

11th RAÚL PREBISCH LECTURE

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STATEMENT BY

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Like my colleagues who are involved in trade negotiations right now, I found your comments most interesting and illuminating. It is, I think, a sad reality-check to find out that we today, probably 40 years later, are still fighting for the same agenda that you and your colleagues were fighting for in defence of the interests of the developing countries, your region and your country. Not only that, but as you rightly stated, we even have the additional challenge of facing new issues being imposed on us, and I very much appreciate your sharing with us what Dr. Prebisch warned about so many years ago, namely the challenge of market forces and how this is going to impact on world trade and also on the relations between North and South. So I greatly appreciate your comments.

This centennial anniversary is not just a traditional celebration. It does bring with it some noble connotations, represented in the world's appreciation of the thoughts and the great accomplishments of Dr. Prebisch. From the very establishment of UNCTAD, Raúl Prebisch was a practical expression of the coming together of peoples on our planet for the sake of a noble objective - contributing to the integration of developing countries in the world trading system in a manner which will push forward the wheel of development in these developing countries. Dr. Prebisch's deep faith and efforts in this direction are the best evidence of the possibilities of collective global action that could lead to the achievement of these common objectives.

Within the framework of the developments that have taken place in the world since the beginning of the 1990s, we do need to try to find inspiration from the thoughts of Raúl Prebisch as regards coexistence and global participation in the achievement of our objectives and the objectives of all peoples. With the changes that have taken place in the last decade and century and the emergence of globalization, we were hoping that the world, with its varied and different cultures and ancient civilisations, would seek further convergence and further joint action in order to achieve common benefits. But unfortunately, instead of pursuing this path all together, we have listened to some voices advocating confrontation rather than convergence, conflict rather than cooperation, voices that deny the possibility of coexistence between civilisations and cultures. There were other voices claiming the superiority of one culture or civilisation or religion over another. Those voices did not benefit from the lessons provided by the history of humanity. They were unable to understand the reality and truth about the various cultures and civilisations that have flourished on our planet. These cultures and civilisations have given to and taken from each other, producing together our common humanity. These voices either

deliberately or accidentally ignored the merits of the most ancient civilisations in relation to the most recent. Maybe the only other excuse is that of ignorance or not knowing enough about other civilisations, but this is not an acceptable pretext, particularly on such a level.

A review of the life and history of my country, Egypt, could provide the best evidence of the possibility for all civilisations and cultures to come together and of possibilities for joint action. The father of all prophets, Abraham, married one of the Egyptian princesses. And the Prophet Moses was born and grew up on the land of Egypt, and it was on Mount Sinai that he received the heavenly message. Egypt and the Egyptian people gave refuge to the Virgin Mary and her child Jesus Christ. The Egyptian church has contributed greatly to enriching Christian thinking throughout the world, and it created the Christian monastic orders. Egypt has also received the message of Islam. It has become a lighthouse for Islamic teaching and thinking.

Before that, Egypt had given the world the Pharaonic civilisation, which has lighted the path of humanity, and along with Greek civilisation it constituted the Hellenic civilisation, which gave the whole world the knowledge that constituted the basis for all sciences being taught in all parts of the world today. And it made its contribution to the Roman culture. Moreover, it has also led Arab and Islamic civilisation. This land, throughout its history, was a refuge for all those who fled from various parts of the world because of persecution of one culture or civilisation by another. So many immigrants came from Africa, Asia and Europe. On the land of Egypt there was a mixture of many civilisations and cultures from all parts of the world, which were all melted together to constitute our Egyptian culture and personality. And on this land, you find side by side Islamic mosques, Jewish temples and Christian churches.

We believe that every civilisation represents the sum total of the cultures of its people, which shape its distinctive personality. Each civilisation has reached a certain level to enable it to make a special contribution to human thinking, and therefore all religions are able to contribute their values and principles. This is quite natural. It is a healthy phenomenon because value systems have developed within the framework of history, politics, and social and economic affairs. And they have passed through various stages. This applies to Islamic civilisation as well as Western civilisation and Asian and all other civilisations.

Here, I wish to clarify that the term Islamic civilisation does not necessarily mean those who profess the Islamic religion; the adherents of this civilisation live on lands which extend from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the borders of China in the East, passing through parts of Asia, Africa and Southern Europe. And they belong to different religions. They are brought together by common or similar value systems. An attempt has been made to describe this civilisation as being reactionary and rejecting progress, advocating violence and refusing to coexist with other civilisations and cultures. We even hear those who reiterate that terrorism is linked with this civilisation because of practices carried out by a minority of those who adhere to this civilisation, or who might adhere to this civilisation. This is despite the fact that similar examples are to be found in other parts of the world, among people of other civilisations and religions. But unfortunately, sometimes such conceptions find their echo in different parts of the world.

This misconception ignores the comprehensive view of the reality of the Islamic world, particularly the contemporary Islamic world. These negative concepts have created the wrong impression of the existence of a confrontation between the West and the Islamic world. There is no doubt that the crisis lived through by the world since the inhuman, criminal attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September will be attributed to that. But this leads to a misconception, because the sources of terrorism, its causes, are not to be found in an absence of dialogue between civilisations. Terrorism is not due to confrontations between religions, as some claim. The source of terrorism is a feeling of injustice, marginalization, suffering, indignity, deprivation of the most elementary human rights and the continuation of aggression and occupation for so many years and for so many decades. Whether this injustice is political or economic, social or even cultural, following this trend will have dangerous repercussions, unless we all try very genuinely and with joint faith to correct such misconceptions and misrepresentations.

Islam did not spring up in the last decade, nor did it come up to fill an ideological vacuum. Islam, like the other heavenly, divine religions, was established in the world long before those modern ideologies cropped up. We do not ask the West to recognize something that we have not done. Members of the Islamic civilisation did not attribute to this civilisation of the West two World Wars. The most violent conflicts of this century were those that beset the countries that belonged to the Western civilisation until the middle of this century, and the main cause was conflict of interest rather than a conflict of civilisations. This is the best evidence of the wrongness of those who advocate this concept of a conflict between civilisations.

Undoubtedly, we need further action in order to attain a deeper understanding on the part of every culture and every civilisation and every religion, an understanding of the other cultures, civilisations and religions. There is a need to base our understanding on serious and deep knowledge in order to be able to realize the positive interaction between cultures and civilisations. This is likely to help us strengthen the basis for peaceful coexistence. The adherents of Islamic civilisation throughout the past fourteen centuries have enriched the Western civilisations, culturally and scientifically, and today the adherents of Islamic civilisation do not deny that they have benefited from the accomplishments of Western civilisation in the scientific, technological and medical fields. I would like to quote from an article by Mr. Miguel Moratinos, Special European envoy to the Middle East; its title in English is "Europe and the Moslem World, International Relations". I quote: "Perhaps Western societies should rethink their traditional outlooks instead of focusing on the exclusive desire to export their own cultural and civilisational models. It is time for them to accept cultural imports and to improve their understanding of an increasingly and complex and interdependent world"

I would like to dwell on the important role that can be played in this context by the serious mass media in the process of building bridges between the adherents of different civilisations, because they are watched and read by so many people. The media should take seriously their responsibility to disseminate knowledge and facts without any attempt at distorting reality or exciting people's feelings.

We do believe that, in addition to dialogue, which is a basic constituent to promote understanding between the adherents of various civilisations, it is also certain that the achievement of economic progress and the elimination of poverty is a cornerstone in the achievement of this objective. The attainment of justice between the inhabitants of this planet resides in the meeting of their basic needs. This is a decisive factor in bringing about stability. In this connection, we welcome the adoption of international targets for development.

I would like to announce that, in the coming few months, we plan to reopen the Alexandria library, which has preserved the heritage of human cultures for so many centuries. Arab and Islamic Egypt will now revive this ancient library so that it remains forever a lighthouse, guarding the heritage of all humanity with all its diverse cultures and civilisations.