

THE BIRTH OF THE SOCIAL SUMMIT

The Political Compatibility of Social and Economic Efficiency

When I said good-bye to you with nostalgia at the end of the work of the General Assembly's Third Committee last year, I never imagined that so soon afterwards I would return as Chairman of the Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), allowing me the opportunity to work with you again. I feel very honored.

It is no mystery—since I have reiterated this publicly and privately on many occasions—that I have a special personal and political commitment to the social development tasks of the United Nations. I am deeply convinced that history will judge the United Nations not only on the basis of its capacity to ensure international peace and security through peace-making and peacekeeping, a task for which it is irreplaceable, but also for its capacity to respond to the concrete needs of people.

When the Charter of the organization states, "We the peoples of the United Nations," it is not a simple rhetorical reference. It is a substantive innovation regarding the drafting of significant international treaties.

Those of us who are here representing our governments are also representing the shared interests of peoples and we therefore have the obligation to address the fundamental problems which they suffer and which seriously constrain their possibilities of personal and collective development.

That is the great political task facing the Third Committee of the General Assembly as the principal organ of the United Nations in charge of social affairs, of the Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council and of the body of subsidiary organs and specialized agencies. We know from the multiple reports put out by the different secretariats how much is being

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done in this area. We also know that there is still much to be done. The same reports point this out.

The fundamental challenge before us is to put human beings at the heart of United Nations activities. Being relevant has become our principal responsibility: doing things that make a difference and promoting ideas, proposals, projects and policies that are efficient and capable of improving the conditions of people's lives.

Placing the human being at the heart of the United Nations is a great historical task. It will not occur overnight; it will be a long and difficult process. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile goal, and well worth the struggle and the inevitable confrontation of difficulties.

The first step is securing the political will to do it. I believe this is possible. The World Summit for Children, organized by UNICEF, showed us that 71 Heads of State were prepared to come to the headquarters of the organization to commit themselves to concrete policies surrounding a great social theme: the fate of the world's children. We all know that those same Heads of State would not have met around a purely political and economic agenda.

I believe that this Summit came about not only due to the extraordinary dynamism of James Grant and the permanent backing he received from the Secretary-General, but because the social themes are perceived to be closer to the reality of our societies.

The importance of children was not difficult to explain to national public opinion. Similarly, it is not difficult with regard to what we do in the realm of poverty, employment, housing, education, women, human rights, migration, the environment, natural disasters, drugs, humanitarian cooperation, youth and so many other subjects that are included in our social agenda.

This leads me to ponder that we should start thinking about the possibility of convening a World Summit for Social Development. A Summit to place human beings and their social needs at the heart of United Nations endeavors.

A well prepared Summit, from the political and technical point of view, where governments outline, by common agreement, priority areas of action and of international cooperation in social matters. This would mobilize the international community, international organizations, private enterprises and organizations, political parties, churches and other religious entities, NGOs, universities and think-tanks behind the common objective of improving the quality of people's lives.

If this Summit can become a reality we will have taken a fundamental step towards not only putting human beings at the heart of the United Nations but also of placing the United Nations at the heart of people throughout the world.

This vision has enormous implications for peace and international security. For the great majority of the earth's inhabitants, the roots of insecurity are found, precisely, in an insufficient social development. Poverty and inequality are sources of social tensions, criminality and political violence. These clearly demand firm policies that preserve public order and ensure the protection of persons. But national and international policies that gradually reduce the sources of social insecurity are also necessary.

Social peace, obtained through sustainable human development, enduring growth and a fair and just relationship between people and nations is the principal source of world peace in the future.

This demands progress in developing an integrated notion of security. Together with the classical notion of the state's internal and external security, we also must develop a modern concept of "human security", which reflects social needs, and whose satisfaction becomes the principal source of stability and peace in every society. It is essential to explore the non-military dimensions of security.

Already there are some initiatives in this direction. UNICEF's insistence on the need for development with a human face, UNDP's Report on Human Development, some documents prepared by the World Bank and the UN secretariat in New York and Vienna are reappraising the value of human beings in development policies.

I am convinced that the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council is not only an exercise in administrative reorganization, no matter how important this is. It is, above all, an exercise of collective political will and commitment to transform the United Nations into a relevant center of analysis, discussion and decision regarding the economic and social reality of the world.

Obviously, we have the option of doing little or nothing at all about this matter. It is always easier to leave things as they are. That is the conservative option. But, we are running the risk of becoming irrelevant, if we do not accept the challenge of new ideas: if we do not adopt the attitude that by listening to others we enrich ourselves; if we do not recognize that as government delegates we have the responsibility of creatively questioning our practices and procedures to improve them and make them more effective; if we do not permanently ask ourselves who benefits from our deliberations and resolutions.

I have allowed myself to speak to you so candidly and express these few thoughts because my tenure as Chairman of the Third Committee of the General Assembly last year was a very rich personal experience.

I was impressed by the delegates' resourcefulness and their commitment to social issues, and also enriched by the personal relationships I was able to develop with those of you who are here today, and others who are absent.

I finished my task last year convinced that here is a source for revitalizing the United Nations and that much can be done for the good of the organization by the Third Committee. I have faith in the creativity that we will be able to unleash. Here I am again, I am at your service, with the conviction that many great ideas will emanate from ECOSOC's Social Committee and the General Assembly's Third Committee. Let's continue our progress, overcoming obstacles, and trying together in the next few years to convert some utopias into realities.