

11th RAÚL PREBISCH LECTURE

Geneva, 11 October 2001

STATEMENT BY

Javad Zarif

**Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Iran;
member of the Group of Eminent Persons for the UN Year
of Dialogue among Civilizations**

It is indeed for me a great pleasure and honour to participate in this important gathering, commemorating the centennial of one of the foremost advocates of dialogue, Raúl Prebisch. His dedication to institutionalizing dialogue was translated into concrete action when UNCTAD and the Group of 77 came into existence to encourage and promote dialogue between developed and developing countries in dealing with the major challenge of the day, which remains a major challenge of today, namely underdevelopment.

Today, we are indeed indebted to another visionary, the current Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Professor Ricupero, for his vision in bringing Dialogue among Civilizations to the focus of attention in UNCTAD, the top development-oriented body in the United Nations. I listened carefully to your comments, Professor, both on the role of dialogue as well as on the tradition of Raúl Prebisch. And without going into much detail, I want to add that the Secretary-General addressed an important issue facing us in the era of globalization, that is a sort of dichotomy that is emerging between localization and globalization, between identity and globalization, and how these two trends, which are taking place at the same time, could be integrated. My answer is that one way to do that is to dialogue among civilizations, which would give globalization a human face.

The tragic events of 11 September highlighted in the most vivid yet inhuman and barbaric form our common vulnerability. They also indicated how new and non-traditional actors can have a significant and sometimes devastating role in global relations and in shaping the future of international relations. But most importantly, they brought into focus the need to address the very mentality and modes of globalization that provide the roots for terror and violence.

I pointed out in my statement before the General Assembly last week that “terrorism is in fact a heinous product of an outdated paradigm of international relations”. That paradigm was founded on the “will to power” and the arrogance that is usually associated with it, the idea that “might makes right”. As might ruled, injustice prevailed and hatred flourished, some who were

dispossessed were inclined to resort to violence and terror, in fact in a peculiar way to compensate for their lack of conventional might. We must eradicate terrorism by changing the prevalent mentality that provides such a fertile ground for those perverted responses to lack of mind.

An important characteristic of the outdated paradigm of global interactions is exclusion in its various forms. It defines the world in terms of modes of loyalty and divides people into coalition members and enemies, and on that basis distributes rewards and blame. The need for an enemy is so strong – it is in fact a tool for governance - that at times enemies are forged in order to be able to manage domestic as well as global society. This approach to global politics has brought bloodshed and devastation to human society, suppressed much potential, and wasted vast human resources and capabilities, giving rise to domination, violence and underdevelopment.

Globalization can potentially contribute positively and has in fact contributed in many ways to the comprehensive and sustainable development of the developing world, but when addressed within the paradigm of exclusion, it can lead to further marginalization of the underdeveloped economies, exacerbation of poverty and hunger in vast parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the further widening of the gap between the rich and the poor in other parts of the world. It is increasingly depriving the neediest areas of the planet of the scarce international development resources, and that is a point that our Chairman has very rightly raised today.

The desire of the international community to break away from the paradigm of exclusion was demonstrated by the designation of this year by the United Nations General Assembly as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. A new paradigm is emerging today because there is a wider appreciation that what unites us is far greater than the differences that divide us, but more importantly and probably more vividly today than only a month ago, because of our appreciation of our common vulnerability to threats ranging from terrorism and organized crime to poverty and environmental degradation. In the era of globalization, there can be no island of security, prosperity and development. Thus, our common humanity and our common vulnerabilities are emerging as better tools for global governance, as well as local governance, than perceived or imaginary enemies. Let me quote here from the draft of a forthcoming book entitled *Crossing the Divide* which has been written and is being published by the Group of Eminent Persons on Dialogue among Civilizations, of which I am honoured to be a member: “The processes of globalization are giving birth to a new paradigm of global relations: equal footing, reassessment of the enemy, dispersion of power, stakeholding, individual responsibility, and issue-driven alignments. The current reality is a mosaic of the old and the new. The elements of the new paradigm are already there, but to a certain extent we are blinded by the old paradigm, which prevents us from seeing what is emerging. The new paradigm also starts from the assumption that the sources of knowledge and wisdom are inherently diversified, that each civilization has much to offer, and that inclusion will bring with it mutual enrichment and mutual benefit. Thus the emerging paradigm of dialogue among civilizations is founded on inclusion,

and a collective desire to learn, uncover and examine assumptions, unfold shared meaning and core values, and integrate multiple perspectives through dialogue.”

In debate, which we have all been used to in the United Nations, we attempt to convince the other side of our view, and often without even listening to the other side; this certainly sounds familiar to me and I am sure to all of you. But we start a dialogue with a readiness and in fact a desire not only to listen but to be convinced. Debate was itself a major step forward from war and fighting, but it was in essence an attempt, as in war, to overcome the adversary, albeit through a much more civilized avenue. A paradigm shift would require a revolutionary change from debate to dialogue. According to the Group of Eminent Persons: “Dialogue brings with it equal footing as it is a process by which we accept, as much as we want to be accepted. We include, as much as we want to be included. We listen, as much as we want to be listened to. In these terms, dialogue can perhaps usher in a new paradigm of global relations because it challenges the old paradigm of hegemonism, the politics of power, and in other words ‘might makes right’. Dialogue can be a framework where the weakest is accorded the privilege to be listened to, and where the strongest finds it necessary to explain its case to the others.”

This, in my view, is the very core of the objectives and principles of the United Nations and of this august body, UNCTAD. I am reminded here of a visionary statement in this context by Raúl Prebisch at the plenary meeting of UNCTAD in 1964: “A fruitful dialogue is now about to commence. Developing countries are not merely called upon to solve their own economic problems. They can contribute a great deal because they have a concept of life and of human values which will, I am sure, enable them to contribute decisively to resolving basic incompatibilities between technological and spiritual values. Many developing countries bear the imprint of thousands of years of civilization. They could do much to ensure that, in our common efforts to control economic forces, we do not subordinate man to the demands of technology or purely economic processes, but enable him to free himself from economic need, from poverty and from his inherent ills.”

In the Group of Eminent Persons on Dialogue among Civilizations, we have been investigating how this vision can be brought to reality. This is how mutual enrichment through integration of multiple perspectives can lead to the emergence of a set of common values which can be embraced by all and develop into global ethics. While “liberty, right and personal dignity” have received universal recognition and reverence, the contribution of the countries of the East and the South in bringing into focus corresponding values such as duty, human responsibility and the good of the community can help develop a fuller agenda in addressing social disintegration, environmental degradation and abject poverty, to name just a few.

In the same vein, while values such as liberty, rationality, legality and rights have received considerable attention in contemporary political discourse, we may be able, through dialogue, to integrate liberty with justice,

rationality with sympathy, legality with civility, and finally rights with responsibility.

When and if such a dialogue gains momentum and begins to bear fruit in terms of reaching a common understanding on shared global ethics, then progress in the other fields of human existence is bound to be facilitated, and we will gradually learn that we need to be each other's keepers.

Globalization and the information revolution in our increasingly shrinking world now empower each and every one of us to directly or indirectly affect the quality of life of the rest of the world's population. That is a tremendous power. We ought to reflect collectively on this in the context of a set of shared global values and ethics to discern global responsibility, global accountability, probably in the context of a global civil society and the individual responsibility that must accompany such unprecedented power at the disposal of every individual and group, albeit in significantly varying degrees, across space and indeed across time. Only under such circumstances will we all realize that we are part of the whole and with that realization all become stakeholders of the new world.

Those who hold dear to their hearts and minds the ecosystem of the earth, which is one; those who hold dear the objectives of the free market, which they believe is one; and those who hold dear the dignity and human rights of their fellow human beings, irrespective of their latitude or longitude on this planet, have something in common. They all believe consciously or unconsciously that we are all part of the whole, of the world community which is interconnected and whose parts mutually affect each other. The greens, the global financiers, and the human rights advocates perhaps unknowingly share a common vision, that the world is one for all, and we are all component parts of that entirety. In other words, each assumes that they have a stake in the world.

We will realize that, as stakeholders, humankind has a common destiny from which there is no escaping. With stakeholding, the idea of "us" versus "them" will begin to lose its utility and a zero sum game will no longer be applicable as the predominant mode of rational and objective analysis. Most situations, ranging from the environment, the global economy, trade and the transfer of knowledge and technology, to the eradication of terrorism, organized crime and weapons of mass destruction can be analysed in positive sum or negative sum propositions. Let me correct myself. We can make them positive sum or negative sum. If we approach the realities of the era of globalization with a zero sum mentality, which is the remnant of the old paradigm, we would all lose and indeed end up with negative sum situations across borders. Environmental degradation, instability, drugs, terrorism, chemical or biological weapons and now terrorism using chemical and biological weapons don't recognize any boundaries. This must have become abundantly clear to all of us at least since 11 September. Thus, we need to shift to a paradigm and a mindset based on dialogue and stakeholding, which allows us to appreciate this clear reality of being all parts of one unit. Another

visionary, the renowned Iranian poet, Sa'adi, eloquently articulated the fundamental underpinning of such a mentality 700 years ago:

“The descendants of Adam are limbs of each other,
Having been created of one essence.

When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.

If you have no sympathy for the troubles of others
You are unworthy to be called human.”

Nearly 40 years ago, Raúl Prebisch had the realism and the courage to lambaste market forces that, despite promises, failed to “solve our problems of development and income distribution, and spread the benefits of technological progress.” The global economy today is comparably not much better. He also had the vision and the farsightedness to prescribe that “a new rationality must be sought, but not one based on hegemonic interests, rather one not merely based on economic and social objectives but on eminently ethical ones.” Being one of the lonely voices introducing human rationality and ethics to the global economy 40 years ago, Raúl Prebisch was not overly optimistic. But I wish to pay tribute to him for his vision and to express the hope that a new paradigm of dialogue aiming at the realization of equal footing, stakeholding and global accountability could indeed gain increasing momentum.