities, this kind of traditional justice, however, runs the risk of becoming the highest expression of injustice. Why is it so?

As it turns out, we all have the same rights and opportunities, but these cannot be equally seized by all. In other words, if we give the exact same opportunities to everybody, then we provide a disproportional advantage to those who are better off to begin with; because they have more privileges, or are better placed in society and have more networks, they can exploit their own opportunities to a much greater extent than someone who isn't as privileged.

This can be illustrated by considering the way non-state actors (like Multinational Corporations, for example) are better positioned to exploit the opportunities offered by globalization (often to the detriment of others) than a State bound by national and international rules; or how a group of engineers from a rural town in Kenya or Tanzania doesn't have the same opportunities as the engineers working for Nokia in Finland.

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<sup>6</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, Rapporteur of the Global Agenda Councils on Geopolitics & Global governance. [Global Agenda 2009 World Economic Forum](#).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

## Articulating ethics into Global Governance

The question is how to articulate these two kinds of ethics, extroversion and adjusted equal opportunities, within the greater discourse of Global Governance?

### 1. Principles of Global Ethics<sup>8</sup>

Effective and just global governance should be based on these ethical principles:

- **Global justice:** respect for international laws;
- **Social responsibility:** society before the self, also reflected in altruistic leadership;
- **Environmental stewardship:** built on the respect and sustainability;
- **Interdependence and responsibility** for the “whole”,
- **Localism:** reverence for place, respect of local dimensions and traditions.

These principles of global ethics should be taken all together, as a kind of compact among tied together by an unbreakable chain between the five of them. In order to do so, two elements are absolutely indispensable: cooperation (also through Private-Public partnerships) and a bottom-up adaptation of these five in respect of localism.

### 2. Public-Private Partnerships

So far State actors and non-State actors have acted with limited alliances and little partnership between them, given that States tend to build alliances with other States, as do non-State actors with their kind.

This has to change. Creating a synergy between these different kinds of actors, in my opinion, should not be an option but a must: States cannot be effective in carrying out their duties or in adopting an ethical approach to global governance without the participation of non-State actors, including civil society.

The need for a significant change in attitude derives from the fact that we are facing problems without passports, with solutions with passports. Today's threats, in fact, are not only interconnected, but many also go beyond borders, like climate change, environmental pollution, natural disasters, pandemics, and so on. Such complex challenges can only be tackled by uniting our forces, with States, but also with national and international organizations, NGOs, the private sector and civil society.

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Colero, *A Framework For Universal Principles of Ethics*  
<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/papers/invited/colero.html>

### 3. Localism

In my experience, a link that has been neglected in the wake of globalization and that ought to be revitalized is localism, or reverence for a local place and respect of its customs.

Some see localism as irrelevant, particularly in the face of global principles (such as human rights or gender equality) that should be applied all over, at times without any consideration of local traditions. This attitude, however, runs the risk of failure. Global public goods or universal rights cannot be arbitrarily applied everywhere as a one size fits all, or even as a sort of franchising. An uncompromising application means losing the corner stones of these universal values, which must be, instead adapted and adopted from the bottom up, integrating them with a respect of local traditions and values.

Moreover, respect for the local dimension and its interaction with regional, national and even supranational levels is important if we consider how global or transnational problem, usually have local impacts and implications. So incorporating the local dimension can also be crucial in tackling some of the challenges we face nowadays and will be facing in the future.

#### In conclusion...

As Darwin has stated and proved, “it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” I dare to add to Darwin that history has also proved that it is not the richest to survive, nor the most educated nor the one who eats more but the one who is most responsive to change.

Then we might sit and wait that natural selection take its course and, eventually, find the best kind of ethics and democracy to facilitate the governance of global public goods and defend us from global public bads. However, in the face of today’s global threats, marked by a grim financial picture, environmental degradation and increasingly complex humanitarian crises, slothfulness and wasting time are not luxuries we can afford. Humanity’s plight and the sake of future generations cannot be gambled with.

We should all, from the leaders and the powerful to the citizens of the world, assume our responsibilities. Proactively discussing and testing ideas for a new ethical doctrine of good global governance might prove to be a smarter and more effective way to contribute to the next generation’s hope of respect of justice, freedoms and peace for human kind.

Thank you.