

Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table  
edited by  
The Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel

Volume 3

Andreas Bsteh – Tahir Mahmood (Eds.)

## *Poverty and Injustice*

Alarming Signs of the Present Crisis  
in Human Society Worldwide

3<sup>rd</sup> Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table  
Vienna, July 3 to 6, 2004

VERLAG ST. GABRIEL, MÖDLING

The editors owe sincere thanks to  
The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture  
and to the Section Science and Research Promotion of the City of Vienna  
for their financial support of the editorial work and the printing  
of the English edition.

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## Preface

How do we come upon a path that leads us to joint responsibility? The issue becomes increasingly urgent in the face of all the burning problems which challenge us today. Does it not become more and more evident, that the vital problems of our world can only be solved, if at all, in a concerted effort to ensure environmental sustainability – which means using natural resources wisely and protecting the complex eco-systems to provide for all people the vital water and the daily bread, to share the resources of our planet for the benefit of all and not only the few who are privileged, to give an adequate say to all nations when it comes to decisions on how to organize international relationships and structures, to implement effectively a worldwide independent judicial system in order to punish violations of valid principles and rules of international law, and many other things? Is this emerging world not in the need of a new world order to be evolved in the light of the seemingly irresistible process of its global socialization?

Aware of entering a new epoch in history that calls upon us and all our fellow human beings to thoroughly reconsider our way of life in a creative manner, and to be prepared to jointly design the new rules for the future house of humanity in which our later generations will be living, the participants of our Round Table dealt with the general topic of their 3rd Plenary Meeting – “Poverty and Injustice”.

The fact that an alarmingly wide segment of humanity lives in extreme poverty was already noted in the course of the 1st Plenary of this Round Table, where it was repeatedly characterized as particularly worrying when we tried to clarify what the most important problems humanity is facing on its way into the future would be.<sup>1</sup> Then, more attention was paid to the

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the 1st VICIROTa Plenary were published in: A. Bsteh & T. Mahmood (ed), *Reading the Signs of the Time: Contemporary Challenges for Christians and Muslims* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 1). Mödling, 2003; and its translations into German (Mödling, 2003), Arabic (Jounieh, 2003), and Urdu (Delhi, 2004) .

problem of worldwide poverty in the context of our 2nd Plenary which dealt with "Manifestations and Reasons of Intolerance and Violence" in the present-day world.<sup>2</sup> So, it was not just by chance that our spiritual path, which we wanted to follow in our Round Table talks, directed us to focus in the framework of our 3rd Plenary on the subject of "Poverty and Injustice."

Inter-disciplinary discussions between social ethics and political science, theology and sociology, jurisprudence and pedagogy, were likely to sharpen the awareness of the multi-dimensional problem area of "Poverty and Injustice" in general, and the different approaches which would be needed to structure and organize the world of tomorrow. Tangible was indeed the spirit of sincere openness that united all of us sitting around the table. Deeply encouraging was the joint experience that even difficult situations can be mastered in reaching out to one another in a spirit of sensitive togetherness.

Therefore, we may take our 3rd Plenary and the successful process of publication as a renewed sign of hope. Dialogue which can lead us to joint responsibility is possible. The fact that it calls for hard work should only be understood as a criterion for its seriousness, as a reference to the price we have to pay if looking at things realistically we wish to deal with the problems that are posed to us at this moment when a new epoch in human history is being born.

Our sincere thanks to all those who participated in this 3rd Plenary of the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table and also actively cooperated in the publication of its proceedings, for which purpose VICIRoTa participants suitably revised their respective presentations and contributions to the discussions. Furthermore, we owe heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Ingeborg Bogensberger and to Professor James S. Rooke for their substantial help in accomplishing the translation of the German texts into English. In recognition of their manifold services in connection with the organization of the 3rd VICIRoTa Plenary and its publication we would like to express our special thanks also to friends from the Institute for Theology of Religions –

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of 2nd VICIRoTa Plenary were published in: A. Bsteh & T. Mahmood (ed), *Intolerance and Violence. Manifestations – Reasons – Approaches* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 2). Mödling, 2004; and its translations into German (Mödling, 2004), Arabic (Jounieh, 2004) and Urdu (Delhi, 2004).

Mrs. Petra Gerl and Mrs. Brigitte Sonnberger, MA., who with great sensitivity and utmost care transcribed the recorded discussions, compiled the indices, and assisted us with other preparatory steps for the publication of the German and English editions of the present documentation, which will be the basis for the Arabic and Urdu editions to be published in the near future in Jounieh / Lebanon and New Delhi respectively.

Andreas Bsteh – Tahir Mahmood

24 September 2006



# Injustice and Poverty on the Level of World Politics

Goga Abrarovic Khidoyatov

## 1. A new global empire

The twenty first century is called a century of global processes and problems, which begin to determine the destiny of mankind more and more. A growing interdependence of the various countries and peoples worldwide has reached such a degree that it merits being defined as a 'globalization process'. This notion is applicable in like manner to the domains of economy, politics and culture. The main features of economic globalization are the predominance of multinational companies, a gigantic concentration of capital and the establishment of international finance-trade organizations and institutions, which serve their interests in practice.

Huge financial, technical and political means are at the disposal of the multinational companies, allowing them to dictate their interests to world trade and to the development of economic relations. At present there are about one thousand global companies with ranges over the whole world. They control 60 % of world production. They have created a world empire without borders, without sovereign States and without nationalities. The present Transnational Companies (TNC) are multi-type conglomerates specializing in many branches of production. The gigantic General Electric (GE) specializes for 50 % of its capacities in the production of power systems, 10 % in the manufacture of various kinds of industry equipment, 10 % in the production of aircraft engines, 11 % in mechanical engineering, and 5 % in plastic. In 2000 the company purchased Honeywell Inc., therewith having increased its production capacities by 40 %. Branches of GE are located in 32 countries worldwide and play an important role in the policy and economy of each of these countries.

In 2002 the profits of the ten largest American companies were \$1 trillion 268 billion. There has been a rapid growth in the concentration of capital. Last year two Japanese banks with assets of \$2 trillion emerged, assets of Deutsche Bank have also reached \$1 trillion. At the end of the year 2002 the merger of the Banks of Morgan and the City Group took place, whose assets reach about \$1 trillion. Practically, in the course of time a situation emerged that enables the world banks to buy up the whole globe with

all its riches and peoples. An international finance oligarchy has been formed, which establishes a world order of its own. Two world banks – the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – back it up. 151 States are members of both these world finance organizations. Loans and credits are given only on guarantees of the State receiving them.

In world trade the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) rules. It has been signed by 97 States, whose share in world trade amounts to 90 %. The main aim of GATT is the liberalization of world trade by way of decreasing trade barriers, liquidating obstacles in the way of world trade, assisting an open and honest competition, and establishing codes and rules of trade.

The USA above all stands for freedom of trade and liquidation of all trade barriers. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, in 2000, President Bill Clinton said: "Open markets and trade based on clear rules is the best known to us as a locomotive for raising living standards, slowing down the decline of ecology and creating general prosperity." But while calling for free trade, presenting itself as a campaigner for the freedom of world trade, the USA in practice adheres to entirely different strategies. It cuts off for its own nation cheap imports from Korea, China and Japan as well as from developing countries, where production costs are very low due to extremely low-priced labour. The reason is that unlimited access of cheap producer goods may, even to such gigantic markets as the American, ruin entire branches of the industry in a few months. The so-called antidumping measures of the American authorities against the import of European and Russian steel have also a clearly discriminatory character. The law of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, adopted as far back as 1974 and impeding the development of American-Russian trade, still remains in force. To textually summon other countries to open their markets under the guise of freedom of trade and to carry out in practice a discriminatory trade policy is one of the main principles of economic globalization. It is clear that the underdeveloped countries, where for that reason industrial production is in a state of stagnation, suffer most of all therefrom. No wonder that globalization provokes such fierce criticism; the conference in Seattle has been ruined, others have failed, etc.

At the Third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle (1999) acute opposition between the developed nations and the 'third world' countries became obvious and a consensus proved impossible. The main gain from

the economic globalization goes to the leading industrial powers, whereas the developing countries do not want to be forever second rate peoples: poor, illiterate and culturally backward. They consider such trade as inappropriate.

Unjust conditions of trade are the main reason why in Africa the lowest living conditions in the world are prevailing. Poverty here does not decrease but rises year in, year out. A monstrous poverty, where people live on \$1 a day and spend during a year less than is sufficient to stay in a good hotel for one night – such is the price of globalization for African peoples. Here we come into collision with an unshakable principle of the rich States – the double standard for defining justice: justice is only what is profitable for the developed States, unacceptable is what does not bring profit.

A certain working mechanism in the impoverishment of poor peoples has been established in the world. Despite the general rise in the economy worldwide and despite the fact that modern agricultural technology at present can provide food for up to 10 billion people and that the industry is able to supply all the necessary means for the whole world's population, an objective trend towards increasing poverty in the world can be observed, and the number of people and countries that suffer from malnutrition, illnesses and illiteracy is growing. If we take the 20 % of the poorest people in the world, their share in the general volume of world profits was in 1960 2.3 %, in 1991 1.4 %, and is at present only 1 %. Simultaneously the gap between the incomes of the population in the richest and in the poorest countries of the world has widened. In 1960 this gap was 30 to 1, i. e., the income of the 20 richest countries exceeded the income of the same percentage of the poorest countries 30 times. In 1991 the gap was 61 to 1 and at present, 78 to 1. The mechanism of inequality and injustice determines the mechanism of impoverishment of the poor countries.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) gives credits, loans and aid readily, provided however that liberal reforms are carried out in the economy. The liberalization of the economy stimulates the privatization of the economy, the control of the IMF over money emission, the free transfer of capital and labour, and the privatization of land. After having carried out such 'reforms', the debts of the poor countries rose astronomically. In 1981 they were \$750 billion, and in 2000 they reached \$2 trillion. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa alone pay \$10 billion a year in debt servicing. The reforms of the IMF were a successfully conducted operation. And there is no way out for the poor countries. The rejection of the liberal reforms



recommended by the IMF can now become a reason for default and may lead to a financial catastrophe. 120 countries were debtors, among them 70 countries with delayed debts. The national governments of these countries already have less power than the multinational corporations.

## 2. Robbery of poor countries

More than forty years have passed since the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) had been adopted, which put an end to colonization. Politically the former colonies became independent, sovereign members of the United Nations. However little has changed in their lives in economic and social respects. They still are backward, poor and illiterate, and as before they are in economic dependency on the Western developed States. A sort of stable iniquity has been formed in the relations between the developed and the developing countries. As is well known, the economies of the developing countries are based on the production of raw materials. Their well-being depends on the prices for raw materials on the world market. Real prices for raw materials in the 1990s were 45 % lower than in the 1980s and 10 % lower than at their lowest level in the period of world economic crisis in 1932. As a result the trading conditions for developing countries during recent years deteriorated by 50 %, and now they are losing in their trade with the developed countries because of such an unequal exchange about \$60 billion every year.

At the same time the developed countries set prices for industrial goods from the developing countries at rates 30 % higher than the world level. Losses from such unjust trade amount to huge sums. This led Mexico to a financial disaster in 1996, Indonesia and South Korea in 1998. In this connection a rapid growth in the debts of the poorest countries can be observed. And nobody knows when they will pay them. Not only do they have no means to pay them, they do not even have the means to pay the interest rates. The debt burden has become a running knot, which is constantly being tightened round the neck of the developing countries.

An iron law in trade says that a raw material export will invariably prove to be detrimental to the economy (oil is the exception to the rule). It is the consumer of the raw material who gains the profit, not the producer. The more a country is drawn into a 'raw material' trap, the more the structures of the colonial order are being strengthened. A state-owned sector of

economy is the last stronghold of the sovereignty of a State and a hope for economic development. But the IMF has created a system of its own for the destruction of state-ownership. The IMF gives credits only on condition that there will be a privatization of the economy. A country has to privatize its economy, liquidating its state sector. This inevitably leads to the collapse of the whole economy. Then follows the grant of a stabilizing credit by the IMF, and the country's economy passes under the full control of the establishment that gave this credit. This happened in Mexico in 1996, in Nigeria, Indonesia and South Korea in 1998. As a result Mexico's debt is about \$80 billion, Nigeria's \$60 billion, Indonesia's \$57 billion and South Korea's \$56 billion. But even these credits did not solve the economic problems of these countries. Per capita income in Nigeria is the lowest in the world – only \$820, and at the same time the rate of inflation there is one of the highest – 14 %. Debts must be paid, and these countries can hardly escape from their debt bondage. In order to avoid default and declare a country bankrupt, its government must increase taxes and prices, sell national assets and send workers for earnings to foreign countries. The policy of the world financial oligarchs creates an inequality between rich and poor countries, ruining the economic structures of the poor countries and perpetuating their poverty and backwardness. On these conditions of economic 'cooperation', the poor countries will never be able to put an end to their poverty, and it seems that they have resigned themselves to it; and the political propagation by the leaders of the rich countries, that both riches and poverty are from God, is given as some comfort to them.

The World Bank set a criterion of poverty for making statistical calculations according to which two levels are established. 48 countries relate to the first, mainly on the African continent, various countries of Latin America and East Asia relate to the second. As a whole it emerges that 1.2 billion people live on \$1 per day, and 2.8 billion on \$2 per day. That means that 4 billion people in the world live in poverty.

## 3. Philosophy of poverty

At conferences, congresses and conventions, from the bosses of the world or leaders of the 'Big Seven', as they like to call themselves, calls for a readiness to render aid to poor countries, about writing off their debts can be frequently heard. Bill Clinton even promised to write off 100 % debts of those countries that are U.S. debtors. The leaders of the developed



countries also call for thinking about measures to ensure that the poor countries "would not be left behind". They offer promising plans of aid that, in their words, will be able to relieve them of their burden of poverty. Ways of political and economic partnership are being worked out that will allow economic growth worldwide in the 50 years to come.

The poor countries are urged to open up their borders, to "tear away the doors" and to create a new system of "communication between nations and individuals, between economies and cultures". The leaders of the rich countries lecture the representatives of the poor countries on how they will reap the fruits and benefits of globalization if they move towards a greater integration within the existing system. The Prime Minister of England, Tony Blair, claims that the main direction of human development is the trend to give up a "narrow", "egoistic individualism" and pass over to a sense of "membership, community, to general interests." This sense, in his conviction, is transmitted by the words: "extend a helping hand to me".

Simply speaking, a new idea has appeared in the Western countries of sharing the benefits of globalization with those countries who have not yet tasted them: charity for the right of robbery, in plain language, a tip for establishing full control of the rich countries over the economy of the poor ones. Tony Blair further said: "The question for Europe is clear: could it forget the interests of the past and go forward firmly in order to play a leading role in the economy and industry of the future? We shall try in order that it will be so."

Together with charitable ideas, neo-Malthusian theories are widely spread in modern Western society, whose main conclusion is that there is always an excess of population in the world that will engender want, poverty, indigence and immorality. Hence the conclusion that charity is senseless, for it only supports the existence of an 'excessive population' and encourages its reproduction and growth, leading – together with competition – to the reduction of earnings for others. According to the neo-Malthusians, the task is not to feed 'excessive population', but, one way or another, to strive for its reduction. In his time the founder of Malthusianism declared the right of every born man to the means of subsistence as pure nonsense, thus depriving man of his main right – the right to live. Doubtless this idea is revived again in Malthusian circles.

Charity is harmful when it becomes political. It takes care of the existence of poor countries not by means of their own work, but by the aid offered by the rich countries. It is contrary to ethics and morality and leads

to the demoralization of the people of the poor countries. It undermines the sense of self-respect of the people in these countries and leads them to a humiliating position in the world community. Earlier it was exactly this kind of approach that undermined the economies of the Socialist countries, when the State was engaged in creating additional jobs and arranged for artificial employment, so that people earned without producing useful and competitive products.

The most dreadful enemy of the poor countries is unemployment. There is no elaborate system of social security in these countries, and the illiterate end up in the street, in a direct and literal sense. In Algeria 34 % of the population are unemployed, in Angola 50 %, in Bangladesh 35 %, in Botswana 40 %, etc., and this unemployment can last for years. Preserving the present world economic relationships means aggravating disasters for the poor countries.

Charity is injurious to the future political development of these States. In almost all developing countries tyrannical, despotic regimes are ruling with dictators as presidents, with kings, princes or representatives of feudal bosses. They will get their hands onto loans or financial aid, and they will try to use them for the prolongation of their own power.

#### *What comes next?*

Globalization means a trend towards concentrating capital in the hands of a small group of financial oligarchs and impoverishing the other part of the society, which we call the poor. As long as this basis of modern society continues, it will not be possible to stop this process. It will develop, and so the antagonism will increase between these groups of States, which can turn into an Apocalypse of world dimensions.

The rich are not loved. The rich strive for power, they are greedy, indifferent to the fate of their country and dishonourable. They demand patience, obedience, industry, conscientiousness from the poor, whereas they themselves constantly violate these commandments. The ostentatious luxury of the life of the rich, which is demonstrated constantly on TV and in films, provokes a sense of protest in those who have no money to buy medicines, to send children to school and to find a decent job. Recently a poll conducted in Russia about what they would do in case of a further worsening of life, 6.7 % answered that they "are ready to take up arms", and 65.7 % are sure that unjustly gained fortunes should be confiscated and the owners punished. A new revolution hardly threatens the world,



but an antagonism between the rich and the poor, the developed and the developing countries begins to take on severe forms. A rapid growth in international terrorism, antiglobalist demonstrations, international struggle of green parties, etc., are manifestations of a growing movement worldwide against abuses on the part of the mighty multinational corporations, against financial oligarchs, against their insatiable greed and social egoism. The cold war divided the world into capitalist and socialist systems. Now the world is becoming more and more divided into rich and poor countries. Globalization became a breeding ground for the rise of a militant nationalism that threatens to turn into a new global political force. Its struggle in modern conditions can assume violent-barbaric forms of individual or organized terror, and if they get nuclear arms, the consequences will be unpredictable.

The situation becomes more complicated from year to year. The main responsibility for solving the global problems lies with the United Nations. Only this organization has the authority for solving these problems and the influence strong enough for setting about a restructuring of the world order. There are many neo-liberal concepts in the world, offering the most radical ways of solving the various problems. They are all correct, but all bear an abstract character, and their practical realization will change nothing.

Political measures should be adopted in the first place. In the majority of countries of Africa and Asia feudal orders predominate, kings rule whose culture of ruling is at the level of the Middle Ages. The King of Swaziland Sobhuz II bought a personal plane for \$40 million, a sum exceeding twice the expenditure for health care in his country. He spent \$12 million for the reconstruction of his three palaces and the construction of eight more for his wives. At the same time the country is on the verge of bankruptcy, one third of its population are infected with Aids, and the average life expectancy is 37 years.

In 1960 the UN adopted the resolution on decolonization, and colonialism has been liquidated. Now the UN has to take a difficult decision to liquidate feudalism in Asia and Africa and to establish democratic initiatives and human rights. All the reactionary regimes in Africa and Asia have close ties with the global financial oligarchy and multinational companies, they are the guardians of their interests. Only the democratization of these continents can lead to radical changes, not only here but on a worldwide scale.

## Questions and Interventions

how to get hold of the problems?

**KHOURY** With regard to Professor Khidoyatov's explanations which dealt with the economic situation in our present world, without being myself an economist, I would like to know how we can possibly find a way out of the impasses in which we ended up in so many ways. How do we get to more justice in world trade? Are there practicable ideas in competent economic circles, how to get away from this accumulation of riches in the hands of a minority so that the vast majority of people can also participate? I also had the impression that Professor Khidoyatov would welcome a larger degree of nationalized economy. Which arguments are in favour of that, and to what extent would such a development be desirable? And could we expect an improvement of the situation if the individual countries were in a better position to accept these global developments and rearrange them more appropriately? Finally in which way could corruption be fought more effectively in various countries, because it is largely to blame for the existing poverty and aggravates it. How can we tackle this problem?

limits to political power, but not to the power of money

**KHIDOYATOV** Of course, globalization is a very complex problem. In fact there is no alternative to it, it is the way to the future. But globalization has positive and negative consequences, the latter being linked up with misuse of political and economic power. And whereas we know of limits to political power, there are no limits to the power of money. Therefore it is necessary to put a stop to the misuse of it and to the avarice of the big companies, as for example Roosevelt did in 1933 and thus paved the way for the U.S.A. to overcome this crisis. Presently it is mainly unemployment that gives the Western countries a hard time. At the moment unemployment can reach up to 10 to 12 %, but it is still difficult to anticipate the situation 10 to 15 years ahead. Thus it is important, not only for the African and Asian countries but also for the West, to put limits on improper developments in the realm of the big companies. Under the given circumstances it is certainly very difficult to stop people from taking up arms and instead to try to solve the problems through democratic means. All the more should we be interested in ensuring that conditions of a true democracy prevail because only under the premise of



true democracy will it be possible to approach the positive aspects of globalization.

globalization and political responsibility

**GABRIEL** Here an additional remark seems to me to be useful. The processes of globalization are on the one hand of a technical and economic nature and as such they are irreversible. On the other hand, they are also of a political nature if we only think of the question how far the liberalization of trade should actually reach. As everybody knows, already in 1991 all the financial markets were liberalized worldwide; and this too contributed – also in the opinion of economists – in making all national economies much more crisis-prone. So the question is which markets in detail should be liberalized and at what time.

Behind this question are certain interests and also concepts in economics which already assume that liberalized markets as such are supporting prosperity. This may be true in certain cases but not in every case. If we only think of a group which has fallen back in technical and educational respects, or of an industrial branch which cannot again be made profitable by its liberalization only – simply by integrating it in global competition – but is wiped out on the market of free competition.

Thus even economists, who took part in it, are of the opinion that the liberalization of markets, especially of financial markets, also in the case of the States of the former Soviet Union, was in economic terms not conducive either; it has contributed in pushing lots of people into poverty. Therefore, it seems to be important to make a difference between globalization on the one hand and deregulation of markets (globalism) on the other, since the former cannot be influenced whereas the latter comes under political accountability.

radical political measures needed

**KHIDOYATOV** This field of tensions between politics and the economy naturally is of great interest. An interesting tendency in economics might be worth mentioning in this context: the school of scientism, a new political doctrine claiming that development in the field of sciences will lead to innovative processes in the moves involved in the accomplishment of globalization. Personally, however, I think that technology and science alone perhaps may lead to great technological innovations, but isolated they will not be right for changing this process of globalization on the political level: since on this level what is important will be time and again the political visions of humans, of statesmen.

We should realize: there will be in the future radical political changes or it may happen that people rise up in arms, for example in the framework of international terrorism. In this case, what we experience today, would only have been a beginning, and what follows would be a broad movement that rests on arms only. Therefore, we must win over decision-makers on the political level to find a way out of political stagnation. We experience at present a most dangerous period since the United States continuously speaks of Osama bin Laden whereas there are actually thousands of Osama bin Ladens all over the world. We know that – whether we look at Central Asia, at Africa or Asia – they are only waiting for the signal. And this signal will assume all forms of world terrorism, and it will be dangerous for world civilization.

concerning the difference between globalization and deregulation

**MARBOE** The issue of globalization naturally also is concerning international law, not least those issues that relate to the economic aspect of international law. So, for example, specialists like Christoph Schreuer and August Reinisch deal with the crucial role of the economy in international relations, a problem that also keeps me busy in the context of my postdoctoral thesis. Without being an expert in WTO law, I still would like to point to two aspects that are repeatedly coming up: the aspect of globalization that results from technological and internet progress and quite generally from the ever denser international networking in the context of all areas of modern life, on the one hand, and the aspect of the political development of deregulation and liberalization of international trade and economy, on the other. Either aspect should be clearly differentiated from the other.

if liberalization, then in the same way for all

With regard to liberalization, a crucial issue repeatedly comes up: the fact that it obviously is not the same for everybody. Thus, for instance, the U.S.A. are subsidizing their own agriculture or the steel sector substantially, something that naturally violates the principles of free competition. Other areas, in contrast, should be liberalized and deregulated depending on the interests of the highly industrialized and more powerful negotiating partners. As in many other areas of international law we should be careful also in the realm of WTO law that no double standards are claimed by any side. Then it will be possible to continue discussion whether liberalization is basically good or not, whether it is in fact conducive to the prosperity of all and similar issues – but always under the condition that not only selected



areas are deregulated and that it is not only decided by the economically rich countries.

to what extent can the UN interfere in internal affairs?

**IQBAL** Generally I agree with the speaker's comments, with his analysis of present-day developments, especially with his statement about decolonization not leading to real sovereignty in the developing countries.

But then, at the end of his paper, he made the remark that the United Nations must think of liquidating feudalism in African and Asian countries which is among the main sources of these crucial problems in developing countries. The point is, however, which specific measures should be taken, because art. 2 of the UN Charter states that the United Nations cannot interfere in the sovereignty of any country?

The other question results from the fact that countries are sometimes not at all willing to respect what the United Nations say. Since the developed countries are already having their own brand of feudalism, as it were, or dictatorship how then is the UN going to liquidate these problems in the developing countries of Africa and Asia?

a program of democratization of the world to be elaborated and implemented

**KHIDOVATOV** In 1960 people also had been asking whether and in which way the United Nations may be in a position to abolish colonialism. The United Nations adopted the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" and, within a short period, the colonial rule had collapsed.

Similarly, the point is now to elaborate a program of democratization and declare that this program – willingly or not – must be put into practice. Certainly we reject any form of democratization by force, as it was executed by means of bombs in Iraq or in Serbia. Political activities need time. What is at issue now, is the need for relevant practical ideas. There are countries, like Brunei and Senegal, whose vision is still highly impaired by feudalism – a great obstacle, indeed, in present-day global development because they are playing an important role in the UN framework, in many of their organizations. Therefore, I support the process of democratization in Asia. In sum, as at that time in the case of decolonization, the United Nations should present the program of democratization on a global level now.

The era of globalization, which we are witnessing this day and age should prompt us to create one single world community based on a consistent law, based for example, on human rights. Numerous organizations demand it, but sometimes it seems that double standards are applied. In terms of

double standards democratization is postulated in various countries, in the case of other countries eyes are sometimes closed with regard to the true conditions. But it will be difficult to master the prevailing global tensions (not only difficulties!) and at the same time refrain from real democratization: as in a natural process, the tensions would then lead to awful consequences in terms of world terrorism.

in the process of globalization, how may North and South be granted the same opportunities?

**BELARBI** I would like to refer once again to the positive and negative aspects of globalization. First of all, we have to be aware of the positive side of globalization, which can transform our world – increasing development, fostering democracy, promoting the technology of information and facilitating communication and transportation all over the world. The

world really became a small village. In fact, is it not for the first time in our human history that we are witnessing these deep changes? The rise of peoples' awareness and their endeavours to adapt themselves more to this world in movement is unprecedented.

But we are confronted with another side of globalization as well: with the wide open market, the development of free trade zones, the subventions for agriculture in developed countries and the accumulated backwardness in developing countries that lead to a growing gap between poor and rich, between North and South, between those who decide and those who are compelled merely to execute. In that respect, globalization is designed and performed by Northern countries without the South being able to participate actively in it. It participates in the process of globalization only as a people who have to implement it. They have no chance to agree or disagree with what happens.

The main problem we are facing is how to grant to the people of the South the right to discuss globalization in a way that they also will benefit from it. How can we get the Northern countries to be more open to Southern proposals, to listen to their problems and to seek the global interests, not only the Northern ones? The example of the World Trade Organization is very significant. The Southern countries are not really organized on an equal basis with the Northern countries. In negotiations they face the great regional groupings and cannot negotiate with them. The main question is how to grant in the process of globalization the same opportunities to the North and to the South, how globalization could be of benefit for the whole world, how we could close the gap between rich and poor. Disparities,



inequalities, exploitation and violence are still the main characteristics of our world, but it is a shared responsibility to achieve a globalization with a human face.

a balance is needed between national and global interests

**KHIDOYATOV** The real problem of globalization consists in coordinating national and global interests. In 1945 there were 56 member states in the UN community, at present their number has increased to a total of 191. Each and every nation wants to exist

forever, no country wants its own language to get lost, none its tradition and history to fall into oblivion. No-one wants to quit this world's scene and leave no trace there. The national interest therefore is the problem. On the other hand, there are global problems because we are a worldwide family. Whether I like it or not, I think it is necessary – possibly in the framework of the United Nations – to find a well-adjusted balance between national and global interests.

## The Different Faces of Poverty

Ingeborg Gabriel

Amartya Sen, Indian Nobel Prize winner for Economic Sciences and Professor in Cambridge, introduces his book *Development as Freedom* with an Upanishadic narrative from the 8th century BC. A married couple discuss which would be the best way to become rich. They consider various strategies. Then however the wife asks her husband, "In which way will property and wealth get us closer to immortality?" Whereupon the husband answers, "Property can help us to lead the life of rich people, but it will help us in no way to attain immortality." Then the wife answers, "But what am I to do with it when it does not help me to reach immortality?"<sup>1</sup>

By this introduction in a book that deals with strategies in fighting against poverty, the author shows in a subtle way the limits of the Economic Sciences and of a purely material approach, which are usually at first associated with the term poverty. This is not intended to relativize misery and destitution, which material poverty causes all over the world. In the same way, particularly also in interreligious dialogue, we should avoid a narrow and purely economic approach.

At the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes, "[...] and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else."<sup>2</sup> Fighting against material poverty as a central goal is undisputed. But material goods are a means to reach other goals. The life of humans is an entity in itself. In such an integral perspective, poverty exists wherever human beings can satisfy neither their material, nor their non-material fundamental needs and can therefore not develop in freedom.

For living a fulfilled and happy life, human beings depend on certain goods that are needed to attend to universal human wants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Sen, *Development as Freedom*. Oxford, 1999, pp. 13 f.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book I. 1096 a9.

<sup>3</sup> The teleological ethics of Thomas Aquinas, which he took over from Aristotle, begins with "natural inclinations" (*inclinaciones naturales*), which may be found with every human being, and from which follows the ethical duty to develop them, cf. *Summa theol.* I/II q. 9 a. 94, 2. On this topic we should also consult: W. Korff, "Zugänge zum Naturbegriff", in: id., *Wie kann der Mensch glücken. Perspektiven der Ethik* (Serie Piper; 394). München, 1985, pp. 33–47. A new interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy and ethics is presented by Martha Nussbaum,



First, they depend on satisfying their fundamental material needs in order to survive and – what is more – to lead a good and dignified human life. They are food, clothes and shelter, but also basic health care in the case of illness. Human beings depend on education and cultivation of the mind in order to be able to understand the world, and they need adequate training in order to be gainfully employed and to provide for themselves and their family and thus to be able to make their contribution to social welfare.

Second, however, human beings depend on having rights in their political community and social recognition. To have no political rights, an inferior legal status, or to suffer discrimination obviously is a serious form of poverty. In order to develop, human beings need recognition and positive perception of others. Life means giving and receiving in a social context. According to modern understanding, social needs also include the possibility to participate in political and social life, which means to have rights for political participation.

And: third, human beings live their lives in cultural structures, which give to the individual a place where he/she feels at home, identity and moral orientation. In general religions form the basis of these cultural structures and their values. Moreover, man as a transcendental being holds the belief in something to which it is worth dedicating himself and which therewith ranks above material as well as non-material needs.

When there is a lack of the goods that are central for these three fields, life cannot develop, it suffers damage and, depending on how serious the shortage is, it can sink to a level that is below human dignity. This applies to material as well as to social goods, cultural order and religion.<sup>4</sup> At the same time there are manifold mutual influences between the different forms of poverty, which mutually reinforce each other: in general social poverty also follows in the wake of material and educational poverty. The former is, on the other hand, frequently linked with cultural poverty or with a culture of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

In the following I would like to outline in brief the three kinds of poverty in the present situation of the world.

social ethicist, cf. for instance M. Nussbaum, *Sex & Social Justice*. New York, 1999. She begins with human wants. The term is more appropriate than that of inclinations, since according to our usage they also include negative inclinations, like for instance aggression.

<sup>4</sup> Thus it is said in the Encyclical *Populorum progressio* of 1967: "The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man." (no. 14).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the classic sociological study of O. Lewis, *La vida. A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty*. London, 1967.

## 1. Material poverty: lacking satisfaction of basic needs

The amount of goods that are available worldwide has multiplied in the last 50 years. Although the world population has tripled since 1950, the average per capita income of every inhabitant of the world today is also three times as high. Yet, these figures obviously say little. For during the same period of time the gap between the poor and the rich has widened to a frightening degree. This is true between countries as well as within the individual countries.<sup>6</sup> Thus the difference in income between the richest and the poorest fifth of the world population was in 1997 about 74:1 – in the meantime it has probably continued to rise – whereas in 1990 it was still 60:1 and in 1950 even 35:1 only. The richest 20 % of the world population control 86 % of the gross national product worldwide, the poorest 20 % however little more than 1 %. If we begin with the top of the affluence pyramid, then, according to the UNDP report, the property of the 200 richest persons is above the total income of 41 % of the world population.<sup>7</sup>

In 1999, 1.2 billion of 6 billion people lived on an income of less than a dollar per day and 2.8 billion – hence almost half the world population – on less than two dollars per day. Even though the number of people living in extreme poverty decreased between 1990 and 1999 from 29 % to 23 %, in absolute figures it stayed practically the same<sup>8</sup>, which means that humanity did not make any remarkable progress in overcoming the scourge of hunger, misery and need. The data, which could be augmented at one's discretion, also signalize that material need is not in the first place a global problem of production, but a global problem of distribution.

However, this has profound effects on the consciousness of people. For, whereas over long periods of history, hunger and want were caused by the insufficient production of goods, this is different today. Humiliation and hopelessness of the poor are all the more bitter, the more their justified expectations to participate in the increasing global abundance of goods are disappointed. It is this tension between possibility and reality, between

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the detailed data with J. J. Llach, "Gaps and Poverty in the long run", in: The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (ed.), *Globalisation and Inequalities. Proceedings of the Colloquium 8/9 April 2002*. Vatican City, 2002, pp. 43–66.

<sup>7</sup> We should also consult the *Human Development Report 1999. Globalization with a Human Face*, ed. by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 7) p. 3 and the *Human Development Report 2002. Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*, ed. by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), p. 21.



hopes and the lack of their fulfilment, which makes the present situation so scandalous and also politically so explosive and prone to violence.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas in the 1980s and the 1990s – different from the 1960s and 1970s – the problems of fighting poverty were hardly thematized in general consciousness and in international institutions, during recent years a certain positive change has taken place. The “Millennium Development Goals”, which were approved by the United Nations in September 2000 and are called the Charter for the 21st century, mention the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as the first goal and call for halving the number of people whose income is less than one dollar per day by 2015. Further targets, which should contribute to the fight against poverty, are the achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, securing environmental sustainability, improvement of health in various fields, and the progressive advance of a global partnership for development. Such targets and the obligatory monitoring linked with them can strengthen the awareness of the problem and favour political accents and measures.<sup>10</sup> To make them work, however, a framework of complex national and international conditions is required, for the extreme forms of poverty are the hardest to overcome. A first step in this direction was made in March 2002 at the “International Conference on Financing for Development” in Monterrey, N. L., Mexico, where the means to fight poverty were significantly increased. But from a global perspective the real reason for the lack of progress made in overcoming poverty lies in the commercial policy of the industrialized countries and in the indebtedness of many poorer countries. A policy of forced liberalization, which increases the differences in income and proneness to economic crisis particularly in economically weak countries, comes along with the protectionist attitude of the industrialized countries, which are not ready to open their markets to the products of the developing countries and in addition subsidize above all their agricultural products.<sup>11</sup> The necessary repayment of credits under

<sup>9</sup> Cf. a study by Th. Gurr, *Why Revolutions are Made*. Princeton, 1970, which examined the causes of political violence in 12 countries. This showed that in general the extent and intensity of violence are correlated with the difference between the actual and expected provision with goods. Therewith he demonstrated that disappointed expectations contribute to a greater extent to the arising of violence than the real provision with goods.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. UNDP 2002, *op. cit.* (fn. 8) pp. 19 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also J. E. Stiglitz, *Die Roaring Nineties. Der entzauberte Boom*. Berlin, 2004, especially chapt. 9: “Gewinner und Verlierer der Globalisierung” (Engl. ed.: *The Roaring Nineties. A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade*. New York, 2003).

unfavourable conditions reduces national budgets and thereby the scope for fighting national poverty in many countries, as do imposed structural adjustment and the lack of capacity (or readiness) to levy higher taxes. Above all, nationally as well as internationally, there is a lack of political will to reduce disparities of income and property effectively and thus establish more social justice.

The lack of basic goods is exacerbated by a lack of education. The importance of knowledge and education increases in view of the growing complexity of the world and on account of technology and globalization. Understanding the world, participating in political life as well as doing qualified professional work needs above all adequate education and training. In the field of literacy, data have improved more substantially than in other fields, in 1998 the quota of schoolchildren was 84 %. Yet, this still leaves 113 million children worldwide without primary education. The number of illiterates is estimated to be 854 million people, 554 million of them women, i. e., 65 %.<sup>12</sup> Since education is not only a basic precondition for a better income, but also for self-determination in private and public life, this form of poverty is particularly serious. It may be surprising, yet, in the OECD countries also there is a functional illiteracy of about 20 %, which is also linked with material poverty. Although the issue here is not absolute poverty, it is nevertheless a relative poverty compared with the rest of the population.

In brief: “Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources, and economic power. Yet a huge proportion of the world’s citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy.”<sup>13</sup> This was written in 1965, but the situation has not changed; as figures show, today the distribution of goods is even less equal than 40 years ago.

More and more voices now speak in favour of reforming an economic order that increases inequalities to this extent, which may be taken as a sign of hope. This becomes obvious at the World Social Fora, which have taken place annually since 2001, the last time in January 2004 in Mumbai, India.

Those religions for which justice is a central ethical concern, are particularly called upon to speak on the national and international levels. This

<sup>12</sup> UNDP 2002, *op. cit.* (fn. 8) p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et spes”*, art. 4.



applies to the activities and structuring of international and national institutions, but also – particularly in the industrialized countries – to encouraging a materially more modest lifestyle. For two reasons the present situation is a blind alley: first, more growth of global economy alone does not lead towards a more just distribution. Second: the possibilities of growth are globally limited by natural resources. This means that the supply of goods, which is general in the USA and Europe, cannot be achieved worldwide and is therefore not just either.

## 2. Social poverty: lacking rights and social recognition

Having no rights or being socially discriminated against is another form of poverty. When people have no civil rights anywhere, have no citizenship or when their civil rights and liberties are restricted, then this is a serious form of poverty.<sup>14</sup> According to H. Arendt, a German-Jewish philosopher who was compelled to flee from the National Socialist regime to the United States, the most important right is the right to have rights at all. First, this applies to the millions of refugees worldwide, whose legal status is limited. The same applies, even though to a lesser degree, to ethnic and religious minorities, but also to women, who are denied full civil rights or whose rights are not effectively enforced by their native State.

A lack of rights is linked with the absence of social respect and mostly also with material poverty. An extreme and terrifying example: in totalitarian North Korea an estimated 2 million people have starved to death since 1995. This above all because of a total lack of rights.

But social poverty can also take the form of the lack of social recognition or discrimination. This applies above all to those groups of the population who are not gainfully employed, such as the aged, the sick, the disabled, but also the jobless and people of alien ethnicity, religion or nationality. Since social and family relations become more unstable in the wake of increasing mobility, the growing pressure of work and individualization, social loneliness and isolation of old and sick people are a frequent form of poverty in our societies.

## 3. Cultural and religious poverty: lack of identity and orientation

Globalization, the breakdown of communism and the disappointed hopes to participate in the economic affluence are mostly quoted as reasons for the fact that cultural identity since the 1980s has become more and more politically relevant. In this context it is frequently ignored that the erosion of cultural and religious traditions is a real danger to people and societies. This applies to all cultures. But whereas in Europe, despite all discontinuities, the present global culture is joined to previously existing developments, this does not apply to non-European cultures. There, as Habermas said in his famous speech when he was awarded the 'Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels', "suffering felt about the disintegration of traditional forms of life [...] is neither balanced by material recompensation nor by experiencing the creative element inherent in destruction of what has been traditionally accepted."<sup>15</sup>

The concept of cultural identity is equivocal. It includes everything that constitutes a culture, especially its values. This thesis, which is to be found in philosophy with P. Ricoeur, corresponds to the self-understanding of monotheistic religions. At the centre of religious identity are the commandments, values, norms and models, which are to guide actions and to which a central position is due in the life of the individual and of society. "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all." (Is 7:9). This is the core of the message of all the prophets. Here, taking one's stand means professing God as well as the moral practice that corresponds to revelation, and thus acting according to His commandments.

When these values and moral persuasions are crumbling and lose their power of orientation, then a vacuum develops, which is experienced by the individual as deficiency and inward need and has destructive consequences for society as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

Contact with other cultures and religions as well as fast social and technical changes often lead today to moral disorientation and to ethical relativism. The norms and customs handed-down are no longer taken for granted

<sup>15</sup> J. Habermas, "Glaube und Wissen" [Faith and Knowledge], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2001–10–15) p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> R. Pfau, a Catholic nun and physician, who has been working in Pakistan for 40 years, reports that she has been asked more and more often, "Is there actually a difference between *ḥarām* (mortal sin) and *ḥalāl* (a conduct that pleases God)?" When somebody asks in this way – Pfau continues – this manifests a total lack of orientation and, resulting from it, great inner distress. R. Pfau, *Das Herz hat seine Gründe. Mein Weg*. Freiburg etc., 4<sup>th</sup> 2003, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> H. Arendt, "Es gibt nur ein Menschenrecht", in: *Die Wandlung* 4 (1949) pp. 754–770.



without ever being called into question and thereby lose their binding strength. However, without moral norms that are acknowledged by all, the quality of living together changes: it becomes more inhumane and violent. This does not exclude there being norms in every society that need to be improved or which should be abolished. But on the whole the erosion of moral persuasion has negative effects on the individual as well above all as on the weaker members of society, and on society as a whole.

Therefore the difficult question arises, what would be an adequate response to this dismemberment of moral traditions.<sup>17</sup> Cutting ourselves off on principle and radically preaching our own values is in the long term not successful in a globalized world. Safeguarding our own cultural, religious and moral identity therefore demands an education that teaches our own system of values and simultaneously respect for other cultures and religions. This can only be done by means of good reasoning and reflection. Proof has to be offered that one's own norms promote life, are a 'path towards life', that they are appropriate for man and do him good. A merely voluntaristic reasoning, according to which the commandments have to be followed because they are decreed by God, does not suffice. Norms have to be followed because they are good, not first and foremost because God decreed them. Hence it follows that others have to be allowed as well to follow the norms they have recognized as being good. In an interdependent world this acknowledging the other and being tolerant towards him is indispensable. All the more so since, giving the other as God's creature the "good eye" (M. Walzer), is in keeping with the innermost nature of these religions.

Apart from a lack of values and norms as moral poverty, there is also a lack of ultimate purposes in life. Generally religions answer comprehensive questions concerned with where we come from and where we are going, the meaning of suffering and of evil, as well as that of our own life and its activities.

They give us a comprehensive view of the world and convey to us the knowledge of the value and dignity we have despite our finite nature. They allow us to see the world as meaningful and ordered and make it possible for us to experience ourselves as transcendental in encountering God or the divine. Within us there is an existential longing to give ourselves and to be

<sup>17</sup> In the 5th century BC, this relativization of norms by cultural contacts was a reason why Greek philosophical ethics developed. Socratic-Platonic pedagogics as well as Aristotelian ethics are the answer to human identity and social co-existence being endangered by the loss of binding norms.

one with ourselves. When this is not fulfilled by religious faith, a vacuum develops, which is filled with other contents. The secular ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries have shown that this longing for transcendence also exists in atheist States and can take on a destructive shape, when it is not rightly guided. As history also shows, religions as well are not impervious to fostering wrong forms of dedication. For this very reason reflecting in detail about religious values is so important. But despite all abuses, man needs the hope that grows from believing in what transcends him. Or as it is said in the Bible, "[...] that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Dt 8:3).

#### 4. Conclusions

We live in a world which, the longer the more, is endangered by inward contradictions. It merges into one through the new means of communication. By technical and economic globalization states, cultures and individual persons are more and more mutually netted and thereby also dependent on each other. This growing interdependence exists in all fields of life: in the economy and environment as well as in ideas, values, forms of cultural expression and religions. There are no longer any closed fields. What concerns one part of humanity, has definitive effects on all others. This applies to what is wholesome and to what is evil, to global goods and to global troubles and problems. Fragmentation of the world by the extremely unequal distribution of opportunities in life, but also by cultural and religious contrasts is opposed to this oneness and leads to increasingly stronger tensions, which break forth in conflicts. In face of the many wrong developments, missed chances and increasing polarizations, it often seems to be utopian, when one wants to point out alternatives. Nevertheless, this is the task of religions and their followers, above all of Muslims and Christians. They are not only the largest religious communities, but are particularly challenged by the present situation to find common strategies to overcome poverty.

There are three thoughts which I would like to put for discussion:

As I tried to show in my lecture, there is first the need of an integral perception of man, thematizing and taking seriously all the needs of each individual and of all human beings. These needs are of a material and of a non-material nature. This requires a struggle against poverty, the lack



of rights and the decomposition of social structures, but also overcoming absolute partitions between cultures and religions by dialogue and mutual esteem.

Second, such a comprehensive view of poverty should lead towards a new world view and towards a new lifestyle of the rich, above all in the rich countries. In the Christian tradition, the concept of poverty is used not only negatively, but also positively. The aim of self-chosen poverty as a reduction of wants is that inner freedom, which makes man more capable of a relationship with God and his/her human fellows. This is based on the insight that too much of material goods obstructs the perception of what is essential and can hinder man in his/her human development. Accordingly, there is not only material underdevelopment, but also excessive developments that are detrimental. In the industrialized countries this can often be found today. Beyond that, one may ask whether the various forms of poverty are not linked worldwide: is it not unavoidable that deficiencies of meaning emerge in a world where goods are distributed so unequally and where the knowledge gets lost that the value of material goods for human life is limited?

A third point: it needs a culture of solidarity, including an option for the poor. This applies to individual attitudes as well as to national and international institutions. The Biblical message is that God takes particular care of the poor and the rightless. Therefore, this view of the world in the perspective of those whose position is marginal must also be the view of the faithful. Worldwide there is an awareness that determined steps to change the global order are necessary, if anarchic conditions are to be avoided in the long run. It is the task of Christians and Christian Churches to support these endeavours in every possible way. It would be interesting to hear about the relevant attitude of Islam.

The *Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et spes"* of Vatican II says, "God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (art. 24). The challenge, based on the moral responsibility of our individual faiths, is to make a strong effort to ensure that this hope is not extinguished.

## Questions and Interventions

globalization has legal and cultural dimensions too

**OTT** I think we may welcome the extension of the concept of globalization and its negative consequences to the cultural and legal aspects. Do any landmark documents, ideas or strategies exist that demonstrate how to develop the concept of globalization along the lines of Professor Gabriel's paper?

**GABRIEL** The aforementioned aspects are frequently seen isolated from one another. There are, however, also valuable documents – in particular, I am thinking of the UN "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs) and the "Progress Reports" that are part of it – that deal with the material aspect of the struggle against poverty and point at the same time to this interrelationship especially between the issue of poverty and the legal aspect. Amartya Sen has also shown remarkable approaches towards the intertwining between the realm of law and material poverty. In a similar way even to include the level of cultural and religious values, is a difficult job. In this context, however, the forum of our Round Table could help preparing the ground and developing from Christian and Muslim perspectives approaches that continue these perspectives beyond the political and economic levels and deal with certain cultural values.

**POTZ** A paper of the International Labour Organization (ILO), to which I am going to refer extensively in my own presentation [s. below pp. 73–81], tries to deal with this subject matter, perhaps not so much from the cultural but from the social aspect of the globalization process.

... and a religious dimension

**KHODR** When we read the titles of the papers that are presented in this conference and reflect on what we heard this morning, I get the impression that our conference could also take place in one of the UN organizations. Everything sounds humanistic, good and profitable, but still humanistic. And yet, are there not a lot of things to be said in this context from a religious, and more closely from a common Islamic and Christian view point? Can we easily think of another subject in which Christianity and Islam are so much in agreement as regarding the issues of poverty and injustice, discussed here in our conference?

God's option for the poor

**GABRIEL** Naturally, I could have given to my paper a clear Biblical and theological orientation. What we nowadays happen to summarize in our Christian tra-



dition in the concept of the “option for the poor” is like a central thread that goes through the Old and New Testament. No doubt, with a view to the Bible we have to speak of God’s option for the poor. The said option concerns both the perspective of election – if only we think of David, the youngest son, or of Mary, a woman, being elected, and if we think of what is said in Deuteronomy about the Israelites that they are elected by God not because they are a big people, but a small one – as well as the perspective of solidarity with the poor: whether we think of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt who are freed in the Exodus (the true central idea in the Old Testament), or of the liberation of the poor through Jesus Christ (the central idea in his proclamation, see Lk 4:17 f.) and in the Sermon on the Mount, where it says, “Blessed are you who are poor [...]” (see Lk 6:20–26).

**BSTEH** In the course of our meeting we will still have ample opportunity to deal with the various aspects of the complex subject matter of poverty and injustice and to convey something like a general view on it.

**KHOURY** Two small comments on ‘illiteracy’. Which are the criteria? The conventional criterion is seen in the ability or inability to read and write. But should we not speak of a partial literacy nowadays with regard to the fact that the TV, to a certain degree, is in a position to replace the book? And concerning the issue of illiteracy and culture: Louis Gardet, the great orientalist, once said with reference to some parts of the Muslim world – and I think it was rightfully said – that a most remarkable understanding and culture may be found in illiterates. Dealing with the phenomenon, we should take this into consideration and see illiteracy in a more differentiated manner.

is humanity mature for a humane globalization? Finally, a question with reference to the positive and negative aspects of globalization: is present humanity mature for a humane globalization? Or does this irreversible process of globalization rather plunge humanity into some kind of adventure that expects too much of us? If this is a reasonable objection, how do we then become ripe for a humane globalization? Not only theoretically, but practically – how do we get there?

**GABRIEL** When speaking of 20 % functional illiteracy in our societies, I was referring to people who are incapable, for example, of reading instructions for equipment that is needed, and similar things. As far as the relationship between illiteracy and culture is concerned, undoubtedly, among illiterates too understanding and culture may be found. Yet in our globalized world, people who are generally incapable of partaking in discourses are

necessarily marginalized. In our world, all cultural traditions get caught up in the maelstrom of trends and developments, in which they must be able to maintain their position – and this can only happen on grounds of literate culture. Illiterate cultures, however, run into the danger of finding themselves, as it were, all of a sudden in reservations; they are necessarily the weaker ones, and this is a type of poverty.

The question, to what extent people cannot cope with globalization, certainly is the central question. Vatican II affirms that to socialization, in other words, to globalization a certain degree of personalization must correspond. So, also for me, the big question is, whether this ongoing process as a whole and in all detail is hopelessly too much for us.

**BSTEH** In the context of our dialogue initiatives, once our societies need prophetic criticism I was asked what we need most in our age. I answered: “prophets.” And I added that, for me, these are not people who compete with the great historical prophets, but people who dare to stand up in their societies and criticize them – whether religious societies in the narrower sense or cultural and political societies on national and international levels. Of whom would I be thinking here? I mentioned the name of Andrej Sacharov. Personalities like that we would need in the same way as structural changes. Whether in our own Church, in other religious communities, in politics, wherever and any time.

**BELARBI** According to Hannah Arendt, the most important right is the right to have rights at all. Her statement, cited in the previous lecture, makes me think of the migrants’ situation worldwide, for there are more than 150 million migrants in our world, and they have no rights. There is the UN “International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families” (1990), but this Convention was only ratified by the countries of origin, not by the receiving ones in Europe, by the USA, the Gulf States, etc. This implies a heavy responsibility of the community of States and the UN as well.

**MARBOE** In the framework of his previously published basic work on the international protection of human rights, Professor Manfred Nowak was recently ranking the aforementioned UN Convention among the seven central international conventions on human rights<sup>1</sup>, although we have to admit that it was not yet ratified by the recipient countries.

<sup>1</sup> M. Nowak, *Introduction to the International Human Rights Regime*. Leiden, 2003, p. 94.



humanistic  
foundation and  
specific religious  
approaches

**GABRIEL** With reference to the intervention of Msgr. Khodr, on the one hand I would like to stress the fact that precisely from the perspective of our religions this humanistic foundation is of decisive significance, which we must not repudiate again; on the other hand, the specific approach of each and every religion last but not least with regard to the big problem areas of poverty and injustice must always be taken seriously. For that reason I would be interested in a reaction from the Muslim side to the Biblical statements about poverty the way I have mentioned them very briefly in my presentation.

## Poverty and Injustice: From Justice to Injustice

Seyed Abdolmajid Mirdamadi

### In the Name of the Most Compassionate and Merciful God

In order to make their children familiar with the religious principles of the Islamic culture, Muslim parents teach them the principles of Islam. First they are told that these principles are *tawḥīd* (monotheism), *‘adl* (justice), *nubuwwa* (prophecy), *imāma* (leadership), and *ma‘ād* (resurrection). Growing older, they read in their schoolbooks about three principles of faith: monotheism, prophecy, and resurrection, and about the principles of our *Shī‘ī* confession, i. e. justice and leadership. The most important criterion in the context of our confession therefore is justice. God has created the world in justice and established this principle in all the domains of His creation.

We may identify mainly three areas in which justice is at stake, namely justice in creation, in legislation in general and in the field of punitive measures in particular. Justice is also demanded of religious leaders, *imāms*, witnesses and judges. In the modern age, beyond that, even social justice is demanded, whose range is much wider than the theological and personal area.

The purpose of referring to justice in this context is to diagnose the opposite, i. e. injustice, because in Islamic culture, ‘poverty’ and ‘injustice’ represent negative and abominable states of affairs. This means that, from the perspective of Islamic theology, poverty and injustice are not of an independent nature or willed by God, but an imperfection with regard to those things that are ordained by God.

#### I.

Therefore, God has not created poverty and injustice, he rather established justice as a principle of creation. Seen from a Qur’ānic perspective, after monotheism justice is the most important thing in human life:

1. “There is no god but He: that is the witness of God, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise.” (Sūra 3, Āl ‘Imrān, v. 18).

2. God has sent all the prophets in the first place to implement justice: “To every people (was sent) an Apostle: when their Apostle comes (before

them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged." (Sūra 10, Yūnus, v. 47).

3. The revelation of the divine books is likewise directed towards the proclamation of justice. Thus the Qur'ān says, "[...] nor follow thou their vain desires; but say: 'I believe in the Book which God has sent down; and I am commanded to judge justly between you. [...]" (Sūra 42, al-Shurā, v. 15). And another verse says, "We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; [...]" (Sūra 57, al-Ḥadīd, v. 25).

From these verses we know that the prophets are commanded to establish social justice.

## II.

Beginning with the above mentioned principles – with justice in creation, legislation and in the field of punitive measures – the Muslim scholars have defined social justice in a threefold manner:

1. Justice in the sense of the equality of all human beings in the history of creation, with regard to human dignity and their position in relation to God.

In contrast to this concept of justice is the denial of the equality of men and women, the denial of respect for human life, of the right to personal property, of the right to self-defence, of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, of the right to make use of the divine gifts, and of the right of each individual to determine his/her own fate. We may identify the scope of justice in three areas especially: in the area of the political exercise of power, in the cultural field and in scientific work.

According to an utterance of the Prophet Muḥammad, human beings are like the teeth of a comb. Furthermore, Imām 'Alī, the first *imām* of the *Shīr'īs*, sent a letter to the Province governor of Egypt, which is nowadays known as a historical document on human rights, saying, "Oh Mālik, do not attack other people like a bloodthirsty wolf. Because they are divided in two groups: either they are your sisters and brothers in religion or they are created (as humans) like you." (*Nahdj al-balāgha*, Letter to Mālik al-Aṣhtar). And in the said letter we find another passage, "The best deed for you is the most just one, the one which is closest to truth. The goal of your activity shall be the contentment of people." We all know that the population in Egypt at that time consisted of Muslims, (Coptic) Christians, and other groups.

In our world, many liberal thinkers, too, were of the same opinion, and we may recognize in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" of 1948 the result of their endeavours. This Declaration became the basis for the acknowledgment that all human beings, on an international level, are equal in rights with regard to their dignity and worthiness, to the value of the various cultural traditions and of all scholarly works that refer to human beings. That is, the equality of all human beings has to be seen as recognized by Islam and Christianity, especially also in the documents of Vatican II, their program being the acknowledgment of human dignity in the various religions and peoples.

In today's worldwide situation, which may be defined as the epoch of dialogue, we note that human identity is expressed in its cultural framework, which includes the geographical position, ethnic affiliation and religion, as well as the existence of certain forms of government. Thus it is necessary to do justice to the variety of cultures, to refrain from any form of degradation, and to avoid cultural paternalism in the context of political or military exercise of power.

These principles must be embodied in just relations among people and mutual support in the framework of the international relations of governments and peoples. Beyond that, through dialogue a deeper mutual understanding among people must be achieved and the cultural level raised in those fields wherever possible. The dialogue among civilizations, religions and cultures not only involves the removal of walls and borders, but also the opening of windows in order to know more about the situation of others.

If we ignore legitimate borders and force our way into foreign areas, this will certainly not produce good results. In doing so, the opportunity of cultivating dialogue, cooperation and tolerance will be destroyed. It will end up with the kind of problems that are today known to us in many countries of the world. In addition to the respect for the convictions of other faiths and with its basis on common religio-philosophical principles, from the perspective of faith and of those truths that are rooted in it and of the continuing interreligious dialogue about these truths the final assessment must be left to God. Thus the Qur'ān says, "If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, – all who are on earth! [...]" (Sūra 10, Yūnus, v. 99). And, "[...] To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single People [...]" (Sūra 5, al-Mā'ida, v. 51).

Finally, we have to do justice to the worldwide development and spreading of sciences that are useful and necessary for the implementation of just



conditions. For this will enable us, in the sense of a long-term development, to convey to all people the results and findings of science and technology, especially in the field of agriculture and industry. Because hoarding and concealment of knowledge and of results of the research must be prevented, since they have been produced in the past through joint endeavours of people in various civilizations. They all belong to the heritage of the whole mankind, and all people must be in a position to use their fruits without discrimination. According to a well-known utterance of Imām ‘Alī, the tax on knowledge in the interest of the poor is the dissemination of knowledge.

2. Another meaning of justice refers to the varying modes according to which people are granted what meets their individual wants and capacities. Such differences do not only not imply any discrimination, they rather correspond to the true meaning of justice. Thus Sūra 49 says, “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other [...]” (Sūra 49, al-Ḥudjūrāt, v. 13). “And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth [...]” (Sūra 45, al-Djāthiya, v. 13). Finally Sūra 17 says, “We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation.” (Sūra 17, al-Isrā’, v. 70).

Furthermore, God has left to us the determination of our own personal and social conditions: “[...] Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). [...]” (Sūra 13, al-Ra’d, v. 11). He also says that we have to bear the consequences of our own activities: “that man can have nothing but what he strives for” (Sūra 53, al-Nadjm, v. 39).

The extent of benefit, therefore, corresponds to our personal involvement. Whoever tries harder, will get higher remuneration. By that, however, I want by no means to be claiming that it is just that today 80 % of the worldwide resources are for the benefit of only 20 % of the world population. Rather, I would like to raise the following questions:

◦ Is the fact that such a small minority disposes of 80 % of the riches really due to the endeavours of these 20 % – or is it rather a consequence of hoarding knowledge and of a sort of materialism that ignores spiritual and human values? Is it not a consequence of modern imperialism, of the exploitation of peoples, which becomes possible by controlling the world’s natural resources?

◦ Yet, if we have to assume that these riches were finally produced by the efforts of all, does this inequality not cry out against human conscience and are there no limits to be observed?

◦ Even if we do not respect morals, are there no principles at all for the distribution of wealth to be followed in the framework of divine and human laws?

The Islamic prescripts, valid for the economic field, take therefore on principle into consideration those differences and differentiations that result from the various gifts and efforts of individual human beings. In this context, however, importance is attached to the issue that there shall be no excessive accumulation of wealth in the hands of individual people or groups. Fortune and goods must be distributed to avoid poverty and discrimination. “[...] And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the Way of God: announce unto them a most grievous penalty” (Sūra 9, al-Tawba, v. 34).

We close this section by quoting Imām ‘Alī who once said that he never saw any accumulation of great fortune without thereby violating the right of a poor (*Nahdj al-balāgha*).

3. As to the third meaning of justice, I would like to explain it by two dicta of Imām ‘Alī: „Justice means that everyone obtains his right“ (*Nahdj al-balāgha*). And: „Justice means that everything gets to the place that it deserves“ (*Nahdj al-balāgha*). This means that justice aims at the right of him who has a right. In Islam, therefore, rights are stressed in a special way, and justice is respected as a holy matter. Islam defines the rights to which all regulations in detail must correspond, primarily in the field of wealth formation. In this connection there are rules that, as previously mentioned, limit the accumulation of property assets.

So, for instance, God is seen in Islam as the proprietor of all things. Man has no absolute property. Property in truth is only a confidential pledge on the part of God, which makes it possible for us to satisfy our needs and those of our family and of those who are needy (cf. Qur’ān 70,24 f. and 17,26).

The observance of these obligations guides society on the path of social justice and relieves it of poverty. Islamic literature speaks of poverty in a twofold manner: one kind of poverty is valuable – it is mainly celebrated in the literary works of the Šūfis and mystics. They refer to the Prophet who said that poverty is an honour for him. This kind of poverty is poverty related to God and leads to independence of all other people.



The second meaning is of a negative nature. About it there is a saying of the Prophet: that poverty is a great death. According to Imām 'Alī, poverty can lead to unbelief. Other sayings make cultural and religious poverty a subject of discussion, it is then seen as "a red death". This kind of poverty is the worst.

In the understanding of Imām 'Alī, right is wide-ranging and comprehensive; but when practice is at stake, right is in danger of being restricted. In other words, de facto we try to cut down the rights of others. Applied to the present-day situation: our thoughts have a worldwide horizon, but when acting, we repeatedly remain restricted within certain spheres of interest. Thus, in practice we prevent justice from being implemented by sticking to restrictions and limitations, by dividing reality into the spheres of 'we' and 'the others', by fixation on nationality, descent, cultural and ideological affiliation to a certain ethnic group, language or history, to certain values and traditions, etc.

Not only Islam, but the teachings of all religions, the opinions of philosophers and sages, all *Weltanschauungen* and ideologies have been striving to establish justice in our world and resisted oppression and discrimination. They do not tire of demanding respect for human rights in our day, too, for all those who are poor and starving, oppressed and tortured, the homeless, refugees, prisoners and victims of war, prisoners in general, women and children. Numerous organizations have been founded for that purpose. It is also expressed in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and other conventions.

All the more is it regrettable that justice was not only unable to spread, on the contrary, since the Declaration of Human Rights the situation has worsened. After all the present-day worldwide political situation shows most clearly how war and poverty, social and family problems, drug addiction and trade in bodies are spreading evermore.

Last year's statistics mention 1 billion people who are starving and 200 million undernourished children; 30 people die per minute due to hunger and drug addiction. The permanently increasing number of people sick with Aids, the increase of violence in families, rape and sexual abuse of children, high divorce rates – all that shows that our world does not progress on the path of justice. It was Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General and one of the most eminent international personalities of the present day and age, who, during the Conference of Ministers of the 77 group in Sao Paolo, referred to the fact that justice, in our present-day world, plays a much smaller role than was the case some 40 years ago.

### III.

As followers of our religions, we can only appeal to the conscience of the open-minded people of the world, of the compassionate citizens, the faithful, of those who love justice, of countries and governments, especially of the neutral countries such as Austria, to do more in order to prepare the grounds for more justice in the world.

Finally, I would like to put down five points:

1. All religions are principally convinced that, in the future, justice will gain acceptance in the world. The religious scholars and the followers of religions are obliged to do their utmost in the interest of justice. But we must be aware that a just order can only be established by overcoming ignorance and discrimination, by supporting mutual understanding and deepening tolerance through dialogue. A violent attitude and the application of oppressive methods that contradict the spirit of religions will never contribute to the establishment of justice in the world.
2. In terms of power and culture, the whole of mankind must on principle be considered as equal. With this in mind, respectful relations with other peoples, cultures, civilizations and religions on a global level must be cultivated. Dialogue may prove to be an appropriate means towards the re-enforcement of cultures, it may help to achieve a higher standard.
3. More attention must be paid to religious education, especially by encouraging morals in order to avoid family problems, and to the protection of one's own body and of one's spiritual welfare. The basic teachings of religions, such as the Ten Mosaic Commandments, Jesus' moral directives and Muḥammad's peace treaty with the people of Makka must become our cultural guidelines.
4. I underline that man has the right of disposal of his/her own assets and property, but at the same time we must be aware that in all that we have collected, the poor, the weak and disabled, etc. have participated. To create a just world and to eliminate poverty, it is necessary that we let the disadvantaged participate in our wealth.
5. We must turn away from waste, hoarding of fortunes, striving for power and from any kind of oppression. The implementation of more justice verily can prepare the ground for the solution of the problems of mankind and can also serve the spreading of democracy and freedom.



## Questions and Interventions

creativity is  
needed – in view  
of historically  
conditioned  
discriminations

**KHODR** Although I am happy to have listened to a religious discourse, I am still concerned about the complete lack of any critical analyses of the Muslim society. If a given society is completely Muslim I have no problem. In this case the *sharī'a* is applied, and rightfully we may then refer to the idealistic sayings

first of the Holy Qur'ān, then of the prophet and finally of Imām 'Alī. I don't like to criticize much Muslim societies where I live, but we cannot possibly claim, that there is no discrimination, I mean discrimination in fundamentals; I am not speaking of political practice. Undoubtedly, there were new creative departures in the course of Islamic history. We may think, for example, of Caliph 'Umar: when he arrived in our country he noticed that Persia was Zoroastrian; and obviously Zoroastrians are not monotheists, but they wanted to recognize them as *ahl al-kitāb*, and consequently did not kill them. What I want to stress is that there is creativity in Islamic thought and we need more of this creativity for modern times.

In various publications I asked my friends, the pillars of Hisbollah in Lebanon – there are very good people among them, enviably intelligent people, like professors of Oxford – whether they would apply the Islamic law, the *sharī'a*, for instance to a thief and also to me as a (maybe kleptomaniac) Christian – they never replied that, in case they become rulers in our country, they will not apply the *sharī'a* to Christians.

I am aware that we have been living together for centuries in a very sweet way. My friends in my native city are Sunnites. They are very gentle and kind people, noble and proud. I know that. But when they start claiming that they have their books and laws, I would like to raise the question, "How do you deal with these laws which modern man qualifies as discriminating?"

two legal sources:  
religious law and  
reason

**MIRDAMADI** We all know history and what happened in history. But there is no compelling evidence for applying historical views in modern society as well.

We have our *sharī'a*, the religious law, and our cultural tradition. And for that we have to be aware of conflicting situations that might arise at this turning point of an era, in this epoch of globalization. For on the one hand there are these religious laws and we cannot simply take them away from the Muslim world, though certainly not all Muslims care

about them. On the other hand, according to Muslim understanding, there are in principle two legal sources – the Islamic sources and reason. And in my opinion we may assume that in the present time all the Islamic sources can be interpreted in the light of reason. Of course, there are concepts like retaliation, etc., but nowadays they do not have the same implications they had before and they are not implemented in the same way. We no longer live in the past, but in our present time, and we all may live together in peace and harmony.



## Spiritual Aspects of a Global Political Dispute

Heinrich Ott

It is certainly beneficial, when we in our daring enterprise of a small Muslim-Christian cell of friends, of kindred spirits (which, however, ought to radiate worldwide and so find followers!) pause from time to time, in order to make sure of the continuity of our work: what steps have we already taken, which could be the next ones?

At our first conference in the year 2000, every single member of our group put the question to himself, "What, in my personal view, is the most important and most urgent matter for humankind in the present situation?" At that time, I advanced the thesis that we have to match the reasonableness of small, manageable groups of human beings against the irrationality of big, anonymous masses.

In 2002, at our second conference, the topic was "Intolerance and Violence", a highly relevant issue after the 11th September 2001. In this connection, I personally reflected, *inter alia*, on fundamentalism as a form of violence. The fundamentalist denial of dialogue with another believer, with the differently thinking fellow-human being in general, could be overcome by virtue of a new, alternative readiness for dialogue. In this way, the present discourse on the phenomenon of fundamentalism could be carried further in a new and more promising direction.

### I.

First and foremost, violence directed against truth must be set aside. For it is in the deepest sense an act of violence against truth itself if we believe that we could possess truth and, in possessing it, could claim the right to deny to our fellow-human beings their participation in truth and, consequently, refuse them the dialogue in their search for truth.

To be clearly understood, I do not assert this in the context of the correctness of scientific and everyday knowledge or statements. This thesis is conceived of rather with regard to the ultimate, deepest truths as we encounter them in religion and in the areas of ideological and ethical questioning. In this context, the thesis advanced here is relevant: our claim to be alone in possession of the truth is basically *hostile to the truth*. Truth can-



not be possessed by us. It has priority. The fundamentalist philosophy, the superstitious believe in our *possession* of the truth, fails to give this priority to it. Therefore, the fundamentalist attitude is hybrid and at the same time violent, for it excludes our fellow-human beings from participation in the truth and, in consequence, also from the dialogue about truth – insofar as they do not unconditionally subscribe to the same set of beliefs.

Naturally, everyone truly religious believes he has met with truth and stands confirmed in it. In the Bible, we find the expression “being in the truth” in the words of the Johannine Jesus. But we must differentiate between “being in the truth” and “possessing the truth” – the latter as it were in black and white, in definitive wording or in cold print, so to say.

If we call upon the one and true God and praise him in the forms of our own religious tradition, then we believe and we know that we are concerned with God himself. At that very moment, we also realize that our God, God’s truth, infinitely transcends all our knowledge, words, concepts and imagination. Therefore, the believer of another religion who turns to the one and true God in the language of his tradition stands before His infinite, all-surpassing truth, just the same. It is this very nature of truth, infinite and all-surpassing, that, from the outset, excludes every fundamentalist usurping of it.

A little episode, culled from the history of interreligious relationships and endeavours, which I read a long time ago, has kept me sometimes musing in this context. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Ecumenical Council of Churches with their headquarters in Geneva organised a first small-scale conference of Christians coming from different denominations with representatives of all the other world religions in Ajaltoun in the Lebanon. After the first day of concentrated and peaceful dialogue, the Muslim representatives at the conference approached the Christian moderator with the request: the participants had had an exchange about God for the whole day, now it might be reasonable to also pray to him together. The suggestion was carried out. For the remaining days, each of the religions represented led an act of worship, according to its ritual, for all. – To begin with, the Christians had found it most difficult to accept such a solution.

There, at an early stage, a problem cropped up that is well known in present-day Christian Ecumenism and that has repeatedly caused discussion among theologians. At the moment, the time is not available for me as a theologian to further deliberate and develop this question. Let me only say this: if it is true as, for instance, Martin Buber asserts that one can actually not speak *about* God because He is no object of this world, but

in principle can only speak *to* God as to a Thou, then it is reasonable to consider whether those who make ‘God’ their common topic – naturally not an objectivistic topic – should not also be permitted to pray in common to this God.

So much, as for the little episode at Ajaltoun which set me thinking. It is evident that the special and unique topic ‘God’ cannot be treated exhaustively by making statements although we ‘state something’ all the time when we speak. Every utterance in this context remains something like groping, an attempt to feel one’s way into the matter as the Apostle Paul says in his address on the Areopagus: God had created all nations and allotted the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for Him “and perhaps grope for Him and find Him” though He is not far from each one of us. For “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Ac 17:26–28).

The truth which we cannot ultimately express in predicative sentences, in communicating, ‘informative’ sentences, this very truth alone is the truth of God in which we ourselves live and move and have our being. Everything else should most likely be called a mere ‘correctness’.

## II.

To the first consideration on the impossibility of possessing the truth, I should like to add another: religion can have a highly practical impact on politics, political thinking and acting. And precisely this not only on ethical and ideological levels, but also on those ‘methodological’ and ‘ontological’ – as regards the relationship to reality – and, therefore, lastly on a ‘tactical’ one, too. Religion increases flexibility. It enables the human being to look at reality from a new point of view and gain a different experience of it, even and particularly of political reality. For instance, if the elites, who are today expected worldwide to assess the main global crises such as poverty, injustice, intolerance, violence and terrorism and who are supposed to prepare relevant decisions, consist merely of secularly thinking individuals – notwithstanding their perhaps high personal ethos: then pessimism would most likely be the attitude towards the future of humankind.

But should these elites consist to a large degree of believers and religiously minded people then there would be room for hope, inasmuch as relating to transcendence creates room to move and flexibility in thinking, decision making and understanding.



My thesis might appear paradox to many a contemporary, considering what nowadays is frequently happening in the name of religion. However, we should not only fix our attention on the practice of some religious groupings. Every religion can develop a tendency towards fanaticism. But we have to distinguish this from the basic religious attitude as such, namely *the existence before transcendence (coram Deo)*. So, Jesus asserts that faith can move mountains. The religiously minded and existing human being accepts given reality, for instance in human relationships. We know we cannot live alongside the facts, it would just be unrealistic. Nonetheless, at the same time we take the 'possibilities of God' into consideration. Reality has 'room to move' because it is permeated by God, it is being 'dwelt in' by Him. Such a vision and such a basic attitude can alter our political style. A human being, made flexible by religion, takes miracles and their possible occurrence as it were into account and just this reinforces his realism.

These potentials that lie in the core of religion should be uncovered in interreligious dialogue! That would be a worthwhile way to a target, i. e. it would lead further than the usual mutual settling of scores between religions reckoning up the mistakes made and misdeeds done in the past by representatives of a religion in the name of their religion.

### III.

I have begun this talk with deliberations on the understanding of the concept of 'truth', holding that no-one can 'possess' the truth and that, therefore, it is not permissible ever to deny a fellow-human being, a co-believer who belongs to another religion, participation in the truth. In what follows, we have begun to investigate the 'dynamics', the 'cleverness' and the 'realism' of a basic religious approach to the solution of human problems worldwide.

It should be easy to grasp that religion will only be able to unfold this encouraging dynamism by developing or bringing forward an understanding of truth which does not primarily separate but unites the believers. How close religions can come to each other is a basic, decisive question for the unfolding of the dynamics of religion in the service of humankind. From there, we can build a bridge to the specific topic of our present conference: Poverty and Injustice.

If we aim at overcoming poverty in the world, having in mind the fact that today a minority of the world's population lives at the expense of the great majority, then we must not attempt to put so-called 'riches' in the

place of poverty because the way of living of the said minority already puts a heavy strain on the basic livelihood of *all*, namely the global environment. Everybody is aware of this fact nowadays. Perhaps the term 'riches' could still be used in this context, however, with a different connotation, namely the one of 'true riches'. Meanwhile, to avoid misunderstanding, I would rather choose another term: *quality of life*. This has already been in use in the German language for some decades. It is being readily employed by politicians. On the other hand, the term is difficult because many take its precise meaning too lightly. Let us ask ourselves, looking as far as possible back and remembering the fifties, sixties and seventies of the past century, have we become actually richer since then?

Has our human life, our living together, our quality of life actually gained? Were we the poorer at that time? The question is difficult to answer. The first, spontaneous, emotional response of most people would most likely be a No. The reason for the difficulty lies in the fact that we neither have a solid definition of 'quality of life' nor criteria for it. The politicians, who use the term, all too often commit the greatest mistakes. They escape into and resort to a quantitative meaning of 'quality of life' whereas, primarily, what is valuable and preferable in this term is that it does aim at the qualitative and not at the measurable dimension. Instead of only asking how many kindergartens, senior citizens' homes, medical doctors, public transport connections etc., etc. are there in a particular segment of the population, we will have to ask questions like the following as well: is the community at ease in its environment? Are there still spaces of silence or does noise dominate the scene? Are there still open areas, natural surroundings, animals as companions of people? Is there still a sense of home and belonging? What respect is paid to elderly people and to what they say? etc., etc. There is no end to the many-faceted perspectives of being human! In this regard, the relevant questions are much more difficult to raise and the answers cannot be put into figures and numbers.

Now, this is my supposition (or my thesis) which I would like to put forward for discussion: the eye, the ability to discern, of a religiously motivated human being, insofar as his religiosity is not only lip service, is on the average sharper for these dimensions, his capacity for understanding what a human being needs is deeper, for the real human being is the one before God. So, in the spirit of religion, we may perhaps find substantial help to overcome poverty and therewith encounter a 'spiritual aspect of the political dispute'. Perhaps in this way a new quality of life is opened up for



the poor; they receive encouragement and the possibility to do something for themselves and for a larger community, becoming "subjects of their own history" as the Liberation Theology of Latin America frequently expresses it. I am thinking, for example, of those many and often even small development projects which aim to hand out to the needy not only a fish but the fishing rod and hook. In many cases, there are small, inexpensive projects where women are involved. So, for example, I recently read about an initiative of "Mission 21" (formerly Basle Mission) in an impoverished region in India where women were encouraged, guided and financed to help along the rural people of their region by employing cooperative methods. Such would be a type of approach to fight poverty, an approach that is governed by the guiding principle of 'quality of life'. Central in such an enterprise is the communal aspect, the common effort where each and everyone takes up responsibility for his/her part.

Assuming responsibility ourselves and doing this together with others in a community, is very likely one of the most important realisations of a 'quality of life'. In this profound and useful concept both are intertwined, receiving and giving. Quality of life is being received by sharing it.

As we are gathered here in a circle of representatives of religion, and in fact of different religions, to discuss this present-day issue, the question might emerge whether it would be possible to embark more frequently on inter-religious projects as described above. Not Christian and Muslim projects in competition, but common ones – so that different religions together experience this important aspect of quality of life which consists in a 'coalition of people who are ready' to carry through a common responsibility.

#### IV.

To round off this talk, I should like to return to the beginning. We began with probing into the concept of 'truth' and it was my intention that these deliberations should build a bridge between the religious concept of truth, on the one hand, and the global, political problem of overcoming poverty, on the other. It appears that religion can, to a large extent, contribute to coping with such questions and crises, namely through what we called the 'room to move' or flexibility or 'faith in miracles'. It becomes possible to cope with them insofar as the religious, believing human being clarifies the characteristics of the truth he believes in. In case, all religious teaching and knowledge, every religious utterance, would be nothing else but 'assertions

of facts', information on factual realities which one must believe because one cannot perceive them, then religion would have little impact on the problems of the world. Consequently, only altercation about the asserted facts would be the result, in the worst case, violence, in the best, toleration as a mere putting up with.

But in this matter, we are not concerned with bare facts but with something much more real, with a powerful reality. God facing us, listening to us when we pray, is a *power* that 'works', has an effect. Of such powers we can only speak in symbolic terminology which can 'convey' much more of 'reality' than a language of pure facts as it is used in everyday life or in the sciences. The language in question is not one of predicative sentences only or assertions, which intends and is expected to define everything as concisely as possible, rather it is a language that always remains imprecise, leaving the horizon open as in poetry. Just therein lies its strength and closeness to reality.

In this line of thought, we have in one go spoken about interreligious encounter and a great problem of and in the world. It is my clear conviction that in present times religions must *encounter one another* and, on the grounds of such encounter, not only *tolerate* one another but recognize one another and, by doing so, learn to gradually *understand* one another. Nowadays, if a believer recognizes another religion it does not mean unfaithfulness towards his own religion or his own religious identity. For, religious identity is not found in being in a better position than others, let alone, exclusively possessing something for ourselves. Rather it consists in what we are able to convey to other people from the treasury of our faith traditions and from our experience of transcendence.

Every kind of religious existence, every genuine religion, receives its 'mission' – a mission from God – and its proper way, the style and manner as it were how to testify to God's power, reality and presence in this world. Employing the category of 'mission' in this context, we hold that different 'missions' and different styles of witnessing need not be mutually exclusive. Whereas different teachings of faith which one interprets as information about 'transcendent facts' – an absurd concept – unavoidably are mutually exclusive! This change of category lightens the burdensome problem of religions living 'side by side' and in coexistence.



## Questions and Interventions

'to possess the truth' and 'to be in the truth'

**KHODR** First, I am not at ease with this distinction between 'possessing the truth' and 'being in the truth'. In any case, I find in the Bible only the latter – 'being in the truth' (cf. Jn 17:16.19).

Second, this distinction suggests the attitude towards the follower of another faith which is well known in the Western tradition: if he does not possess the truth, you kill him. Thus, Thomas Aquinas stated, "You kill the heretic" – and this subsequently turned out to be the theoretical foundation for the Inquisition.

On the other hand, there were Christians who emphasized that he who claims to be entitled to kill a heretic, should be excluded from the Church. Why all these constructions? Why not say, "There are many people in error, I respect their freedom!", why not use in this context the category of 'freedom' instead of 'truth'? One of the Church Fathers once said about one of his opponents, "I know he is in error but still I defend him vis-à-vis the administrative or political authorities!"

**OTT** First I would like to clear up a possible misunderstanding. What I wanted to say, is precisely what Msgr. Khodr also wants to say: we cannot possess Biblical truth and religious truth in general. Only fundamentalists erroneously think they could also possess religious truth.

With regard to Thomas Aquinas, I would like to add two comments. At first, Thomas asserts that we have to be grateful to the heretics because they help us to understand truth in a deeper way. This kind of thinking also underlies the pattern of disputation in Thomas' *Summa theologica*. Another comment follows Msgr. Khodr's concept of defence: naturally we have to correct each other if necessary and also, as the case may be, to contradict one another argumentatively. Yet, I am also convinced that I have understood a proposition of my partner in the dialogue or of a writer in theology or philosophy only when I am able to defend vis-à-vis others the very person with whom I do not agree.

to do what is true – orthodoxy and orthopraxis

**GABRIEL** In the Gospel according to John I find the expression: "But those who do what is true come to the light [...]" (Jn 3:21). And other texts read similarly.

Taking this as a starting point, I would like to propose the following thesis: there is quite generally in our traditions a surplus of or-

thodoxy compared to orthopraxis, and that holds good for quite a long period in our history. This is due to certain historical reasons. On the other hand, are we not taught by the modern world, by modern humanism to reduce this surplus of orthodoxy to some degree? What actually comes first in the context of our faith: the theoretical confession of certain truths or rather practice and discipleship? Here I would like to ask our Muslim friends about the interrelationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis in their own Muslim understanding. Possibly, this also might contribute to an easing of tension concerning the expressions of 'possession' and 'possessions' in the context of truth.

**OTT** The comparison of orthodoxy and orthopraxis is widespread, but not quite unproblematic if we take into account that all true thinking needs to be embedded in our life. Basically, there is no knowledge of God that does not fall within my range of practice. This is also expressed in the ancient axiom: "lex orandi – lex credendi": our practice of praying determines our practice of theological thinking.

absolutely true is the transcendent God only

**KHOURY** Unlike fundamentalists, as Mr. Ott said, we have to accept the other one who also invokes the true God. But in case we assert generally that the other one invokes his God, then fundamentalists wonder, whether this is in fact the one and true God, or rather another one. I think there is no disputing with fundamentalists except by means of their own argumentation, i. e., by arguing that it is the transcendent God only who is absolutely true – and because of his transcendence he is not at our disposal either. So we may become more modest and need not assume that we are in the absolute possession of the absolute truth. Compared with this, the aforementioned argumentation is not effective: that we have to accept the other one because he too worships the true God – for precisely this is the question that still must be answered.

**OTT** In case, someone accuses somebody of not believing in the true God, this accusation should be first examined more closely and discussed. Then, we shall sometimes experience that there are people who appear to be adherents of a fundamentalist movement, and all of a sudden we may realize that, nonetheless, we can speak with them, maybe even about unexpected things. We must take into account that, occasionally, there are instants on our part, too, where we must be ready to take the trouble of accepting criticism and soften earlier held positions. Our faith, therefore, includes an ongoing process of interpretation that calls for permanent reflection on those perspectives and positions once reached and held.



## Hopelessness and Despair as Consequences of Extreme Poverty and Injustice

Nasira Iqbal

In today's world rapid changes have led to dichotomy of global society into the very rich and the very poor. This situation exists not only between countries of the North and the South but also internally in the countries of the South. The governments of the underdeveloped countries may have limited resources but the individuals at the helm of affairs are affluent while the rest of the population is generally extremely poor. There has been a gradual disappearance of the middle class, which has traditionally been considered the backbone of society. The UNDP Human Development Report 2002 says in its overview: "Addressing poverty requires understanding its causes"<sup>1</sup>, and since the world is overall becoming richer, there is no disputing that rising poverty must reflect increasing inequality in the distribution of its wealth. However, although the disparity between nations is glaringly obvious, and startling global comparisons are well documented, much less attention has been paid to the destructive effects of rising inequality *within* nations, and still less to the cause of these increasing disparities.

This situation has arisen partly out of the geographical circumstances of the countries and partly out of the policies of the governments concerned. Countries in Europe and North America have sparse populations, thus their per capita access to resources is much greater than that of the populations of countries in Asia, where resources are limited, leading to extreme poverty. The situation is exacerbated by the migration of refugees from even poorer neighbors to these poor countries. They often carry drugs and guns for their survival, leading to a culture of violence. Some of these countries have recently emerged from colonial domination. Their independence is often illusory. The departing colonial powers adopted policies to keep the underdeveloped nations bereft of management and advanced technical skills in order to perpetuate their dependency on the West. They also left a legacy of disputes among neighboring countries which could easily have

<sup>1</sup> UNDP Human Development Report 2002, "Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty" (Overview), p. 1.

what does 'quality of life' actually mean?

**KHOURY** With regard to the term 'quality of life', it will be difficult to open it up to the poor as long as we are not able to define what 'quality of life' really means; we need concrete standards in order to know

what should be done in the interest of the poor.

**OTT** 'Quality of life' is certainly a substantial and at the same time enigmatic concept. It will not easily be possible to define it from above as it were, but we need for this purpose a basis of experience – a communal basis, but also one that is rooted in our own personal being. Some elements which seem to me personally important, were mentioned in my paper. Other people might have different priorities. In other words, we are not in a position to put ourselves on a high pedestal and dictate to someone else, perhaps living in a poverty-quarter in India, what should be for him / her a good quality of life. We will only be able to discover it in dialogue, by carefully listening to one another.

religion needs prophets

**BSTEH** How is it possible to make do in our religious self-understanding without the prophetic element, without religious criticism in face of what actually hap-

pened in the course of human history and what is happening in today's world? We need the prophet who, in the name of God, tells us from time to time, "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. [...] Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5:21.23 f.). A human being who dies of starvation, a widow or an orphan to whom their right is refused because they are the weaker party and cannot stand up for themselves – these injustices cry to high heaven. The God to whom all these injustices cry out, is the God of our faith, whether I am a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or whoever.

'Possession of truth' is a concept that can direct religion in a wrong direction, because it involves the risk of making religion into an administrative matter for religious officials who propound all sorts of holy teachings, offer sacrifices and let their fragrance ascend to heaven – but refuse to their fellow human beings their basic rights. Every period and every religious community need people who when the occasion arises, whether the time is favourable or unfavourable, set an example and raise their voices in the name of those who have no voice in our world, and who, if necessary, shout into the world that this or that injustice cries to high heaven.

**OTT** What was said before, is very close to my thinking. I can testify that this is exactly the context which made me formulate my presentation.



been avoided if just and equitable settlements had been made at the time of colonial departure. Such situations exist between India and Pakistan over the status of Kashmir, and the Arabs and Israel over the state of Palestine.

International lending institutions dominated by the developed countries, extended loans to the developing countries with conditions that the goods, equipment or consultants be imported from the "donor" countries. This "aid" was a device to create markets for their own equipment, goods and personnel at exorbitant prices. The World Bank and IMF also determined the value of the currencies of debtor countries. Thus the value of the lenders' currency increased while borrowers' currency devalued correspondingly. Furthermore, they dictated economic policies, which in many cases caused destruction of their industries and economies e. g. Mexico, Latin America, Nigeria, Indonesia and South Asian countries.

The leaders in the borrowing countries earn huge benefits while the general population suffers. The youth of the poverty stricken families try to attain fortunes overnight through dubious means; courts are flooded with cases of gangs exploiting poor persons with promises that they will provide them passports, visas and jobs in oil-rich or developed countries. Women and children have become special targets of this human trade. Trafficking in human beings has become a multinational business racket with so many power brokers that no government dares to tackle the problem. Thus these poor human commodities have no route of escape.

Such desperate situations are worrying. The flows of trade and capital that integrate the global economy may bring benefits to millions, but poverty and suffering persist. In an integrated world, disease, environmental degradation, civil strife, and criminal activity are also global concerns. Responding to concerns about global poverty, the World Bank, IMF and International Development Agencies have begun to re-examine the way they operate. They are looking at impacts more than inputs by establishing performance targets, and they are enhancing their accountability and transparency by measuring progress towards these goals.

At the 2000 Millennium Summit, world leaders distilled key development goals and targets in the Millennium Declaration. Based on the declaration, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, and the World Bank have devised a comprehensive set of eight goals:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development.

While each goal is important in its own right, they should be viewed together as they are mutually reinforcing. The poverty goal calls for reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day by 2015. But it appears that in some regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and Latin America inequality remains very high and growth is expected to fall short of these goals. Increasing inequality in income distribution will reduce the numbers who benefit from the same average rate of growth. Thus inequality is deteriorating in these regions leading to poverty and despair.

United Nations Development Programme's new Human Development Report for 2003 shows that the 1990s was a 'decade of despair' for many developing nations, with 54 countries becoming even poorer than before. In many of these countries, improving indices have been shockingly reversed: life expectancy has fallen in 34 nations; in 21 the Human Development Index has declined, and a larger proportion of people suffer from hunger; in 14 more children are dying before the age of 5; and in 12 primary school enrolment has decreased. As a result, progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, so proudly propounded at the turn of the century, has virtually stalled. There is now no realistic prospect that any of the goals will be met by 2015. For some regions the prospects are truly appalling: sub-Saharan Africa will not reach the goals for poverty and child mortality until 2147 and 2165 respectively, and for HIV/AIDS and hunger, trends in the region are heading up – not down.

Civil and international conflict, corruption and the failure of the rule of law, environmental degradation and food insecurity, social dislocation, weak domestic institutions and high indebtedness, are all acknowledged as contributory factors – although naturally, the Western-led deflationary 'structural adjustment' policies that have contributed so heavily to many of these ills, are not deemed to be responsible for them.



Terrorism is caused by poverty, since people in poverty and despair are more easily led down an extreme path by those looking to gain power by whatever means necessary. It takes very little for most people to show the worst sides of themselves, for example, the inhuman treatment meted out to prisoners by the soldiers and officers at Abu Ghraib prison. All religions teach us that it is proper to accord equal dignity and respect to all people by virtue of their humanity. But this statement becomes meaningless unless we take proper action to limit the imbalance between advantaged and disadvantaged human beings. Grossly to exploit peoples' relative weaknesses is not to treat them with respect; to watch them live, and often die, hungry, afraid, sick and oppressed is precisely to deny their human dignity.

All religions acknowledge this principle, and enjoin their followers to share their belongings and relieve others from poverty. But national legislation aimed at redressing imbalances of wealth is woefully inadequate in many modern societies. Moreover, although our increasing whole-globe awareness should give such measures a strong international dimension, this has proved to be far from the case. Instead, our 'winner-takes-all' global economic system, geared as it is to protecting the assets of the rich, has shown itself inherently opposed to redistributive policies. Government regulations limiting private or national accumulation of wealth are regarded as unwelcome intrusions on personal and economic liberty, and have come under persistent attack since the start of the 1980s. As a result, economic inequality has now reached obscene proportions, with the most recent available estimates showing that the income of the world's richest 5 per cent nations is now 114 times that of the poorest 5 per cent nations.<sup>2</sup>

The rate of suicide amongst male and female youth is very high in developing countries. Every child in Pakistan is born with a debt of 100 dollars and more than one-third of the population subsists on less than one dollar a day. This situation breeds hopelessness, deprivation, injustice and hatred towards the 'haves'. It creates two extremes of religious belief or disbelief. Some frustrated individuals repose blind faith in *Pirs* (quack religious leaders) who promise them rewards in both worlds for a suitable price. Those youth who have nothing to give to the *Pirs* are lured into religious institutions where they are indoctrinated to retaliate against those perceived enemies who have caused their deprivation. Such institutions thrive on clandestine funding received from questionable sources who thrive on the continued

confrontation of the rich and poor countries and who flourish on the income derived from the marketing of weapons of mass destruction, the manufacturers of which are obviously not the developing countries

After the collapse of Communism, the US has increasingly come to see itself as the savior of the world and the arbiter of each and every nation's future. Those nations who are not prepared to bend to its will are classified as "Rogue States" and threatened or chastened by force. The humiliation of Iraqi prisoners today is not the first outrage inflicted on the Muslims who have not forgotten the lacerations inflicted upon them by US condonation of the Israeli occupation, by the genocidal first Gulf War, by the strangulating sanctions against Iraq, and its ultimate invasion to destroy its Weapons of Mass Destruction and *Al-Qaeda* links. Both claims proved patently false by their own investigative agencies

News items like these fan the fires of hatred: "US Guns Bombard the Shrine of Hazrat Ali (RA)", "Two Florida Islamic centers vandalized," "1,000 Homeless in Rafah after Israeli Action." The US "liberation" of Iraq will be remembered by the horrifying photos of prisoners' humiliation at Abu Ghraib prison. In their blind self-interest, the custodians of "freedom and human rights" have become morally impoverished barbarians.

After 9/11, the Muslim countries have emerged as the targets of Western fear and hatred. Islam is not a monolithic religion, but, like its practitioners, has many faces and different ethnic identities; it is a faith that celebrates peace and honors diversity, and it too, values knowledge and understanding as a fundamental principle of both our spiritual and secular lives. Those who retaliate against anti-Muslim measures hit the headlines, while the majority of Muslims fear that being involved will mean being misunderstood or, worse, becoming a victim of a campaign to demonize their religion or distort their views.

"Islamophobia," or a fear of everything Islamic is encouraged by those who have promoted Islam as the new overriding threat to the West, replacing Communism in this post-Cold War era. Esposito has warned against falling prey to "easy accusations." He writes, "In understanding and responding to events in the Muslim world, we are again challenged to resist easy stereotypes and solutions. There is an easy path and a hard path. The easy path is to view Islam and Islamic revivalism as a threat – a historic enemy whose faith and agenda are diametrically opposed to that of the West. The more difficult path is to move beyond facile stereotypes and readymade images and answers. Just as perceiving the Soviet Union and Eastern Eu-

<sup>2</sup> UNDP-Human Development Report 2002.



rope through the prism of the 'Evil Empire' had its costs so too does the tendency of Western governments and media to equate Islam and Islamic fundamentalism with radicalism, terrorism and anti-Westernism seriously hamper our understanding and condition our responses."

If we want to rectify this prevailing situation, and defuse the climate of injustice and hatred particularly carved out after the 9/11 incident, each of us must assume responsibility. The developed countries will have to take the lead. The Western media need not to promote the Islamophobia, and to spread instead, a message of tolerance by emphasizing the principles of love and peace common to Christianity and Islam, and how they attempt to reach their common goal of salvation for their believers. That ordinary citizens all over the World are repudiating the politics of hate is evident, inter alia, from the spontaneous movement for friendship and amity between the people of India and Pakistan. The defeat of Hindu extremists, in the recent Indian polls and election of Italian born Sonia Gandhi as the leader of India, demonstrates, in the words of Sonia that, "people have voted against fundamentalism, communalism and parochialism."

The great religions of the world have always taught the essential oneness of the human race. We have to think in terms of humanity as a whole and to talk only of human welfare. We have to live together on this planet. The resources here are limited. World history manifests that even if we try, we cannot totally destroy or annihilate each other. But we have the ability to hurt one another. Therefore it is necessary that we develop a larger vision and a sense of neighbourhood. We have to see that our children do not spend their lives in hopelessness and despair in a planet fractured by greed, hatred and violence. We have to create opportunities so that they could spend their life positively by pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge for mutual benefit of humankind. Rapid technological advancement, instant communications, shrinking distances and porous boundaries have made it possible for us to help one another as we all have the ability to influence each other's lives. If we have the will we can restrain the affluent nations from economically exploiting the less-privileged ones under the slogan of "Globalization". Therefore it is possible for us to change the present world order of man's inhumanity to man.

All religions and cultures encourage the development of a moral dimension among humankind and expect man to show it in whatever form it can be manifested. The ideal of human solidarity therefore, is not realizable

without reciprocity. Collective action is required at all levels. The target of the needy should be self-sufficiency, and those who come forward to help should understand that true self-realization is only achievable through the elimination of others' sufferings.

Every religion teaches sympathy and concern for the needs of others and to extend charity to those in dire poverty. The Qur'an enjoins:

"Believe in Allāh and His messenger and spend of that whereof He hath made you trustees; and such of you as believe and spend (aright), theirs will be a great reward" (57,7).

"Lo! Those who give alms, both men and women, and lend unto Allāh a goodly loan, it will be doubled for them and theirs will be a rich reward" (57,18).

Similarly the Bible enjoins:

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. Storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:17-19).

In many developing countries, public spirited groups have been motivated to strengthen their societies and make concerted attempts to eradicate the causes of hopelessness and despair by taking up the cause of poverty alleviation. They are bringing about a positive change in the climate of ideas by generously expending their own physical and spiritual resources and calling on like-minded friends from all corners of the world and members of their own communities to share their concern for improving and enriching the lives of those around them. In this way some of the problems of the extremely poor in third-world countries are being addressed and partially rectified.

Amritanandamayi, who was an ordinary village girl from a remote fishing village in southern India, who never completed her formal education, has been acclaimed as a *Devi* (goddess) because of the love and compassion that she has bestowed and dispensed on all those with whom she has interacted. In the brief span of fifty years, she has changed the lives of the villagers in Kerala by providing them education, health facilities, the opportunity of living with dignity and above all imbuing in them a feeling of sharing and caring for each other. She has been travelling, talking and hugging people all over the world. More than 300,000 persons from all



walks of life, including 12,000 people from 191 countries of the world, congregated to celebrate her fiftieth birthday in Cochin (South India), in October 2003. Many of them had contributed generously from their own resources, skills and time in order to promote her ideals.

Amrita says, "People in many countries are suffering; people are jobless, aged and lonely, due to erosion of cultural traditions and ethical values. People are being tortured. When a country makes no effort to understand and imbibe the feelings and traditions of another nation, or religion or when it tries to trample the followers of another religion, it is like injuring our left hand with our right hand, or as if we were trying to poke out our own eye. It is like a person torturing the members of his own family just for the sake of fulfilling his desires. Redressing these crucial conditions, which affect the future of the world, should be recognized as the important goal of the 21st century."

In many countries including Pakistan, it is possible to identify people imbued with the same qualities of care and compassion as Amritanandamayi. People like Abdul Sattar Edhi and Saida Waheed have devoted their lives to the mission of sharing and lightening the burdens and sorrows of others. Cricketer Imran Khan, singer Abrar ul Haq and other celebrities have used their fame and public image in a positive manner to raise awareness and funds to reduce the sufferings of the vast sea of humanity who were without succor and friendship. If these indigenous movements which are becoming alive to the problems of others can be organized by Christians and Muslims together and universalized it would add a benevolent dimension to globalization which has so far been perceived as more of a problem than a cohesive force.

If the followers of Islam and Christianity make a conscious effort to understand the difficulty and pain of others we would be able to see each faith as an integral part of every other faith. Only when we make the effort to understand the difficulties and the pain of others, can we act and work together in the unitary spirit of love. Only then will this world grow as a unity, as a whole. Such growth alone will bring equanimity, brotherhood and peace.

The problems which we face today can only be resolved by developing a global consensus. If the ideal of humanitarianism is to be realized, the vicious circle of conflict and clash has to be broken and reformed into multi-lateralism and reconciliation. We must recognize the worth and dignity of each and every human being as well as respect the ethical values shared

by all the members of the international community. For realizing common good, common action is necessary. I conclude with a few verses of Pakistan's national poet, Iqbal, who pleads for our unification in reconstructing the future world rather than our departure from one another:

Come! Let us cooperate and lead a life of harmony.  
Our mutual skills can transform  
This wretched planet into a paradise  
Under the skies, if we together  
Disseminate love and healing,  
And banish jealousy, hatred and misery.

*(Armughan-e-Hijaz)*



## Questions and Interventions

each system has its strong and weak points

**KHIDOYATOV** I paid a few visits to your country, Mrs. Iqbal, and for me Lahore is the most beautiful city in the world. There are lots of innovations in Pakistan, but one thing wondered me – illiteracy. Whereas in

Uzbekistan, my home country, everyone is literate, the level of literacy in Pakistan is very low, perhaps only about 25 %.

Another phenomenon surprised me when I crossed Pakistan from the north of the country to Karachi: in every village people were listening to the radio or watching TV – and all the Pakistani Muslims watched Indian TV- and cinema-films. This is certainly very interesting and I would like to know more about why this is the case in Pakistan.

**IQBAL** It is true, when I was in Uzbekistan, I was very impressed to see that there is 100 % literacy. But at the same time I found that management skills had not been imparted by the Soviets before leaving the country and many of the administrative skills were still with them, so that the Uzbeks even had to depend on the colonial powers for running their own country.

Pakistan also had this problem that the outgoing colonial powers were interested in keeping the level of awareness low; there was literacy, but on a very limited scale only. And after that the status quo was suiting those who were the power elites. But gradually the level of awareness has increased over the past 55 years and recently, in the context of the democratic process, the provincial governments decided that there should be 100 % literacy within the next 3 to 5 years. In the Punjab province, where Lahore is situated, literacy actually has gone up rapidly. But the process should reach out also to the far lying areas. In fact, overpopulation is one of the major problems that impede the rise in the literacy level. So we should control growth in population to keep abreast of the resources and educational facilities.

**KHIDOYATOV** In his book *Asian Drama*, Gunnar Myrdal, Swedish sociologist and economist, expressed the opinion that Asia would never be in a position to overcome poverty due to the unsolved population problems. But real life now rejects this idea, if we only look at China and Japan. While the Islamic countries generally still stay backward, both previously mentioned countries were able to overcome their backwardness.

**IQBAL** We are still more concerned with the hereafter. But the young generation wants changes today, they want also entertainment here and

now. Maybe this is also the reason why they are watching Indian TV so much.

the Muslim world should participate more strongly in present-day developments

**KHOURY** In view of the widespread poverty and in some cases also the hopelessness in people, the present-day situation in our world gives rise to great concern. It is therefore regrettable that there is hardly any effective participation of the Muslim world in the discussions about political and economic affairs

worldwide and no adequate involvement in the elaboration and implementation of relevant plans of action. The Muslim world has about 1 billion people, but when the "G 7" or 8 meet, the Muslim world is not there. The way I see it, this is a great mistake, it is unfair to a community so large and important. If it were possible for the Muslim community to settle on the form of an appropriate involvement and to find a joint response to the question who could represent the Muslim world in the various bodies at a global level, then, most probably, there would be less injustice in our world, fewer impasses and less hopelessness and as a result, to a lesser extent, readiness to resort to violence.

lack of organization and education

**IQBAL** A very valid observation indeed. One reason why Muslims are not represented or their voice is not heard, is that they have not been able yet to organize themselves effectively. Behind it, however, there also

is the lack of education and the fact that most of the Muslim countries have emerged in the post-colonial era. So they have to overcome their own problems of poverty and illiteracy to some extent before they can organize themselves into a community voice.

a permanent seat in the Security Council for the Islamic world?

In this connection we could even think of the United Nations. There is always talk of adding representatives to the UN Security Council considering the global distribution. In fact, one fifth of the world population belongs to the Muslim community. Therefore, should

not at least one permanent seat in the UN Security Council be given to a representative of the Muslim world to be selected every time the seat is vacant by The Organization of the Islamic Conference, perhaps, which is a representative body though not very effective yet?

**BSTEH** Wouldn't that be a special case that a religious community as such lays claim to be represented in a political body of our world? As far as I know, India's claim to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council also



does not refer to the religious claim of this country's Hindu believers, but in general to the country itself.<sup>1</sup>

**IQBAL** Actually I do believe that India is claiming the seat in the Security Council for the reason that it has 1 billion or that much share of the global population. This was a response to the question why the Muslim voice is not heard as a community. China too has a permanent seat in this body on basis of its share of the world's population. It is not so much a political voice, but a voice of sharing security concerns which may effect the whole world.

**MAHMOOD T.** I think Professor Bsteh has already clarified that India's search for a seat in the Security Council is not for the Hindus who are the majority of the country. It has to be kept in mind that India has the second largest Muslim population in the world – next to Indonesia only. India having a seat in the Security Council would also represent the over 140 million Muslims of India.

I quite agree that UN being a political organization, Muslims of the world, as Muslims, cannot be given representation in the UN.

Arab States not adequately represented in the UN

But how about the political block of Arab States? Do they have enough representation in the Security Council? Do the Muslim countries as a whole have enough voice in the UN? I would say briefly, if they had, the problem of Israel and Palestine would have

been solved long ago. It is because the Muslim interests are being neglected in the UN by the world powers that problems like the Israel-Palestine imbroglio and the destruction of Iraq have risen. Despite their large number the Muslim nations do not have an effective voice in the UN. This is a matter to be considered by the political powers of the world.

which sort of State is desirable in times to come?

**BELARBI** In her presentation Mrs. Iqbal was repeatedly speaking of 'countries'. But a 'country' is no holistic unit, it is rather a composition of various elements: we have the State, the social classes, the rich and the poor,

the NGOs, etc. Each and every element has its special function and its special aims. For the State the primary goals are security and stability, protection and a kind of well-being for the citizens. For the rich perhaps the aim is an increase of their wealth and reinforcement of their power. For the NGOs in turn – who are situated, as it were, between the State and the people – the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Bsteh (ed.), *Peace for Humanity. Principles, Problems and Perspectives of the Future as Seen by Muslims and Christians*. New Delhi, 1998, pp. 87–89.

general aim perhaps is to help the people and improve their situation. The close link between the State and the rich is obvious. Whereas the NGOs may be people who are practically not taken into account and out of reach. And for this reason, a large part of our population is living in illiteracy, they are experiencing unemployment and suffer from shortcoming of health care. Everyone tries to use religion to legitimize their actions and reinforce their influence. Then the interpretation of religion is of varying character: the State may be interested in religion insofar as it keeps teaching people silence and resignation and especially prevents them from getting the benefit of education. And there you see the rich on the side of the State, maybe to exploit the poor.

in search of true democracy

In this context the point is to reflect more carefully what kind of State we consider to be desirable and how we may start to implement it. How can we attain

a form of government that permits everyone to sit at one table and discuss with greater openness the various problems up to the point where it becomes possible even to advocate in all the different issues opinions that digress from each other. Of course, we are speaking nowadays of democracy, and there are in fact many countries which have introduced democratic systems. On the other hand, it is inadmissible to limit such systems to the organization of free elections – which in practice frequently happens. Real democracy is what we need day in, day out, in our homes, at school, in our family, in our world of employment, on all levels of society. And how can we introduce a new vision of the State and a new vision of democracy?

NGOs and their responsibility for the shaping of just co-existence

**IQBAL** The reason for using the word 'countries' was that it is the nation-states and their governments which are everywhere responsible for what is going on. But then of course, as was mentioned by Mrs. Belarbi, it is true that the rich are sharing the power in the government, and that is why sometimes the States may even exploit the poor.

For that reason I tend towards stressing the special responsibility of NGOs: they can play an important role in developing the individual awareness that each person has to contribute towards achieving the appropriate balance in the society and not simply leave it to the governments of the countries.

... in cooperation with the governments

But the NGOs have to have a partnership with the governments because if they do not allow the NGOs to operate they will not be able to operate. Through education it will be possible to create an atmosphere

of respect for diversity. And it is precisely education – one of the main Mil-



lennium Goals – that can be advanced substantially through NGOs. However, also the official support of the 191 members of the UN is needed, if they had a self-regulatory regime: because this change must be brought about from within and through the acceptance of the governments. Otherwise, how can we do it? States can be, in any case, a major impediment in trying to bring about the balance in global society.

when  
hopelessness  
joins poverty and  
injustice

**BSTEH** Still another remark on the situation when hopelessness joins poverty. When poverty and injustice reach a degree where people lose all hope, a situation emerges that can no longer simply be subsumed in these concepts. To abandon hope for ourselves, for our children, for our family causes unimaginable strain on us and may lead to reactions that otherwise would be perhaps unthinkable. And we should be aware of the fact that religion may play a thoroughly different role in this situation. It might feed us with hopes of a hereafter and, in face of what happens here and now, cause us to sit back doing nothing. Yet, religion also may make us get up and, as did the prophets of the Old Testament, give voice to the voiceless and accuse those who do nothing to oppose injustice or who even are themselves – partly – to blame for it. The proclamation of the prophets asserts that it is injustice that cries to high heaven in case we do nothing here and now but only feed hopes of a hereafter for a widow or an orphan from whom their just wages are being withheld or who are otherwise maltreated. In terms of Jesus' proclamation it would be to take the wrong path and irresponsible to say "Lord, Lord" and not to do what he tells us: to give food to the hungry and to give something to drink to the thirsty, to give clothing to the naked and to visit him who is in prison (cf. Mt 25:31–46). If we only fed the hopes of the hereafter vis-à-vis the misery of all these poor, we would run the risk that, on the Day of Judgement, Jesus would declare to us, "I never knew you; so away from me, you evildoers" (Mt 7:21–23). I am therefore most grateful to Ms. Iqbal to have put her presentation under the title "Hopelessness and despair as consequences of extreme poverty and injustice."

## The Globalization of Socially Just Structures as a Challenge to Religions

Richard Potz

### 1. Introduction

In the history of mankind spiritual and intellectual progress, the development of the forces of production and the social balance between the various groups in society do not run in parallel in most cases, but are time and again marked by the simultaneous occurrence of inequalities. In their scope for action, this is true above all of the increasing multiplicity of groups with common interests in the dimensions in which they are acting. While socially and economically dominant groups mostly think and act in increasingly wider dimensions, other groups can often only act in small dimensions on account of their social and economic weakness. The former therefore regularly plead for an opening up of the field of action. The latter, which are able to push through their interests – if at all – only on a small scale, tendentiously try to prevent the opening up of fields, until they are in a condition to organize themselves in greater dimensions.

These inequalities between the economically active units multiply the existing social injustices, a process that is familiar above all from the industrialization of Europe and North America in the 19th century, where the opening up of the economic fields was accompanied initially by the pauperization of the masses.

In the 20th century a comparable situation has emerged, in the course of globalization, in the relation of the industrialized Western World to the other regions. It affects everybody and this now globally, which means the widest range possible for the active economic groups resp. the simultaneous occurrence of inequalities in regard to social justice.

An interconnected world has come about through new technologies, which demand more open policies. The growing global interdependence in the field of trade relations – commerce, investments, finance and the worldwide organization of production – now demands a social and political interaction of organizations and individuals throughout the world.



## 2. Fields of globalization

First, thought must be given to the postindustrial information society. It leads to a growing dependence on information and the technologies providing it. We witness an unstoppable trend in the process of economic globalization to extend property rights to never endingly new goods resp. life spans under culturally and legally diverse conditions.

Second, the new technologies (nuclear technologies, biotechnologies) are accompanied by increasingly greater risks, which affect all fields of life in ways which are everywhere and everpresent and whose consequences do not respect national borders. The problem exists also for the reason that the links between science and the economy are so close as never before. Politically irresponsible scientific and economic institutions and markets however must not be allowed primacy over the politics of elected parliaments under the obligation to serve the common good, over the guarantee of human rights, over the reign of law and social commitments, and over the respect for our environment today and tomorrow

Third, thought must be given to the mobility of persons, but above all of finance capital. This begins with the control of multinational enterprises, which increasingly take political action without having the corresponding legitimation, i. e. without having to bear political responsibility. In our political system the citizen is the expert for taking political decisions. If he hands over this competence to the global players in the international economy and the acting internationally experts, then our political system is in principle jeopardized. Therefore it is necessary to uphold the primacy of political decisions and at the same time to improve the conditions for the democratic process leading up to the decision being taken by the citizen.

Without this political globalization, no humanitarian globalization can be considered as a corrective against economic globalization. For the West, globalization is mainly seen in economic terms, for the non-Western societies however it is seen mostly as a cultural threat. In this way we evade too readily the need to confront the political dimension of globalization and its consequences.

The "World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization" of the International Labour Organization (ILO) published a paper at the beginning of this year entitled: "A Fair Globalization Creating Opportunities for All."<sup>1</sup>

It is of the greatest importance for our work that our thinking in the preparation of this Round Table should agree to a high degree with this text. In the following I should like to report those parts of the synopsis of this text that appear to me essential.

## 3. The ILO-paper on the social dimension of globalization

Under the title: "A vision how change is possible" the declaration asserts in the beginning: "Public debate on globalization is at an impasse. Opinion is frozen in the ideological certainties of entrenched positions and fragmented in a variety of special interests. The will for consensus is weak. Key international negotiations are deadlocked and international development commitments go largely unfulfilled."

The report makes no promise of recipes for simple solutions, because they do not exist. It is an attempt to break the present impasse by responding to the cares and wishes of the people by showing ways for a better use of the potentials of globalization. The conviction is expressed that "the benefits of globalization can be extended to more people and better shared between and within countries, with many more voices having an influence on its course."

The aim therefore is "a process of globalization with a strong social dimension based on universally shared values, and respect for human rights and individual dignity; one that is fair, inclusive, democratically governed and provides opportunities and tangible benefits for all countries and people."

A catalogue of demands then follows, which can also serve as a basis for the deliberations of our Round Table.

° *"A focus on people.* The cornerstone of a fairer globalization lies in meeting the demands of all people for: respect for their rights, cultural identity and autonomy; decent work; and the empowerment of the local communities they live in. Gender equality is essential.

° *A democratic and effective State.* The State must have the capability to manage integration into the global economy, and provide social and economic opportunity and security.

° *Sustainable development.* The quest for a fair globalization must be underpinned by the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of economic development, social development and environmental protection at the local, national, regional and global levels.

<sup>1</sup> <http://natlex.ilo.ch/public/english/wcsdg/docs/reportg.pdf>.



◦ *Productive and equitable markets.* This requires sound institutions to promote opportunity and enterprise in a well-functioning market economy.

◦ *Fair rules.* The rules of the global economy must offer equitable opportunity and access for all countries and recognize the diversity in national capacities and developmental needs.

◦ *Globalization with solidarity.* There is a shared responsibility to assist countries and people excluded from or disadvantaged by globalization. Globalization must help to overcome inequality both within and between countries and contribute to the elimination of poverty.

◦ *Greater accountability to people.* Public and private actors at all levels with power to influence the outcomes of globalization must be democratically accountable for the policies they pursue and the actions they take. They must deliver on their commitments and use their power with respect for others.

◦ *Deeper partnerships.* Many actors are engaged in the realization of global social and economic goals – international organizations, governments and parliaments, business, labour, civil society and many others. Dialogue and partnership among them is an essential democratic instrument to create a better world.

◦ *An effective United Nations.* A stronger and more efficient multilateral system is the key instrument to create a democratic, legitimate and coherent framework for globalization."

With regard to the consequences of globalization, the paper points out that the potential for good is immense. "The growing interconnectivity among people across the world is nurturing the realization that we are all part of a global community. This nascent sense of interdependence, commitment to shared universal values, and solidarity among peoples across the world can be channelled to build enlightened and democratic global governance in the interests of all. The global market economy has demonstrated great productive capacity. Wisely managed, it can deliver unprecedented material progress, generate more productive and better jobs for all, and contribute significantly to reducing world poverty."

The paper emphasizes especially that "the current process of globalization is generating unbalanced outcomes, both between and within countries. Wealth is being created, but too many countries and people are not sharing in its benefits. [...] Many of them live in the limbo of the informal economy without formal rights and in a swathe of poor countries that subsist

precariously on the margins of the global economy. Even in economically successful countries some workers and communities have been adversely affected by globalization. Meanwhile the revolution in global communications heightens awareness of these disparities."

The ILO therefore proposes a *strategy for change*. It begins with the assertion that "these global imbalances are morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. What is required to change this is not the realization of a Utopian blueprint in one swoop. Rather it is a series of coordinated changes across a broad front, ranging from reform of parts of the global economic system to strengthening governance at the local level. All this should and can be achieved in the context of open economies and open societies. Though interests diverge, we believe that there is increasing convergence of opinion throughout the world on the need for a fair and inclusive process of globalization."

"On these issues, the required course of action is clear but the urgent need for change has not yet dawned on some major players. Here continued advocacy and a stronger public opinion is essential to carry the proposals forward."

"But on these newer issues, such as the development of a multilateral framework for the cross-border movement of people or the accountability of international organizations, the prime lever for the decision to act is broad-based dialogue among State and non-State actors. Through this, consensus and resolve can be forged on what needs to be done, how, and by whom."

Under the title "The governance of globalization", the problems identified are not attributed "to globalization as such but to deficiencies in its governance. Global markets have grown rapidly without the parallel development of economic and social institutions necessary for their smooth and equitable functioning. At the same time, there is concern about the unfairness of key global rules on trade and finance and their asymmetric effects on rich and poor countries."

The fact that market opening measures and financial and economic considerations predominate over social ones is to be traced back to a failure of politics. "The multilateral system responsible for designing and implementing international policies is also under-performing. It lacks policy coherence as a whole and is not sufficiently democratic, transparent and accountable. These rules and policies are the outcome of a system of global governance largely shaped by powerful countries and powerful players.



There is a serious democratic deficit at the heart of the system. Most developing countries still have very limited influence in global negotiations on rules and in determining the policies of key financial and economic institutions. Similarly, workers and the poor have little or no voice in this governance process."

With good reason the paper underlines that it will not suffice to manage the wide range of issues at the global level. The response to globalization still must begin at the national level. This reflects the simple but crucial fact that people live locally within their nations. "From this perspective it is clear that national governance needs to be improved in all countries, albeit more radically in some than in others."

In the opinion of the commission therefore these are the requirements:

- "good political governance based on a democratic political system, respect for human rights, the rule of law and social equity.

- an effective State that ensures high and stable economic growth, provides public goods and social protection, raises the capabilities of people through universal access to education and other social services, and promotes gender equity.

- a vibrant civil society, empowered by freedom of association and expression, that reflects and voices the full diversity of views and interests. Organizations representing public interests, the poor and other disadvantaged groups are also essential for ensuring participatory and socially just governance.

- strong representative organizations of workers and employers are essential for fruitful social dialogue."

The paper sums up: "Policy must focus squarely on meeting peoples' needs where they live and work. It is thus essential to nurture local communities through the devolution of power and resources and through strengthening local economic capabilities, cultural identity, and respecting the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. Nation States should also strengthen regional and sub-regional cooperation as a major instrument for development and for a stronger voice in the governance of globalization. They should reinforce the social dimension of regional integration."

For a *reform at the global level* detailed recommendations are made:

- Reference is made to international migratory pressures, through which "problems such as trafficking in people and the exploitation of migrant workers have intensified. Steps have to be taken to build a multilateral

framework that provides uniform and transparent rules for the cross-border movement of people and balances the interests of both migrants themselves and of countries of origin and destination."

- "Global production systems have proliferated, generating the need for new rules on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and on competition. [...] Cooperation on cross-border competition policy will make global markets more transparent and competitive."

- "Core labour standards as defined by the ILO provide a minimum set of global rules for labour in the global economy and respect for them should be strengthened in all countries. Stronger action is required to ensure respect for core labour standards in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and, more generally, in global production systems. All relevant international institutions should assume their part in promoting these standards and ensure that no aspect of their policies and programmes impedes implementation of these rights."

- "The multilateral trading system should substantially reduce unfair barriers to market access for goods in which developing countries have comparative advantage, especially textiles and garments and agricultural products." At the same time however "donors and financial institutions should contribute to the strengthening of social protection systems in developing countries." Comparative advantages due to the fact that human right- or social right-standards are not respected, are unacceptable. In this connection, greater market access is not a panacea.

- "A more balanced strategy for sustainable global growth and full employment, including an equitable sharing among countries of the responsibility for maintaining high levels of effective demand in the global economy, is essential. [...] Decent Work for all should be made a global goal and be pursued through coherent policies within the multilateral system. This would respond to a major political demand in all countries and demonstrate the capacity of the multilateral system to find creative solutions to this critical problem."

- "The international financial system should be made more supportive of sustainable global growth. [...] In this context developing countries should be permitted to adopt a cautious and gradual approach to capital account liberalization and more socially sensitive sequencing of adjustment measures in response to crises."

- "The implementation of reforms in international economic and social policy will require worldwide political support, the commitment of key global actors, and the strengthening of global institutions. [...] Parliamentary



oversight of the multilateral system at the global level should be progressively expanded. We propose the creation of a Parliamentary Group concerned with the coherence and consistency between global economic, social and environmental policies, which should develop an integrated oversight of major international organizations. A critical requirement for better global governance is that all organizations, including UN agencies, should become more accountable to the public at large for the policies they pursue."

° "Developing countries should have increased representation in the decision-making bodies of the Bretton Woods Institutions, while the working methods in the World Trade Organization (WTO) should provide for their full and effective participation in its negotiations. Greater voice should be given to non-State actors, especially representative organizations of the poor. The contributions of business, organized labour, civil society organizations (CSOs), and of knowledge and advocacy networks to the social dimension of globalization should be strengthened."

The commission therefore proposes "a new operational tool for upgrading the quality of policy coordination between international organizations on issues in which the implementation of their mandates intersect and their policies interact. Policy Coherence Initiatives should be launched by the relevant international organizations to develop more balanced policies for achieving a fair and inclusive globalization. The objective would be to progressively develop integrated policy proposals that appropriately balance economic, social, and environmental concerns on specific issues. The first initiative should address the question of global growth, investment, and employment creation and involve relevant UN bodies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the WTO, and the ILO. Priority areas for other such initiatives include gender equality and the empowerment of women; education; health; food security; and human settlements."

"A Globalization Policy Forum should be organized by the UN and its specialized agencies to review on a regular and systematic basis the social impact of globalization. Participating organizations could produce a periodic 'State of Globalization Report'. Our proposals call for a wider and more democratic participation of people and countries in the making of policies that affect them. And they also require those with the capacity and power to decide – governments, parliaments, business, labour, civil society and international organizations – to assume their common responsibility to promote a free, equitable and productive global community."

#### 4. Summary

The problems raised and the approaches proposed for solutions challenge Christianity as well as Islam to answer, inasmuch as both perform by understanding themselves to be *global players* on the global level and as agents of the civil society *par excellence* on the national and regional level. My contribution therefore shall close with the appeal not to shirk the confrontation with these challenges.



## Questions and Interventions

reservations on the ILO-paper

**GABRIEL** The paper of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which was quoted by Mr. Potz, refers to a number of important processes of globalization

which would be necessary to make economic globalization politically, socially and culturally compatible with human requirements.

In this context, however, the question arises whether this is possible in face of the factual imbalances in the distribution of power in our world. Nobel prize winner Robert M. Solow once stated very much to the point, "Globalization, it's a marvellous excuse for many things". First of all, international companies too are using globalization as a catchword in the interest of their own locational advantages in order to put political decision-makers under pressure. In my opinion, the main difficulty is that since the 1980s, when the "New Global Economic Order" was discussed, no substantial strides could be made with regard to a political framework.

drawing a parallel between industrialization and globalization

**POTZ** Naturally all that has been previously said, is relevant with regard to the issues in question. What made me enter the topic the way I did, is the obvious parallel between what we call today 'globalization' and what is actually meant when we refer to the phenomenon of 'industrialization' in the 19th century. Let us, hypothetically, in Mrs. Gabriel's citation replace the term 'globalization' by 'industrialization' – we would be situated right there, in the socio-political scenario of the 19th century's European industrial nations. What I had been touching on at the beginning of my presentation, agrees therefore precisely with what was at issue on the tide of industrialization – the uprooting of the rural population, low income, etc.

So, if this present-day situation appears to be comparable, nonetheless today's general setup is different; the spaces changed all of a sudden. I do not know whether a new quality must be taken for granted when we are acting globally. In those days the industrial nations were acting in competition with one another, whereas at present the multinational companies, in their activities, move more and more within a global framework.

comparable currents in the West and in Islam

**KHIDOYATOV** The term 'postindustrial society' is no longer in keeping with the times. We actually prefer to speak of a technetronic society, of a society characterized by the application of technology and electronics

to solve social, political and economic problems. On the other hand, we notice two currents in Western democracy – a conservative and a liberal one. Both equally defend the policy of globalization, each one based on its individual level of argumentation. In Muslim society we also encounter two currents – an enlightened and an unenlightened Islam. It is important to maintain the difference between both positions. Thus, for example, in Central Asia we come across an enlightened type of Islam. There the religious order of the *Naqshbandiyya* had its origin, there the comprehensive collection of *Ḥadīths* was compiled by Bukhārī. And that is why Islamic radicalism doesn't find a breeding ground there as it actually does in many other areas.

**POTZ** I do not want to address here the issue of different schools of thought in Islam. But with regard to the conservative and liberal parties in the Western world, I have my personal reservations. Concerning issues of economic policy, is it really appropriate to differentiate between them so strongly? Undoubtedly, conservative politicians in the West, on an economic level, act nowadays in a massively capitalistic manner.

**KHIDOYATOV** It is quite clear for me that in the United States the conservative forces in the Republican Party differ strongly from the liberal forces in the Democratic Party. The same is true for Islam: there is an enlightened and an unenlightened Islam; both currents clearly differ from one another. In my understanding, it would be fatal not to pay attention to these differences.

differences in economic policy not as grave as in cultural policy

**POTZ** In the economic field, nevertheless, I do not think that the differences are so grave. Without being an expert myself on United States issues, I do not dare say whether American economic policy under the presidency of Mr. Kerry would have differed substantially from the current one. Or, does the present economic policy of the United States really differ so much from the one which was earlier practised under the presidency of Mr. Clinton? With regard to other issues, however, as for example especially issues of cultural and educational policy, there are certainly the most varying views on either side – for example how to deal, in a global context, with States that have experienced varying politico-cultural orientations.

globalization as a danger to the variety of religions and cultures

**MIRDAMADI** The term 'globalization' has different meanings in different areas, especially in East and West. People in the Muslim world feel decidedly uncertain and threatened in their cultural and religious identity in the wake of globalization. In contrast to



the term the way it is understood in the context of our discussions here at the Round Table, they have a feeling that this very process is directed against their religion. Globalization, in this case, is in danger of being felt as 'anti-religion' and 'anti-culture', at any rate as a danger to the existing variety of religions and cultures in our world.

**POTZ** In fact, outside the European Western cultural ambience, deep concern may be noted that the danger to cultural identity cannot be ignored as a concomitant of globalization. This concern is in fact not entirely unreasonable, because globalization has evidently a certain tendency towards standardization. On the other hand, it seems very probable that globalization has a great future ahead only if regional identities and needs are safeguarded. The ancient axiom "unity in diversity" should retain its validity in this case also. However, it would not be appropriate to minimize the danger of standardization as a concomitant of globalization. It is simply a fact that, in contrast to the opportunities we had some 20 or 30 years ago, today we may make use of a global information network and that with this obviously irreversible process certain dangers are associated. So we should spare no effort, to make this process socially and culturally compatible.

**globalization as a challenge** **BSTEH** The various religious communities and cultural traditions, should they not feel called to demonstrate that, alternatively to an, as it were, one-dimensional process of globalization, there is a better alternative, i. e. a globalization that goes together with a deepening of cultural and religious plurality? In this case, the thesis would read as follows: a globalization in terms of a collectivistic and standardized global development has only a smaller chance compared to a world that succeeds in preserving cultural and religious diversity and, by that, incorporating a vast, perhaps inexhaustibly creative potential into the process of globalization. In other words, it would be worthwhile thinking that for example the Christian and Islamic world views could contribute a lot of inspiring elements to this, on the whole probably irreversible process of an evermore extensive and intensive networking of all areas of life.

Would this not be in fact a most challenging and fascinating task, under the premise of preserving and possibly even deepening our cultural identities, to show that we know of a better alternative compared to a process of globalization that would end up in an ever increasing standardization and levelling of the religious and cultural heritage of mankind? Here we may spontaneously think of the system of collective farms, of kolkhozs, that was

supposed to replace the system of private farms in the former Soviet Union. Yet, where there was no longer individual responsibility and personal interest, this project, in its standardized and collectivistic design, finally reduced itself to absurdity. In contrast, when personal interest is at work, a lot of creative potential is available that is not only in a better position to catch up on certain conflictual elements or perhaps make even positive use of them, but beyond that even to motivate the respective agents to point the way to a better world.

This is exactly what I consider to be a big challenge under the condition of the ongoing process of globalization: to demonstrate the chance of an alternative development – away from a progressive conformity and oriented towards a spiritual deepening that preserves the unexchangeable profile of cultural and religious identity and makes it fruitful for a humane development of globalization.

**economic interests develop their own dynamism** **MARBOE** I would gladly agree to this and associate with it hope for the future. However, economically seen, some kind of scepticism would be appropriate. On the one hand, we know that business enterprises, to be successful, must deal with the actual needs of an individual population – "every business is local"; in other words, we need not be scared of transnational enterprises not taking care of local differentiations. But this does not necessarily correspond with personal experience that frequently shows that foreign enterprises who settle, for instance, here in Austria are perfectly well interested in selling their products on a large scale regardless of whether they are in demand there or not. They evidently try to rouse demand through supply. And therewith inevitably is connected an international levelling and adjustment.

**various lifestyles meet each other** **GABRIEL** The sociologist Max Weber has insisted on the fact that our economically oriented industrial society has created a certain lifestyle. And we may ask whether everywhere in the world this lifestyle is really wanted. The previous intervention of Mr. Mirdamadi reminded me of a conversation with Professor Schabestari. He told me one day that there is still a certain way of life in Iran, which requires somebody to live with different families but without any conventional profession: he thinks about the Qurʾān and speaks once or twice a month to a certain circle; he has no health insurance, no oldage pension, etc., and remains in this way totally unprotected. We would call this a pre-modern lifestyle that naturally is not in agreement with a



## Education and Global Learning as a Challenge to Poverty and Injustice

Aïcha Belarbi

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the third plenary meeting of the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table and to share some ideas with eminent scholars around a thought-provoking subject that concerns the present and future of humanity.

Before starting, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bsteh and his collaborators for all the efforts they are devoting to concentrate our minds on the item of poverty and injustice, fostering the dialogue between Christians and Muslims and illuminating some areas for common understanding.

I would like to start with a live story about a young Indian woman, married, with two children, living with her parents-in-law in extreme poverty on the New Delhi outskirts. This young woman was further involved in a NGO, whose principal aim was women empowerment. She had followed the three sessions concerning literacy, professional training and public relations. This last session consisted of establishing contacts and relations with administration staff, teachers, nurses, etc., that help women face institutions and develop their capacities in communication and exchange.

At the end of the training, a session of evaluation was organized and one of the main questions was, "What kind of changes have you observed in your behaviour in dealing with foreigners to your small environment?"

The answer of this woman was very eloquent. "Before starting this training," she said, "when I spoke with influential or powerful persons (influential according to age, gender or social status) I looked down, I couldn't answer, my voice quavered, only some movements of my head were perceptible. But as my training advanced and my relations with others, individuals and groups, thrived, I felt more comfortable in all my relations. Then, and progressively, when I spoke with the same persons, my eyes left the ground to come up to their chests, sometimes after, my eyes arose to their chin to reach their face, and finally to look into each other's eyes. The first time I did it, it was exciting; I saw a light around me. I felt myself as a person who has something to say and whose speech, whose words, have significance and to whom the others are available to listen. I felt that I am a free person; equal to the others even if the situation is asymmetric. I enjoyed my full dignity."

thoroughly economized society. In this case, varying lifestyles simply collide, and I think that this was always connected with the protest against a given economized system. By the way, would this lifestyle perhaps point to the quality of life which was mentioned by Professor Ott?

what remains, is the worry of many people in face of globalization

**MIRDAMADI** Many people say: yesterday there was the radio, today the television emerges, tomorrow there will be the internet, and slowly, perhaps unnoticed by many of us this continues until it affects the nerve centre of our culture and religion. When

we declare that all people have the right to their religion and culture, how can this right be maintained in the process of globalization?

**POTZ** For someone working in a factory and assembling a car, this problem does not exist at all. The person concerned has to work the same way wherever he is, whether in Tehran or elsewhere.

let us strengthen hope for a better world

**BSTEH** Thankful for the presentations and all the contributions to the discussion on this first day of our meeting, I would like to add the request, when the time has come, to help handing on what was discussed at this

Round Table. Others may then be strengthened in their hope for a better world wherever they are and in whatever conditions they live, all who feel united as seekers on their way to God and as seekers after a just world.



What we may conclude is that the situation of vulnerability, of material and intellectual poverty could be overcome through education and training, because they

- empower people to be in charge of their lives, to make informed choices and to take advantage of new opportunities,
- give voice to disadvantaged people, strengthen their confidence to participate in community affairs and influence political issues. Then, education becomes a fundamental basis in constructing democratic societies,
- foster equity and social cohesion by providing people with access to productive assets,
- reduce the burden of poverty,
- bring with them the chance of prosperity, and hope for the future,
- finally they open the doors to a life of dignity and independence for people and for countries.

Indeed, the link between education and poverty has been much debated these last decades, because the undereducated are more likely to be represented in the ranks of the poor and especially among women. Thus, in the increasingly knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, education will be an even more critical determinant of poverty or wealth.

This presentation will be structured around three points:

After a brief definition of poverty and its links with injustice, we present the first point which tries to look briefly at the situation of poverty and injustice worldwide. The second point analyses the policies implemented to eradicate poverty. The third topic examines the causes of the failure of these policies and the conclusion deals with a possible solution related to global learning.

#### *A comprehensive approach of poverty and injustice*

Poverty has been a subject of discussion for many centuries dating back to civilizations before Christ and the Prophet Muhammad. Poverty has been described as the enemy of mankind. It strips people of their livelihood, making them endure deprivation and humiliation, breaching their fundamental rights and creating a social injustice which deeply affects the implementation of democracy and the reinforcement of a state of law.

Of course, poverty is much more than simply inadequate income or deprivation. Poverty entails a lack of authority, lack of knowledge, lack of opportunity as well as lack of income and capital. However, lack of edu-

cation perpetuates poverty, and poverty constrains access to schooling, training and access to knowledge.

Poverty generates inequity, which leads to injustice and human rights violations; poverty is a worldwide problem whose roots are inequality.

It is necessary then to make a distinction between 'poverty of income,' measured by per capita spending, 'poverty of opportunity' which is measured in terms of access to basic services such as health care and education, and 'poverty of mind' which is characterized by selfishness, lack of solidarity and exclusion.

Nowadays, we see that the fight against poverty is at the heart of the development agenda. Although bridges, roads, schools and hospitals may be built, business may be thriving and trade booming, poverty has not been reduced and development practitioners have failed somewhere. Why?

- Because the policies of development have been imported and these same policies have been implemented in widely different environments;
- because globalization with its extreme liberalization of economies, its global open markets and its excessive development of technology and information has enlarged the poor classes all over the world;
- because poverty became part of the economic and social world structure and quite a necessity for the international organizations, for States, for NGOs, but not for the poor who are suffering in silence. The sustainable development is replaced by the sustainable poverty.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The situation of poverty and inequity in our present world

1.1 It is estimated that 1.5 billion people live on less than \$1 per day. This number is increasing steadily as civil wars, loss of employment and the restructuring of economies are creating new poor groups.

1.2 The majority of the 1.5 billion people living in poverty are women. In addition the gap between men and women caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the last decade so that we talk today about the feminization of poverty.

Women living in poverty are often denied access to critical resources, such as credit, land or inheritance. Their labour goes unrewarded and unrecognized. Their health care and nutritional needs are not given prior-

<sup>1</sup> F. de Bernard, *La pauvreté durable. Le gouvernement de la pauvreté*. Paris, 2002.



ity. They also lack sufficient access to education and services, and their participation in decision making is minimal.

1.3 Every year, 12 million children under five die as a direct result of avoidable diseases associated with poverty. Education could save many lives. Some data point out that each year the mother spends in primary school, reduces the risks of premature death by around 8 %. Poverty creates also an environment that can often lead to parental neglect and child abuse. We should attack poverty to improve the well-being of children.

In a situation of extreme poverty, girls are particularly at risk as they tend to inherit the poverty of their mothers. They are prone to abuse in all forms and very often confined to households in which they are virtually slaves.<sup>2</sup> Other groups of poor children that deserve special attention are children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, street children and disabled children.

10 million children in the world are working in domestic services according to the *International Labour Organization Report*. They are experiencing all the forms of exploitation and repression. In Latin America the proportion of child workers in domestic services is alarming. 60 % of girls between 10 and 14 are involved in these kinds of jobs.

So, getting all children into school and especially girls, is more than a fundamental right, it is one of the most effective ways to develop a nation and invest its citizens with their rightful powers.

Economic injustice persists in spite of the longest period of economic prosperity. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen. Tens of millions, particularly women, children, disabled persons and the elderly live in poverty.

1.4 The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of more than a trillion US dollars, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 % of the world's population (3 billion people).

The three richest people's assets exceed the combined gross domestic product of 48 developing countries.

In this year's *State of the World Report 2004* the Worldwatch Institute in Washington draws the world's attention to the fact that 12 % of the world population which lives in North America and Western Europe account for

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls (Ouagadougou, March 1993).

60 % of global consumer spending, while one third of the world population that lives in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the globe's poorest regions, account for only 3.2 %.

The *UNDP Report 1998* emphasized that the richest one fifth of the world's people consumes 45 % of all the fish and meat while the poorest fifth just 5 %. The richest one also consumes 58 % of energy while the poorest fifth consumes less than 4 %. They also use 74 % of all the telephone lines while the poorest fifth have access to 1.1 %. In 1998, the average African household consumed 20 % less in general than it did a quarter of a century ago.

Poor, undereducated, prone to diseases and human right abuses, a large proportion of the people in this world are barely surviving in dramatic conditions. According to the *World Bank Report 2002/2003* the major causes of poverty vary across countries. The report stressed that the main factors behind chronic poverty are high illiteracy rates, low level of production technology and underdeveloped rural infrastructures.

Poverty is at the same time cause and effect of insufficient access to education, a weak graduation rate and low quality. Non-access to school or dropping out of school because of poverty guarantees perpetuation of the poverty cycle.

Some examples through the five world continents express the strong link between education, poverty and injustice.

#### *Poverty in USA*

The US Census Bureau published in 1996 some alarming figures that 13.8 % of Americans are living in poverty, and that poverty affects all ages, but an astonishing 48 % of its victims are children:

- about 15 million children, one out of every four, live below the official poverty line;
- 22 % of Americans under 18, and 25 % under 12 are hungry or at risk of being hungry;
- every 2.660 children are born in poverty, 27 die because of it.

Poverty deeply affects American women:

- in 2000, 12 million women were living with incomes below the federal poverty level;
- among adult women, black and Hispanic women have the highest percentage living below the poverty level.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Women's health in USA. US Census Bureau, 2002.



We are witnessing new manifestations of poverty among young teenagers, and especially in USA and other developed countries. A study led in California points out the important role of poverty in teenage pregnancy and childbearing. The proportion of families living below poverty level was highly related to the birthrate among teenagers and remained by far the most important factor related to the birthrate among young teenagers, followed by the level of adult education. Race and ethnicity were weakly related to birthrate, but poverty and education were significantly related to it.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning Canada, women constitute the majority of the poor. One out of five Canadian women is living in poverty, which represents more than 3 million women.<sup>5</sup>

### *Poverty in Africa*

◦ A report released by the World Economic Forum held in Mozambique 30/31 May, 2004 described Africa's poor economic performance as the worst 20th century tragedy in the aftermath of decolonization.

◦ The UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) said on May 21, 2004 that poverty levels on the African continent had increased by 43 % in the last 10 years, with women making up 80 % of the people living on less than a dollar a day, despite the fact that women in sub-Saharan Africa represent 60 % of the officially unrecognized sector, they provide about 70 % of the total agricultural labour and produce about 90 % of the food.

◦ According to the director of the ECA's African Centre for Gender and Development, poverty has been exacerbated by the unequal distribution of resources between men and women, and the rising HIV/AIDS infection rates especially among women and girls. Today it is estimated that 27 million Africans are living with HIV and AIDS; in 2003 two million died while another three million were infected.

◦ About 300 million people live in poverty in Africa, and the World Bank estimates that African economies would need to grow by 5 % a year just to keep this number from rising. If the number of people living in extreme poverty is to be halved by 2015, as called for by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), not only would economies need substantial

<sup>4</sup> D. Kirby – K. Coyle – J. B. Gould, "Manifestations of Poverty and Birthrates Among Young Teenagers in California Zip Code Areas," in: *Family Planning Perspectives* 33/2 (2001) 63–69.

<sup>5</sup> *Women in Canada 2000: A Gender-based Statistical Report*. Ministry of Industry, Ottawa 2000, p. 137.

growth of at least 7 %, but incomes would also have to be distributed more equitably.

In fact, African economies expanded by 3.7 % in 2003, the highest rate in four years. Progress was supported by debt relief and rising commodity prices. In spite of this progress, Africa will probably fail to meet the MDGs, which include halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015.

Indeed, past colonial behaviour and trade practices by the Western countries are seen as having contributed to the continent's woes. We should add conflicts and wars, a phenomenon that is known to increase poverty and undermines all attempts in constructing a sustainable development.

### *Poverty in Latin America*

Concerning Latin America, there are more than 200 million poor people according to the 2002 study of the Commission of Economics for Latin America. Very damaged by the economic crisis, Latin America is experiencing increasing poverty rates.

The drastic magnitude of change in the poverty rates for some countries is alarming, they reflect significant deteriorations of economic and social indicators in a short time: Panama 30.3 % poverty rate, Argentine 30.3 %, Brazil, 36.9 %.

### *Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region*

Mapping the true dimensions of income poverty in the Arab states is very complex.

The World Bank has published income poverty estimates for seven countries based on the national level of poverty lines. The most recent figures, indicate that poverty rates vary from 10 % to 20 reaching 46 % in some Arab countries.<sup>6</sup>

The *Millennium Development Report for the Arab Countries 2003* underlines that today, the Arab states face significant challenges. About 10 million children still do not go to school. Even though women's access to education has tripled since 1970, gender disparities persist. Over half of the women remain illiterate; women occupy less than five per cent of the seats in Arab legislatures.

<sup>6</sup> The Millennium Development Goals in Arab Countries. UNDP Report 2003.



In 2002, according to the World Bank estimates for MENA, one out of every five people live on less than \$2 a day. But with regard to school enrollment and health indicators the region lags behind the rest of the developing world. Moreover, the gender difference is among the largest in the world.

We have to emphasize that poverty is more pronounced in the rural area, where more than 70 % of the poor are living, and when they move to the cities they join the ranks of the urban poor.

#### *Poverty in Asia*

In Asia is living the majority of the world's present poor, 65 %, and especially in South Asia where some of the highest incidences of poverty are found.

But Asia has much to teach the other developing countries, notably South East Asia, in which there have been the most important strides in reduction of global poverty in the latter decades of the last century. The case of Thailand and Malaysia that had per capita income similar to sub-Saharan Africa thirty years ago, they are moving today into the prosperity levels of middle income countries.

Similar progress has been made in China and the President of the World Bank pointed to China during the Shanghai-Conference, May 27, 2004 as an example of scaling up the fight against poverty. In two decades, China has lifted more than 300 million people out of poverty.

In the 1990s Asia and the Pacific region made impressive progress in poverty reduction. The percentage of the population below the poverty line declined in the region from 32 % in 1990 to 22 % in 2000. Since the Asian financial crisis in 1997 absolute poverty has increased; the crisis affected countries, and the poor, especially women and children have suffered the most.

These various examples express the great vulnerability of a part of the population of the world, and the difficulties and obstacles the people are facing to find a way out of this situation. Of course, the developed countries, the international organizations, the UN system are redoubling their efforts in fighting poverty, combating injustice, inequality and inequity all over the world.

#### 2. Many policies have been initiated to fight poverty

Fighting poverty is the main concern of the rulers, the international institutions, NGOs, but all their actions have their roots in religious values and

norms, human rights principles and the international conventions and local traditions.

Religions play an important role in social development and reforms. They can have a crucial impact in eradicating poverty by reference to the practices they established and the ideology they conveyed.

In Islam, for example, the Holy text and the Prophet's tradition dealt with every aspect of life related to the Muslims, individuals and community. These include economic, social doctrinal and behavioural facets.

Islam wants to meet the challenges of poverty by encouraging charity, called *ṣadaqa*, by commanding taxes on wealth (*zakāt*), by developing the *waqf*, which is a donation that contributes to alleviate the poor and needy people's lives.

*zakāt* is one of the five pillars of Islam and requires a person to make an annual alms payment of 2.5 % of his or her excess wealth accumulated over one year, which ensures that wealth continues to circulate through the different classes of the society.

*ṣadaqa* is charity, it is one of the ways of combating poverty. The *ṣadaqa* in the Qur'ān must be seen as a permanent institution.

*waqf* is considered as a grant to both dead and living people. The dead acquire a posthumously permanent reward and the living an endowment which is neither granted, nor inherited and cannot be consumed. The role of *waqf* is very important in health care, education and social work.

The Qur'ān condemns accumulation of wealth and arrogance generated thereby. It insists that wealth should be justly distributed, not remain concentrated in the hands of the rich. The concept of *'adl* and *ihsān* (justice and benevolence) are the two key terms employed by the Qur'ān to stress the need for economic justice. The Qur'ān requires the faithful to avoid extravagance and gives the advice not to become prodigals.

Qur'ān and Sunna emphasize spending money for worthy ends to promote the welfare and the progress of society.

Interest is viewed as destabilizing society; money is made from money without any productive activity. Poor individuals and nations are often trapped into borrowing to alleviate or eliminate poverty, but the burden of debt becomes swollen by interest and the result is the widening of the gulf between rich and poor.

The main principles conveyed by Islam are based on sharing, giving, helping and backing; they constitute the basis of human rights.



"He who sleeps on a full stomach whilst his neighbour goes hungry is not one of us." A saying of the prophet.

The international institutions, the States, and other partners make multiple efforts to alleviate poverty and to implement justice and equity in different countries. Their initiatives are fundamental to fight poverty by establishing strong cooperation, reducing debt, and making investments.

#### *Some international initiatives*

UN conferences have made a lot of commitments to the eradication of poverty.

Eradicating poverty was one of the commitments of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, where abject poverty was considered as severe injustice and an abuse of human rights.

Subsequently, the UN General Assembly declared the period 1997–2006 as the first UN decade for the eradication of poverty. The UN decade for poverty eradication is a worldwide endeavour to confront the problem of human degradation caused by abject poverty. In this context, education plays an important role.

The Millennium Development Goals call for

- eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than \$1 per day and the people who suffer from hunger;

- achieving universal primary education by ensuring that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;

- promoting gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

The UN commission on the status of women discussed the issues of women and poverty at its 40th session in 1996, and prepared further action to be taken by UN member States and the International Community:

- including the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all poverty eradication policies and programmes;

- establishing policies that ensure that all women have adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, health maternity, child bearing, widowhood, disability and old age.

#### *Initiatives of some States*

1. In 1997, Bill Clinton announced a new partnership for African economic growth, and signed into law the first US Trade Bill for Africa in 2000, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

The act opens a new era in US-African trade relations. It elevates the importance of the trade relationship between USA and Africa. It opens the US market to African goods and establishes the highest level of policy dialogue. It will also increase investment to Africa, promote a free market, and stimulate economic growth across the region because USA believes that through trade and investment the continent will develop a sustainable economic growth. AGOA shows the power of trade to lift people out of poverty.

2. The participation of six African leaders in the "G 8" Summit was crucial. They must ask rich nations to become more involved in the continent's economic renaissance and to take notice of progress in building democracy and ending war. Africa would like to have more commitment from developing countries to help economic growth.

3. Hope for Africa is an alternative proposed to the African Growth and Opportunity Act based on the recognition that African nations have the right to determine their own approach to economic development, rather than being conditioned by adopting a "one size fits all" economic model.

The initiative New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is considered to be a mechanism to encourage good governance and an important breakthrough in attracting foreign investment and creating a new political climate for growth.

4. In Washington there is a new bipartisan effort in the House of Representatives to cancel the debt of the poorest countries. The Jubilee Act of 2004 would eliminate \$300 billion that African nations owe the international community. Congresswoman Maxime Walters required the IMF to cancel all the debt owed by heavily indebted poor countries. She also said that debt forgiveness is a Biblical concept that is still relevant today.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Initiatives of some international institutions*

1. Strategies to reduce poverty were implemented all over the world, following the MDGs and UNDP studies on poverty eradication in developing

<sup>7</sup> J. de Capua, "Jubilee Act of 2004 Would Cancel Debt of Poorest Nations," in: *Voice of America: English to Africa*. 4 June, 2004.



countries trying to identify other strategies and objectives which contribute to poverty reduction; these include not only economic growth but all the indicators of human development.

2. The World Bank and the IMF are implementing new frameworks to address poverty by aligning social sector development closely with macro-economic policies and strategies.

The unique Conference on Poverty Reduction known as Shanghai-Conference, May 25 to 27, 2004 and organized by the World Bank gathered more than 1000 people from developing countries who analyzed more than 100 case studies sharing knowledge and practical experiences that shed more light into experiences and the reasons behind success and failure in large scale poverty reduction.

The Shanghai Consensus concluded that achieving the MDGs will depend not only on increasing resources, but also on a renewed commitment to adapt and to accelerate the successful approaches.

3. UNESCO have prepared various papers on poverty eradication within its fields of competence, and approach the issues through different projects. Poverty eradication is a priority in the program and budget for 2002/2003, and appropriate initiatives will be taken in all UNESCO programs during the coming six years of their work.

Numerous NGOs are working on eradicating poverty, their efforts being addressed to women and children to meet their fundamental needs, to provide literacy and additional support for schooling. Such experience usually combines school education, literacy, health care, counselling and income generating activities.

Despite all these efforts and the multiple strategies, poverty is still present and its roots are stronger than before. The principle of eradicating poverty has remained only on the planning papers, and on the lip services of the States.

### 3. Failure of the policies fighting poverty

3.1 The targets set by the international community for halving world poverty could be missed by more than a century, Britain's finance minister said June 1, 2004 to the Independent newspaper, "We would fail to meet each Millennium Development Goal in Africa not just for 10 years but for 100 years."

3.2 The 1990 Conference on Education for All pledged to achieve universal primary education by 2000. But in 2000, 115 million school age children

were still not in school, 56 % of them girls, and 94 % were in developing countries mostly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The Millennium Development Goals set a more realistic but still difficult deadline of 2015 when all children everywhere should be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

According to the World Bank Study 37 of 115 developing countries have achieved universal primary school completion, another 32 are likely to achieve the goal, but the remaining countries risk not reaching this goal unless progress is accelerated.

3.3 The level of international aid to reduce poverty has still not been reached. The agreed UN target for aid from developed countries is 0.7 % of Gross National Income, but this proportion has been dropped by several countries and become far too small.

Gordon Brown (minister of finance UK) has also been pressing other rich countries over the last year to back his proposal for an international finance facility (IFF) which would raise annual aid to poor countries to \$100 billion from the \$50 billion it is now (fifty countries have already indicated support for the proposal).

3.4 If foreign aid is considered as crucial for helping some countries to escape poverty, we have to be aware that "for every \$7 the poor world receives in aid from the rich, it pays back \$90 in debt repayments".<sup>8</sup>

Developing countries have been spending about half of their budget on international financial obligations which should be more available for education and social programs in order to ease poverty.

3.5 According to the World Bank President the world spends every year \$900 billion for defence, and developed countries spend \$300 billion for agriculture subsidies when they devote less than \$50 billion as aid to the poor countries.

The focusing on security, the standardization of security measures around the world dictated by the American administration, can be understood not only as an attempt to increase security but also as a necessity to raise the security budget and as an obligation to share the costs around the world.

3.6 Poverty reduction requires development-led trade. But, since the global war on terrorism began, industrialized countries are apparently increasingly interested in providing aid for immediate social needs, but not

<sup>8</sup> P. Bone, "Generous Aid Equals Greater Security," in: *www.theage.com.au*. May 31, 2004.



for infrastructure improvements. Such aid is directed at speeding up the formation of capital and internal requirements.

3.7 Developed countries are giving with one hand, and taking away with the other; they have given aid to these countries while demanding debt repayments from them. The British finance minister described poor country debt as "the single greatest cause of poverty and injustice across the globe." In many countries of the globe the debt has been paid over and over again.

Some initiatives have been taken to alleviate the debt burden, as in the last "G 8" meeting in June 2004. Among its conclusions it was agreed to extend for another two years a popular debt relief that had been scheduled to go out of existence at the end of 2004. The "G 8" countries also agreed to provide for bigger amounts of debt forgiveness.

President Wolfensohn emphasized during the Shanghai Conference that the spirit generated by the meeting should inspire rich countries to intensify assistance to their counterparts that have yet to benefit from the recent global wave of progress in economic and social development

A lot of policies that deal with poverty have failed. Despite the entire international and national efforts, the search for alternative development theories, the multiple strategies which have been implemented, and despite the relatively higher growth rates some developing countries have achieved, the scale of poverty is even larger today than it was in the past.

### Conclusion

No observer aware of development affairs is content with what has been achieved today. The development effort launched these past decades remains conspicuous and tragically beset with unacceptable suffering as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen.

If the concept of a vicious circle of poverty has dominated modern economic thinking, we are witnessing the emergence of a new concept which is the virtuous circle of wealth as a stepping stone for the economic development. This concept sets out a deep ethical maxim that wealth is obtained through labour, cooperation, solidarity, sacrifice and austerity.

Of course, economic growth alone will not pull people out of poverty, what is needed is pro-poor growth; economic growth and social well-being which reduce poverty.

Indeed, any successful approach to removing poverty, to providing justice for the poor must necessarily be inclusive and integrative. All the

interventions aimed at removing injustices and improving the access of the poor to justice should aim at setting in motion a dynamism that is conducive to creating a virtuous spiral that takes advantage of the inter-dependences among freedom, the power of collective actions, and global learning.

Eradicating poverty has no miracle formula, it needs global learning:

- learning in the sense of individual and collective enhancement of the abilities of society; not only adjusting to imported change, but managing change in its own purposes; learning which helps to break out of the frame of mind that accepts passivity, resignation and silence;
- learning that individuals and people have rights and that they have the potential to use new opportunities;
- learning to empower the poor through both knowledge and organizations: that adds the benefits of confidence and self-esteem in their dealings with public officials. The articulation of material, social and spiritual aspirations is an essential precondition to global learning.

The experience of the last three decades in the field of development emphasize that the bureaucratic approach to the poor has to be changed and new action is needed to mobilize internal motivation that only self-organization can bring.

However, the need to learn is not limited to the poor. It is the very essence of the development process and requires that all segments and levels of society meet new learning needs. Rulers will have to learn, communities will have to learn, governments, bureaucracies and institutions will have to learn. This kind of learning must involve governments as well as citizens, the poor as well as the rich, the planners and administrators as well as their target groups.

The great challenge of our time is to make globalization mean more than bigger markets. To build a more human globalization, we must learn how to govern better and at different levels, and how to govern better together, governments, institutions, citizens, and how to found our relations on ethics and values of solidarity, tolerance and the sharing of prosperity and well-being.

Global learning ensures

- fundamental human freedoms,
- freedom from want,
- freedom from fear,
- freedom for the future generations to sustain their lives.



This new vision of global learning emphasizes a holistic interdisciplinary approach based on the development of knowledge, the acquisition of skills and the necessary changes in values, behaviours and the improvement of self-confidence. Such vision requires reorienting education policies and practices, reorienting the economy for a more equal distribution of wealth and empowering every citizen: women and men, young and old, rural and urban, in order for them to express their own opinions, to make reasoned choices, participate effectively in decisions and to be aware of all the consequences of their actions.

## Questions and Interventions

why do initiatives to fight poverty not bring forth the desired results?

**MARBOE** When we hear about the many initiatives to fight poverty even on an international level, the question suggests itself why do these initiatives produce such little results? It is indeed shocking that in spite of all these initiatives poverty worldwide does not decrease.

**BELARBI** I think all these undertakings, of course, are interesting. Being implemented, however, they do not bring forth the desired effects. Why not? As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, these initiatives do not really respond to the given situation. Second, these initiatives are determined outside the country in whose interest they had been initiated. Third, because the engagement of the people involved is too weak. For these or other reasons these initiatives do not simply miss their target, but may be they do not follow the aim for which they were started.

In fact, the evaluation of many initiatives demonstrates that they missed their targets. For example, one of the Millennium Goals is to ensure "that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling." Will this target really be achieved, if we take into account that already on the occasion of the last UNESCO "World Conference on Education for All" in 1990<sup>1</sup> the effort was made to extend education in the field of primary schooling – but now we find even more than 100 million children out of school? Although the problem is certainly very complex, it is perhaps the individual States where the trouble lies: they are not capable of implementing education the way it should be done according to their local circumstances and environment, independent of the controlling influence of some of the various international organizations.

Does it not happen that sometimes international organizations use poor people for their own purposes? Who is really working for the well-being of the poor? We have to ask these questions of ourselves, of international organizations and of the individual nation-states.

how can we promote self-esteem and self-confidence among people?

**GABRIEL** At the outset of her paper, Professor Belarbi told a beautiful story, which illustrated the overall goal of education, i. e. the promotion of self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, John Rawls, the well-known American ethicist, once rightfully explained that the

<sup>1</sup> The World Conference on Education for All 1990: Jomtien, Thailand, 5–9 March, 1990.



highest value of a society lies with people who are self-confident. In this context I would like to ask Mrs. Belarbi in her competence as a sociologist of education: how is it possible in an Islamic country to harmonize the traditional values and the Western values, the religious and the in some way secular values, to convey to people this sense of self-esteem and self-confidence? For obviously, a quantitatively understood schooling only is insufficient, at issue are also contents and above all methods.

**an open education is the aim, reforms are under way** **BELARBI** I think schooling and education are the main problems all over the world, and each country has to deal with it in its own way. I do not think that, compared to other countries, we will find anything specific concerning education in Muslim countries. In primary schools Islamic religion is taught for the purpose of religious instruction and as a way of life.

But there is sometimes a tension between the way we are teaching religion and other subjects, such as history, geography, etc., because the way we are teaching religion is sometimes very traditional, leading to resignation and passive acceptance of what happens in our lifetime. If we are taught, for instance, in an undifferentiated manner that our life is in God's hand, this might easily result in a state of mind which quite generally refuses to take the initiative; it may be our children's way to gladly open up for new developments, to act on their own initiative and shape their lives according to their own responsibility. If you take, for example, Morocco we are now about to revise all the textbooks and programs of religious instruction in general, with the aim of presenting a very open-minded view of religion. During the next 6 years we are also trying to integrate in the textbooks the issue of human rights and the principles of democracy. Perhaps it will even take more time, because school is not the main educator; we have also to take account of family, media and last not least on what happens on the streets. Culture is everywhere and informal education very important indeed. With regard to a thorough change, we most probably also need strong growth, certain political changes and in general a lot of developments on all levels of society.

**educational initiatives to be linked up more effectively** **POTZ** To refer once again back to what Mrs. Marboe explained at the beginning. The ILO document which was cited extensively in my paper, complains about the fact that there are many initiatives that run parallel to one another and still everybody has the feeling of some kind of a standstill. What are actually the possibilities to react to

all the social and cultural implications of globalization and this generally lamented standstill? The main tenor of this document is to underline that we should try to link up all the many initiatives, also and especially in the domain of education, and to establish a monitoring, a permanent system of control and report with the objective to increase transparency and to find out the true reasons for the lack of appropriate results although so much is done to improve the situation.

**globalization like an open market** **BELARBI** Globalization is now the main channel of our problems. But there are also other problems, such as bad governance or lack of governance in some countries since, in their way of thinking, people might find it difficult to implement good governance, to accept democracy or human rights, etc.

**time for transition is required and a well-organized society** Under the circumstances, globalization is like an open market which however cannot operate in anarchy but needs an organized society. And some societies are just not organized. They are living in a multi-cultural situation, surrounded by various countries with different cultures, but even more multi-cultural inside the country. In this context also Western culture plays an important role, because it is very strong and it is the culture of the international institutions who give financial support. No wonder that we have frequently difficulties in implementing this culture in our countries. Western people sometimes cannot understand that if we implement this new culture it will disturb or perhaps even partly destroy the traditional structure of our societies. We need time for transition. But globalization forces us to go faster than we have the means of moving. And this is our problem.

**taking interest between usury and productive capital** **KHOURY** A small remark about the problem of interest. There is an extensive discussion going on in the Muslim world about the difference between interest and usury. If we say that taking interest means working with non-productive capital the question arises: what about the productive capital, what about the world of banking?

**good governance is necessary and the struggle against corruption** Another question refers to the problem whether the rich countries are not put too quickly in the dock when we ask for the reasons of poverty in the world. We should also look for the reasons in the various countries themselves. One aspect which may also have a share in the poor economic situation of a country was already



mentioned: the lack of good governance. In addition, there may be also corruption that makes many countries that are poor still poorer, and last not least the gap between the rich of these countries and the poor.

interest leads to debts that are difficult to bear

**BELARBI** The issue of interest indeed is a very technical problem. I dealt with this question just to explain that it is not allowed in the Qur'an to take interest: it may lead to debts, and the burden of debts is not easy

to bear for the poor.

the colonial problem lasts till now

To my mind, corruption in the poor countries has a lot to do with the developed countries. Is it not largely also generated and implemented by the latter? There is widespread corruption in fact in the developed

countries too, and they exported it, as it were, into the poor countries. It is precisely this problem that has also a substantial share in depriving people of education. And we must not forget that all these poor countries were previously colonized, which means that they are submitted to a special kind of treatment by the developed countries.

attempts to nationalize *zakāt*, *ṣadaqa* and *waqf*?

**MAHMOOD T.** Mrs. Belarbi has referred in her presentation to the Islamic economic concepts of *zakāt*, *ṣadaqa* and *waqf*. Do these institutions in the Maghreb remain in the domain of the individual as it was in the

inception of the Islam, or have any of these been nationalized for the purpose of revolutionizing the economy of the country? We know that in 1957/58 the Maghreb had taken the initiative of codifying the entire religious law, a process that resulted in the implementation of *Mudawana al-Ahwāl al-Shakhsiya*, the Code of Islamic law; and that last year this Code had been subjected to some revolutionary changes. The question that interests me is whether these recent changes or any other law has tried to nationalize *zakāt*, *ṣadaqa* and *waqf*, or they still remain in the domain of the individual?

the aforementioned concerns belong to the domain of the individual

**BELARBI** I think that *zakāt*, *ṣadaqa* and *waqf* depend on the behavior of each individual, they were not codified anyhow. In Morocco, for example, 6 or 7 years ago they tried to reshape the whole matter of *zakāt* and codify it, but eventually it was not implemented.

much varying application

And I think that *ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* are used by the fundamentalists to improve the situation of the poor, whereas *waqf* is codified by the State and controlled

by everyone. In Morocco and elsewhere too, a codification of *zakāt* is implemented by the Islamists, including the question how much you have to pass on from your wealth every year. In any case, the three domains are not codified in Morocco, they remain dependent on the individuals, on the faith of each individual and on his/her relations with the others; sometimes they are not collected. We also establish foundations and sometimes the State gives *ṣadaqa* to people in order to hand it over to foundations.

unjust prices for raw material

**KHIDOYATOV** We have to speak in this context about two very important things. First, there is the question of unjust prices for raw materials which the Western

countries receive from the Asian countries. It is indeed amazing; the Asian countries have 60 % of all the riches of the world, and to this day they are very poor. This is due to present-day injustice in the world trading system.

certain dispositions serve legalizing poverty

Another root of poverty in Muslim countries refers to the Qur'anic prohibition of *ribā*, i. e. of interest, and subsequently to the fact that there are no banks in Muslim countries. In Saudi Arabia the sheikhs make

a lot of money, and they send this money to American banks. It is interesting that it was only in Muslim countries that something like a philosophy of poverty emerged, a legalization of poverty – through the dervish order and in Sufism.

new orientation is urgently called for

I think we have to say frankly and directly: Islam needs a reformation. In Europe, during the 15th and 16th centuries the Reformation movements

were highly important for the development of the continent and for the increase of its productivity as well. But Islam appears divided. In place of a joint struggle for reformation, we observe numerous divisions and currents. There was some initial movement towards reformation at the end of the 19th century – originating from the Mufti of Cairo who wished to give our spirit a new impulse. Without this reformation our riches such as oil, copper, etc., will continue to enrich the Western banks and companies. The further enrichment of Western countries and impoverishment of the Eastern countries will be the consequences of globalization.

the renewal of Muslim ideology imperative

A brief remark about the difference between absolute and relative poverty. Because it is absolute poverty when people must live on \$1 per day; relative poverty, however, when in a rich country the average profit per head is about \$24.000 a year, but some people have to live on \$10 a



day. Therefore we are obliged to reflect also on the shortcomings of the educational system in Muslim countries. This is our experience in Central Asia too. I would therefore like to put forward the need for reformation in the Muslim ideology.

... following the path of *idjtihād* – of interpretation

**BELARBI** In my opinion it is a little bit difficult to speak of reformation in Islam since we know of the need for renewed interpretation but not for reformation. Islam can be adapted always and everywhere. What we

need may be rather that some of our rulers should become aware of the present-day evolution of the world and also of Islam. But even if they welcomed new interpretations, they would perhaps still encounter strong reactions on the part of the people, especially of the Islamists.

Mr. Tahir Mahmood mentioned the issue of the family code. In Morocco, we are glad to have a revived family code that is very modern, very progressive. It gives to women all the required rights inside the family. It is an important step in the right direction, a measure long wished for by women. But Islamists initially did not want to accept it. Then His Majesty the King as the Head of the Faithful declared that he wanted this code in this way and no other. The code was discussed in and passed by the parliament.

As for other issues, we still have lots of difficulties in implementing them. Yet we believe in Islam in the same way that other forces claim to be believing. And Islam will be adapted to the needs of our time. Maybe, as women, we could not live in the period of the Prophet, but we are now living in 2004 – the state has changed and we have changed also the lives of our younger generation for a better future. So, all in all, I think that the concept of *idjtihād* is present and is one of the pillars of Islam.

**KHIDOYATOV** Definitely, also the *Hadīths* are a place where inspirations and elements of renewal may be discovered.

faults on all parts

**IQBAL** This lack of achieving the goals of education for all and the different paradoxes which arise out of the varying perceptions of the donor countries and

the recipient countries, maybe it is a lack of discipline concerning the question how education can be enforced at the international level, or even of organization and self-examination. For instance, like the donor countries, when they are giving, sometimes it is more show and less intent.

monitoring system indispensable

And then the question of corruption on the part of recipients: how much of the money funding gets to the school children, how much ends up with the

intermediaries? The trickle down is a very small percentage. Somehow we must have a monitoring system, as in the case of the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) which was initially very controversial. But now, I think more than 187 countries have ratified it out of 191. And they had imposed a self-discipline that they will send annual reports. Furthermore, visits on behalf of the monitoring standing commission to the various countries are foreseen to see how the measures are being implemented which the multilateral treaty has specified.

lack of education the major factor for poverty

Undoubtedly, the lack of education, as was already stressed by Mrs. Belarbi, is the major factor for poverty. If all the world's children had no matter what kind of education, even basic primary education, so

much of the causes of poverty could be eradicated, because it has been found that family numbers go down where mothers are educated. Like in Pakistan we have families of 6 and 7 children, but where mothers are educated, automatically the number of children will come down to 2. Then the level of education of the children will rise and the quality of life will go up in the house. But how to monitor it? Can we not, similarly to the aforementioned “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”, organize a Convention for Education for All in the world? I support this idea and have recommended to this end a self-monitoring arrangement.

The news, as on CNN everyday now, speak of \$8 billion that have been marked for reconstruction of Iraq. But only \$315 million have been spent – and most of the money was used to contract out people who were going there instead of the regular army to be the combatants in Iraq because people were not willing to go. So what was supposed to be for reconstruction, out of \$8 billion only \$315 million were delivered, and \$315 did not go for education, health and civic amenities, more than 50 % went for combatants. So there must be some monitoring, but who does it? A third party?, or the recipient countries and the donor countries together to check at both ends?

to what is education going to teach?

And then of course the paradox as to what is education going to teach. Particularly after 9/11 in many Muslim countries the *djihādi* education was implemented in the *madrasas*. In this context children certainly are not taught positive things, but to hate and fight. They are given



arms and they are taught that if you go and fight, you will get a reward in the hereafter. But what we need and what Islam is all about, are positive results here in this world *and* the hereafter. Yet how do we manage it?

why not  
institutionalize  
*zakāt, ṣadaqa* und  
*waqf*?

Concerning the question of Dr. Tahir Mahmood about the institutionalization of *zakāt, ṣadaqa* and *waqf* which contribute towards the improvement of society. We have not institutionalized them in a single Muslim country. Why can't we organize it? Maybe this would

be difficult at the individual level. But, as we have just heard, there were also problems with the family law in Morocco. The "Muslim Family Laws Ordinance" was promulgated in 1962 in Pakistan, and it still has not been implemented all over the country. Whereas, in 1939 the colonial rulers, the British, introduced the divorce law which was uniform for all Muslims in India and Pakistan, and nobody protested. It is still in force today. Because if it came through consensus, although introduced by a colonial government, it was accepted.

how to apply  
*idjtiḥād* together

Why do we not allow *ribā* or interest? These and many other questions cannot be ignored. If we all get together, we should be able to find appropriate answers

through *idjtiḥād*. And in a dialogue like this, perhaps, we can come to a consensus and seek help from others to get these things institutionalized for all the Muslim countries. If India has a view and Pakistan has a view, and if Arabia has a view and we sit in the OIC and we decide, we can produce positive results. May be the UN can also act as a catalyst for all these things. Because, having other countries participate, it may be easier to find a common denominator in the fields of education, eradication of poverty, good governance self-monitoring, etc. These are just thoughts that I would like to share, because I feel the biggest problem of the *Umma* is that we do not apply *idjtiḥād*, and we don't do it together.

to overcome  
poverty through  
education

**BELARBI** We have focused our discussion on the importance of education in overcoming poverty. For this reason I spoke about global learning, how to make education more efficient, how to extend education to

everyone on various levels. And here, when I talk about education, it is education for human rights, for solidarity, for more openness and also for peace. We bear in mind certainly many principles of our religions, but they are not implemented in our daily life. I am not going to discuss these problems in broad meetings such as the Arab League or the Organization of the

Islamic Conference, because these problems are taboo there. We are all Muslim societies, we are Muslim countries, but maybe we do not discuss the level of implementation of the real Islam in our countries. I think we all hope that our rulers will be more open in future to taking up these issues and discussing them – because there is no taboo now in the course of the globalization of the economy and culture.



## Poverty and Injustice: A Socio-Political Challenge in the Realm of Minority Affairs

Georges Khodr

Minorities in the world do not necessarily share the same characteristics, nor do they have similar developments in the course of their histories, however it seems that they nonetheless share the same socio-political challenge of poverty and injustice.

Their experience in facing this challenge differ largely according to two main factors. An external factor relates to the nature of the ruling powers and the culture of the majority that surrounds them, it plays an important and major role. Another major and even more important factor relates to the awareness that these minorities have of their own needs and potentials, and the understanding they have of their own identity and role, which are manifest in the dynamics and strategies that move them.

For example, the replacement of the rejection that the Jewish minority faced in the course of its history by a worldwide support is certainly due to the interplay of these two factors; namely, the aggressive attitude of the host countries where this minority lived and the dynamic solidarity which moved this minority towards its dream project the "promised land". The internal dynamic strategy that moved them from rejection to support relied on twinning their potentials and capacities, i. e., their big fortunes and scientific technical knowledge, with targeted networking and well organized planning towards the aggressive actualization of their national dream. The powerful solidarity within the Jewish community has enhanced tremendously their capacities and potentials and allowed them to establish strong political alliances in support of their national project, which they have always viewed as the deliverer from poverty and injustice. It remains unfortunately true that the Jewish minority which has undertaken a colonial project in Palestine has not comprehended that justice is also the quest of the others who live on the same land of Palestine and have a culture and a national destiny of their own. This example shows that the oppressed minority does not automatically understand from its own experience that oppression must not be experienced by any other minority.

A completely different experience is that of the Christians in the East. These have moved from mastery under the Byzantine rule to subjugation



under Islam. Their attempts at investing their technical knowledge in the environment thus established and their compliance with the majority rule did not succeed in allowing them to survive. Christian minorities disappeared from many cities, to name only one, Antioch for example. The rich emigrated, the poor fled. They scattered in the neighbouring countries, they were holding no dream project of a promised land on this earth. They integrated with the Islamic majority rule and offered their technical knowledge and labour. They contributed to creating the socio-political identity of the East. It is largely due to this contribution that the concept of *umma* was overshadowed for years to come by Arab Nationalism. The poisoned conflict opposing the powerful and rich West and the underdeveloped and weakened East in the cold war has drained the Arab nationalism dream leaving all the Arabs – Christians and Muslims – of the East struggling to find for themselves a new understanding for their identity and another project that could bring them together. Would it be erroneous to consider thus that the quasi-impossible dream of an Arab *umma* and the dismantled Arab-nationalistic project have resulted in the birth of fundamentalism?

Why is it then that the curse of poverty and injustice seems to cling to the Arab population and weigh most heavily on its minorities? The corruption of the Arab political systems concentrating power in the hands of the minority of rich rulers drowned the whole population in poverty and injustice.

The ethnic and religious minorities in these countries suffer a double toll of poverty and injustice. Their only way out of this subjugation, if they don't want to emigrate, is to establish new alliances with the powerful. This bilateral relation between one subgroup minority and the powerful authority in the country obstructs the possibility of any solidarity among the various minorities. Thus it appears that the majority of the population, composed of minority groups, is fragmented into religious subgroups with no common national dream/project, not even the dream/project of a nation for all. These subgroup minorities have not been able to unite in solidarity claiming justice and prosperity as a national quest. And we watch minorities competing to get closer to the ruling minority seeking short term means to alleviate their immediate poverty and overcome injustice by sporadic actions.

The challenge is there; it is up to the various minorities to tap their resources and potentials as well as their needs. They are not necessarily poor by the mere fact of their being a minority: in India and Lebanon for instance Christians are not poor. It is also as important for them to construct a positive and effective strategy that allows them to develop their own

community and collaborate with other minorities in a nationally organized effort targeting the alleviation of poverty and injustice for all.

The main weakness of the minorities seems to reside in the disorganized scheme of relations that prevail within these minorities. Although individuals in minority groups may be very rich, if their wealth is not invested to promote the community cause within the overall project of the nation where they exist, poverty and injustice will still weigh very heavily on the population of this minority. The population remains generally very poor while individuals in the same minority group hold relatively sizeable fortunes. The gap between the wealthy individuals and the poverty of the community is sometimes bridged by generous and benevolent donations to the needy of a sporadic and limited kind. They maintain the needy in a subordinate position while the wealthy individuals struggle to integrate with the ruling system. Their access to power is often denied in closed regimes, and although it is possible in more democratic regimes it is often difficult. They resort to foreign external powers to seek support in their political struggle. If this support allows them success and hence access to power, they remain indebted to the external support and invest in promoting the interest of their supporters. The interests in the population of these minorities are not catered for; they remain unattended, unrepresented and thus have no perspective for improving the situation.

A general overview of two concrete examples in Lebanon illustrates two different realities of this analysis.

The Shī'īs – considered a minority although it is growing into a majority in number – are duly represented in the parliament and in the government, while at the same time a growing number of Shī'ī individuals have become wealthy and are numbered among important fortune holders in Lebanon. It remains that the Shī'ī community on the whole still complains of poverty and injustice. The external support that the Shī'īs received during the past three decades (including the years of the war) coupled with their dream/project of liberating from the Israeli occupation the South of Lebanon (mostly populated by Shī'īs) has created new dynamics within their community. It has to be recognized that the gap between their leaders and the population has dramatically been reduced by moving from a traditionally feudal type of relationship to the systematic organization of a political party. The Shī'ī community today displays quite an obvious identification between its leaders and the population. As a result, an increasing number of health care and social centers, as well as schools and youth organizations were



founded. Cultural, religious and socio-political activities proliferated. The achievements unfortunately sometimes violent were successful; the Shī'īs are major players in the balance of internal and external politics in Lebanon. It remains to be seen whether this socio-political change is considered by the Shī'īs themselves as a way to alleviate poverty and injustice!

The other example of a successful minority is that of the Armenians in Lebanon. The gap between the leaders and the Armenian population has always been very much reduced. Their social, educational and cultural institutions funded and supported by Lebanese Armenian prominent figures have been uninterruptedly developing. Their organized solidarity coupled with their serious efforts of hard work has been promoted by their representatives in the government and the parliament as an integrated part of the development of the national project as whole. Armenians have succeeded in tapping their internal resources, potentials and capacities, their leadership proved loyal to their population. This has empowered them to face the socio-political challenge successfully with no need of external foreign support.

These experiences of two different minorities, hosted by the same Lebanese regime differ according to the awareness each of them holds with regard to its identity and to its project and role in the overall development of the Lebanese nation.

In conclusion, minorities today need to face the socio-political challenge of poverty and injustice through a more efficient, well-planned, adequately monitored management of their own resources, potentials and needs as well. It is equally important for them to invest and contribute, in all openness and creative energy in the overall development of the whole nation, of which they are an integral part. Furthermore, each minority is challenged to bring in its own specific contribution – according to the assets of its own identity and resources, no matter how little they are – voicing in all awareness its rights and needs. Furthermore, each minority should be ready to collaborate with other minorities in striving towards the alleviation of poverty and injustice within a sustainable development scheme for the nation as a whole. It is in overcoming feelings of exclusion and striving to contribute and make a difference in the progress of the development of the nation that minorities should claim their rights to sharing in national prosperity and justice. It is equally important that minorities cooperate in their striving and pull their efforts together to bring the majority (or the ruling minority) to seeing that poverty and injustice are a real threat to their power.

## Questions and Interventions

minorities shall cooperate in building up the whole country

– count on them.

**KHODR** Actually, many countries like Lebanon have no majority and minority. They are all minorities. What seems to be important all over the world is to make a distinction between a numeral minority and a psychological minority. In other words, you might have a small number of people in your community, and yet your group may be very powerful. In my country, for instance, the Christian Orthodox are the fourth group only in numbers, but they are very active; they don't appear much in public, but they are in fact everywhere and have not too much of a minority complex. We should be aware of that everywhere in the world, because you must not give the impression, as a minority, of joining forces against a majority and similar moves. I think the only solution is that all these minorities feel that they are united in the same nation, that they are all in the same boat and have to work together towards the unity of all.

legislative provisions too are needed

**KHOURY** Apart from this banding together of the minorities legislative provisions are also needed which respond adequately to the minorities' problems on a state level so that they come into their own.

moral acknowledgment based on the contribution to the best of all

**IQBAL** First I would like to mention an anecdote from the time when the Zoroastrians were expelled from Persia and came to the subcontinent. When they asked for permission to settle and the ruler said, "Our place is full, we have no more room for anybody", the Zoroastrian leader demonstrated how they could be useful: he took a glass of milk which was full and added something like sugar which took no room but sweetened the milk. Thus he showed in which way the minority could be accommodated and how they could benefit the majority. The Zoroastrians have in fact played a big role in philanthropy and they have been honoured in all the places that they have settled down, for they have that much benefitted the country.



benefits of joint electorate

As for the legal aspect in the minorities question: the system of joint electorates seems to be adequate in countries where there are large minorities like in

Pakistan or India; they can be accommodated and their rights and interests safeguarded, if they also have a vote in election of every candidate in their constituency. Thus, where there is a group of minority voters their votes will be taken into account and the candidates for election or leaders will then want to win them over. But if there is a system of separate electorate, where there is a guarantee that a minority member will be elected, the majority will not bother about them. They think, well the minorities having their own representative, let him safeguard their interests.

So the system of joint electorate has proven to be for the protection of the interest of the minorities, because each candidate or elected member will safeguard the interest of the minority community in his own constituency. And then of course the basic law, which is the constitution, is particularly meant for the safeguard of the interest of the minorities, because the majority cannot change it at will. Even if the majority 51 % vote that some people who are non-Christian or non-Muslim will be jailed, they can't do it because the constitution protects the rights of minorities and guarantees that they will be treated equally like other citizens.

Whether minorities getting together as a whole would act towards their interest or whether it might be considered as something militant by the majority that makes them more frightened, I wonder.

international legal provisions concerning the minorities question

**MAHMOOD T.** The apprehension expressed by Mrs. Iqbal that minorities coming together might frighten the majority, it sometimes has happened in India. But the legal position is very clear on this point. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

(1992) states that "persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations", and also the "right to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group and with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic ties" (art. 2, par. 4 & 5).

Second, participation in the decision-making bodies of their own countries has also been recognized as a basic right of the religious minorities in all

the countries. Their voice has to be heard. All these rights have been conferred by the UN as part of international law. So the theory is clear, but what happens in fact is a different matter.

personal involvement also important for minorities

**MIRDAMADI** Among the various minorities in Iran, such as Sunnites, Armenians, etc. the issue of poverty is also related to the personal diligence of those concerned. We cannot ignore that in Iran there are many opportunities to gain prosperity through studies, work

and in general through personal involvement. It seemed to me relevant to recall this relation between the poverty and prosperity of people on the one hand, and their individual engagement among the minorities of a country, on the other. Islam advocates in any case that people quite generally, whether Muslims or non-Muslims should feel bound to diligence and personal involvement.

the struggle against poverty – a common obligation of all for all

**KHOURY** I would like to remind everyone of Qur'anic verses that praise people who give to the poor a share of their property, for example in Sūras 70,24 f. and 51,19. In my opinion, this is a very important detail especially here at our Round Table, because to fight poverty wherever it occurs, must be acknowledged

as a heavy obligation both in Christianity and in Islam. It follows that we are not only obliged to relieve poverty each of us in our own sphere of action, but also to engage together in the interest of the poor: if we have common principles, we should also apply them together. For, is it not the special point here at our Round Table to develop and deepen this awareness in us?

legal contributions for the well-being of the whole community

To refer once again back to the aforementioned verses of the Qur'an: certainly, they do not only speak of alms and contributions out of pity or charity; here the point is rather an institutional issue: the right of participation in the prosperity of the community. By the

way, the *zakāt* we had been previously talking about, is in fact a legal contribution generally in favour of the responsibilities of the community, of the *whole* community, and of all who live in a certain country in community. At any rate, this was the practice of the Caliphs too. The question is therefore how and in which way we can possibly design in this context some project that would enable us, Christians and Muslims, to play an active role in it together.



members of minorities may well be also part of a Mafia

rich.

Second: sometimes I think that in many instances minorities have been a blessing for a country, because they were urged by their situation to study and to work to overcome their weakness. In the Middle East, for instance, the Christians were a minority in the 17th century. They became a minority as weak as they are now, but they rediscovered the Arabic language and they reformed and improved it to such an extent that I could say that the best poets of Syria are Christians and the language created by these Christians in the 19th century, the style I mean, is used from the Arabian Peninsula to Morocco. So minorities may be a blessing if they are not persecuted.

And we have to strive in this Arabic world to find a formula for a way of life in sincere togetherness and at the same time providing a space of respect and complete freedom for every group. Probably, countries of the Maghreb can give the best example because they are free there from tensions between big majority and minority groups and thus in a better position to establish national goals and true nations. If we learn to strive for this unity of nation, we can hopefully overcome all these problems that frequently arise between minorities or between big majorities and big minorities of a country.

**KHODR** Finally there is a kind of association between the powerful of the world and in each country, a sort of Mafia. So you may belong to a big group and somebody else to a small group – and they both belong to the same Mafia, because they are powerful and

## Poverty and Injustice – Alarming Signs of the Present Crisis in Human Society Worldwide

Saleha S. Mahmood

*“And do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly ...”*  
Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 188

*Almost half of the world’s population  
lives on less than two dollars a day,  
yet even this statistic fails to capture the humiliation,  
powerlessness and brutal hardship  
that is the daily lot of the world’s poor.*

Kofi A. Annan, UN Secretary General  
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 17 October 2000

### Introduction

It remains an irony of the times that as the world makes phenomenal advances in science and technology which expand man’s mastery over the physical environment to ever expanding limits – sometimes leading to permanent depletion and manipulation and extinction of life forms – this force and energy is not utilized equally in advancing the human condition which, along with the natural environment, is being exploited and depleted and denied the positive gains of such human advancement.

Along with continuing strides in economic growth and progress among the developed countries, the majority of the world’s regions continue to struggle with the challenges of increasing poverty and hunger; war; conflict; social and political instability and disorganization; low levels of basic education, health care, environmental and food security and little access to safe drinking water and to sanitation. Concerned with this state of affairs 189 countries adopted the historic Millennium Declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000 in which they set eight specific goals to be achieved by all states parties by the year 2015. Among these declared goals, the main goal is to halve worldwide poverty by the target date (2015) through promoting school enrollment, employment opportunities, improvement in health, sanitation, safe drinking water, etc.



## 1. The spread of poverty

Recent data from various United Nations agencies and the World Bank indicate that in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in Latin America, in Eastern Europe, Central and South Asia, entrenched human poverty and failed – and even reversing – economic development and progress have created crises of massive proportions. The Millennium Goals set to achieve progress in human development through eradicating poverty and hunger, improving universal education, access to water and sanitation, reduction in child mortality and increase in gender equity by 2015, are indeed challenging yet possible for only a few.<sup>1</sup> For most other developing regions these remain difficult and distant goals.

While poverty has declined in some regions of the world, it will require over a hundred years to meet the 2015 millennium goals in sub-Saharan Africa, where there have been reversals, as also in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For hunger, the world's situation continues to worsen. Indeed, during the 1990s, many developing countries saw reversals and stagnation with 54 countries poorer than in the previous decade; 21 countries with larger proportions of people going hungry; in 14 countries more children are dying before age 5; in 12 countries, primary school enrollment rates have fallen and in many countries things have simply not improved.<sup>2</sup>

The United Nations' report cites a combination of factors for these reversals including among them failed economic growth; the HIV/AIDS pandemic; declining development assistance from rich countries; increasing debt burden in poor countries and continuing drop in the value of primary commodities such as raw materials, with the effect of reducing export revenue of poor countries.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The increasing gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots"

There are increasing disparities in the levels of income as a measure of development and quality of life. According to the 2003 *Human Development*

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2003 – Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty*, UNDP, 2003, pdf available online at: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/>, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 34.

*Report*, the richest 5 % of the world's people receive 114 times the income of the poorest 5 %; the richest 1 % receive as much as the poorest 57 %. Twenty-five million richest Americans have as much income as 2 billion of the world's poorest.<sup>4</sup>

Eradicating or at least reducing income inequality is essential to promoting social harmony and reducing friction and the sense of exploitation and injustice. In the aftermath of globalization and with greater access to information through worldwide multimedia, the awareness of inequality becomes more acute, leading to greater social tensions and hostility between the haves and the have-nots. Indeed, these intergroup, interregional and international comparisons generate a sense of injustice and deprivation that may breed social tension and harbor the potential for conflict.

Socio-economic data indicate that while the rich countries remain rich and get even richer, the pattern of development in poorer countries is not consistent, where some have made progress and others have regressed. In fact, surveys suggest that global inequality increased between 1987 and 1998.<sup>5</sup> The same trend is apparent within countries, which report increasing inequality across people. One study estimates that between the 1980s and the mid to late 1990s, inequality increased in 42 of 73 countries with complete and comparable data, and in only 6 of the 33 developing countries inequality declined, while 17 countries saw it increase.<sup>6</sup> These data also indicate that within countries the control over assets and resources is increasingly becoming concentrated in the hands of a few people.<sup>7</sup> The soaring rates of inequality in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and South Eastern Europe, and the persistently high rates in many Latin American countries, have been cited as possible sources of adverse consequences on human development as well as on social stability, leading to a rise in violence and crime in these regions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> B. Milanovic, "True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Surveys Alone," in *Economic Journal*, vol. 112, no. 476 (2002) 51–92.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 4).

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Cornia – S. Kiiski, "Trends in Income Distribution in the Post-World War II Period: Evidence and Interpretation," UNU//WIDER Discussion Paper 2001/89, in: *United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research*, Helsinki, 2001, pdf available online at: <http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/dps/dp2001-89.pdf> (March 2003).

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 39, box 2.2.

<sup>8</sup> See F. Bourguignon, "Crime as a Social Cost of Poverty and Inequality: A Review Focusing on Developing Countries," in: S. Yusuf – S. Evenett – W. Wu (eds.), *Facets of Globalization: International and Local Dimensions of Development*, Washington, DC.: World Bank, 2001, pp. 208–217; and P. Fajnzylber – D. Lederman – N. Loayza, "What Causes Violent Crime?" in: *European Economic Review* 46 (2002) 1323–1357.



### 3. The Human Development Index (HDI)

As part of the overall progress in science and technology achieved in the developed world, the decade of the 1990s is seen as the best of years. Yet, around the world, with social and political turmoil and unrest accompanied and followed by massive population movement and displacement with repeated episodes of armed conflict, wars of ethnic cleansing and genocide, the same decade registers as the worst of the years from the perspective of human development scores. The 'Human Development Index' (HDI) is a summary measure developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) based on key components of literacy, school enrolment rates, and life expectancy (i. e. the ability of a country's citizens to live a long and healthy life, be educated and enjoy a decent standard of living). This measure generally moves slowly, as its key components take time to change, but when the measure falls, "it indicates crisis, with nations depleting their basis for development – people, their real wealth."<sup>9</sup> The decade of the 1990s saw "unprecedented stagnation and deterioration" as 21 countries actually experienced a drop in HDI during this decade as compared to only 4 countries during the preceding decade.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed there is a direct connection between economic growth and poverty reduction. However, though economic growth is seen as a necessary condition but it is not established as a sufficient condition to ensure reduction in poverty across the board. In certain countries with growing economies during the 1990s, the income poverty rose, indicating that growth and income poverty links are not automatic. Thus at the turn of the millennium more than 1.2 billion people were struggling to survive on less than \$1 a day and almost half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, more than half of the 67 countries with complete data saw poverty rates increase in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> (Many of these countries were in Eastern Europe, Central and South Asia, Africa and Latin America.) Through the decade, 500 million people in Asia remained poor whereas in sub-Saharan Africa an additional 74 million people entered extreme poverty levels, while in Eastern Europe and the CIS the proportion of the extreme poor tripled to almost 100 million.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), pp. 40 f.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 1), p. 41.

### 4. The determinants and consequences

The determinants of income poverty are manifold in any society. There is a direct relationship between poverty and hunger, malnutrition, infant mortality as well as life expectancy. The poor also are unable to send their children to school and fewer girls get to go to school than boys, reflecting class and gender inequity in all spheres. In poor regions, only 50% of the children go to primary school. Similar pattern is observed in measuring access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, as only half of the population has access to safe drinking water and only quarter enjoy adequate sanitation.

According to the findings of the Chronic Poverty Research Center at the University of Manchester in England, there are more than 420 million people trapped in chronic poverty involving multidimensional deprivation including hunger, under-nutrition, illiteracy, lack of access to health care and safe drinking water, all of which leading to social isolation and exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Indeed socially marginalized ethnic, religious, indigenous groups; migrants; displaced and disabled people suffer chronic poverty and remain in the cycle. Though the causes are complex and multiple, some act as the 'maintainers' and others as 'drivers' of chronic poverty.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of economic growth, income opportunities decline leading to impoverishment, social exclusion, and political marginalization.

### 5. Poverty and conflict

Poverty and chronic poverty also have direct correlation with violent conflict. Poverty provides the fertile ground for grievance to turn into violence, and chronic poverty maintains chronic conflict. Although one third of the world's population is exposed to armed conflict in some form at the turn of the millennium, a disproportionate number of these conflicts take place in poor countries.<sup>16</sup> Poverty therefore is not just a humanitarian issue but one of strategic concern to geopolitical strategists and developmentalists whose efforts would be stymied by the frustrations and grievances that poverty nurtures, increasing the propensities for violence and conflicts.

<sup>14</sup> See Chronic Poverty Research Centre, *Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05*, CPRC, Institute for Development Policy & Management, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, pdf available online at: [http://www.chronicpoverty.org/chronic\\_poverty\\_report\\_2004.htm](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/chronic_poverty_report_2004.htm).

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 14), p. v.

<sup>16</sup> J. Goodhand, "Violent Conflict, Poverty, and Chronic Poverty", in: *INTRAC, CPRC (Chronic Poverty Research Center) Working Paper 6*, May 2001, pdf available online at: <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/poverty/rc/ItemDetail.do~260318>, p. 5.



Jonathan Goodhand summarizes the relationship between poverty and conflict through three propositions that I have linked to their sources/causes as follows:

Proposition 1: "Conflict causes chronic poverty" – through the depletion of resources;

Proposition 2: "Poverty causes conflict" – by creating grievance;

Proposition 3: "Resource wealth causes conflict"<sup>17</sup> – by promoting greed. To this we may add a fourth proposition:

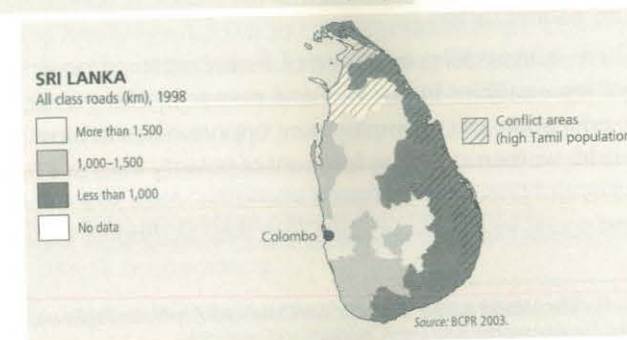
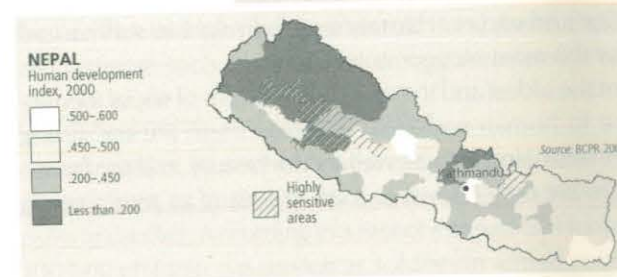
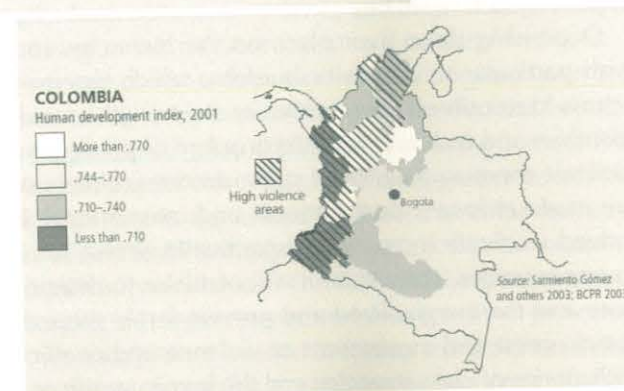
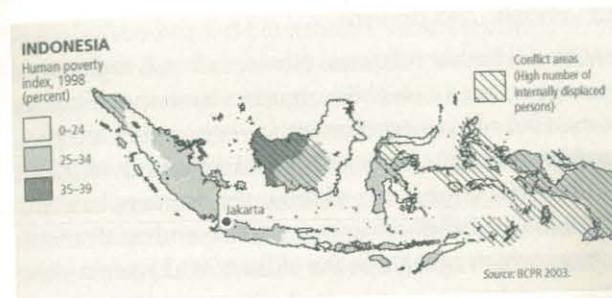
Proposition 4: Conflict over resource wealth causes poverty by perpetuating unequal distribution of resources leading to injustice.

### Poverty and human rights

Poverty has been described as "the gravest of human rights crisis of our times".<sup>18</sup> Poverty stifles and inhibits the fundamental human right of every person to "enjoy an adequate standard of living and access to essentials that make it possible – food, water, shelter, education, work and health care".<sup>19</sup> By denying these rights not only human dignity is diminished but also justice is denied. The poor are constantly marginalized and easily abused. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch work to ensure protection of the fundamental human rights of all individuals. These organizations regard poverty as the main symbol of social injustice that is as grave in its effects and consequences as political and civil injustice.<sup>20</sup>

### The overlap of poverty with conflict

The relationship between poverty and conflict is so direct that we find an overlap between the areas of chronic poverty with areas of conflict, such as in Indonesia (see Chart 1). Similarly, areas of low Human Development Index (HDI) overlap with areas of high conflict as in Nepal and Colombia. Sri Lanka's map shows an overlap in conflict areas with those areas lacking in infrastructure development. It is increasingly apparent that poverty provides the fertile ground for grievances and tensions to harbor, which readily lead to violence and conflict.



<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 16), pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, *Statement on the Occasion of World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty*, pdf available online at: <http://www.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/print/e-171003-feature.eng>.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 18).

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 18).



### *Links between conflict, identity, and poverty*

Historically social identities, whether religious, ethnic, cultural, regional or those based on gender, age, class, or disability, tend to have specific links with wealth and poverty. Chronic poverty occurs in regions that are geographically, socially and/or culturally 'isolated'. Racial, ethnic or religious minority groups as well as the young, the elderly, the women, and the disabled, are all likely to suffer social disadvantages and to endure discrimination and marginalization, which operate as the 'drivers' and 'maintainers' of poverty and injustice.

Depending upon their place on the hierarchy, social identities come with particular privileges or burdens, which determine their differential access to resources. These differentials strengthen and reinforce the given identities and maintain the infrastructure of privileges or deprivations that facilitate the maintenance of such identities. Unless serious interventions are made at local, state, national and international levels to lessen and indeed eradicate increasing disparities in access to resources as well as to opportunities, the situation will continue to deteriorate for the existing poor and the marginalized and provide fertile ground for proliferation of social unrest and movements of violence and conflict. History is replete with stories of class struggles and the heroic sacrifices of the poor and the depraved to seek justice and secure restoration of their right to survive and to make a living under the most meager conditions.

The 'poor' represent the oldest and the most human form of social identity and it remains unique to human societies. Whereas there are the strong and the weak in the animal kingdom as well as the beauty and the beast, the 'poor' and the 'rich' are only known to man and stand as testimony to his greed and avarice.

### *The gender factor*

There is increasing evidence of feminization of poverty in a world that is getting wealthier by the day and poorer by the minute.<sup>21</sup> With less access to education and to employment opportunities in most societies around the world, women are in the forefront of poverty lines as economic growth stagnates and population pressure intensifies. Also, as a result of poverty, conflict and social instability, women lose their traditional male providers, creating

<sup>21</sup> The World Bank, "GenderStatsDatabook", pdf available online at: <http://www.worldbank.org/GenderStatsDatabook>.

more female-headed households, which are likely to be chronically poor. In areas of conflict women are extremely vulnerable to acts of violence, including rape, which has increasingly been used as a weapon of war in today's conflicts.<sup>22</sup> In a study released by the United Nations Secretary General in 2002, the findings indicated the many ways in which war particularly harms women beyond death and injury, and aggravates existing inequalities through displacement, exploitation, sexual trafficking, violence and torture.<sup>23</sup> The study points out that while women do not enjoy equal status with men in any society and in fact suffer from cultures of violence and discrimination, this is further exacerbated during social, political and armed conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Not only are women and children disproportionately targeted in armed conflicts, they also constitute the main victims during the conflict and form the majority among the refugees and displaced persons. Even in the post conflict period women continue to pay for this through suffering greater economic and social marginalization that is aggravated by their dire circumstances. Furthermore, studies indicate that the impact of armed conflict on women's physical and mental health is incalculable.<sup>25</sup> The differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls must be redressed and their condition protected and strengthened so that they are not harmed to further extremes or in desperation driven by commitment to political, religious or economic goals of the conflict and thus become armed combatants themselves or encourage and promote such commitment among their family members.

### *Children, poverty and armed conflict*

Armed conflict has not only adversely impacted the children it has also exploited them, as in dozens of countries children have become direct participants in conflict. According to a recent estimate by Human Rights Watch, some 300,000 children are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts.<sup>26</sup> Escaping from poverty and social and family breakdown in conflict-ridden areas, children find armed groups as their best chance for survival. These child soldiers have witnessed and have participated in perpetration of horrible atrocities and are

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 16).

<sup>23</sup> A. S. Walker, "The Impact of Violent Conflict on Women and Girls", IWTC Women's GlobalNet, #211, October 21, 2002, pdf available online at: <http://www.iwtc.org>.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security*, UN Security Council S/2002/1154, 16 October 2002, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 24), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> See, Human Rights Watch, *Stop the Use of Child Soldiers*, pdf available online at: <http://hrw.org/campaigns>.



often alleged to have been drugged, to take part in these atrocities. Because of their immaturity and inexperience they endure higher casualties and those who survive suffer long lasting emotional as well as physical and psychological damage. Urgent measures must be taken to stop the conscription of children into armed militias and their exploitation as porters, guards, spies and even as executioners. Young girls are forced into the militia to serve as cooks or messengers and are sexually abused and taken as 'wives'.<sup>27</sup> International agencies must intervene to halt the recruitment of children and must develop measures of protecting and restoring them when peace is negotiated, by establishing provisions for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.<sup>28</sup> The cycle of violence must be halted in their generation.

### *The cycle of poverty, injustice and violence*

Conflicts feed and thrive on potential recruits from among those who are poor, dispossessed, displaced and ignorant. Ironically, many of them enter into conflict seeking security and die in their efforts to stave off hunger and starvation. The circular relationship between poverty, injustice and conflict must be intercepted if the world is to see any significant movement towards peace, stability and social advancement. Almost all conflict involves a struggle for assertion of power and control over resources and land, or simply the vindication of an ideology. By eliminating poverty the root cause of violence may be removed, as the poor, out of frustration and desperation, could easily be led into acts of aggression and violence. Ironically, though, poverty is neither the necessary nor a sufficient condition for violence and conflict, yet it offers a strong trigger when combined with social and political causes, laced with ideological overtones. In such situations, victims can become victimizers all too readily.

## 6. The role of religion

In recognition of the intimate and endemic relationship between hunger, poverty, disability on the one hand and discrimination, marginalization and conflict on the other, our religious faith traditions, such as those in Christianity and in Islam, offer rich and comprehensive teachings. With wisdom and compassion they address the issues of poverty alleviation;

<sup>27</sup> See, Human Rights Watch, *Child Soldiers: Facts About Child Soldiers*, pdf available online at: <http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/facts.htm>, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 27).

enjoin principles that promote justice, fairness, balance and moderation in all our dealings; that prohibit the letting of the blood of the innocent; that promote the virtues of patience, tolerance and forgiveness; that exhort the doing of good and prohibit the doing of wrong. If we choose to pay heed to these teachings we will make our way through this difficult juncture at which the world finds itself trapped – for in an age of prolific scientific and technological advances never before witnessed in history, we see a degree of destruction and deliberate, even wanton, decimation of human life, liberties and freedoms even as they are continued to be touted as the object of our struggles.

History has recorded the succor and the solace provided by religious and spiritual traditions to the 'poor' and the 'downtrodden'. Religious teachings inspire hope through faith and generate reconciliation through compassion. In their turn, the poor have indeed used religion for solace, comfort and for guidance in facing the hardships of daily living under difficult circumstances. But religion has also lent itself quite readily into the service of those who have an alternative 'agenda' and allegedly by some, provides 'an opiate for the masses'. Thus, religion has to be on guard so that it remains a vital part of the 'solution' and not a contributor to humanity's problems.

## Conclusion

Indeed as a result of a combination of complex circumstances that involve hunger, poverty, and injustice, along with its clustering of related factors such as ignorance, intolerance, deprivation and frustration, all of which encourage instability and conflict, we are all living in dangerous and difficult times.

Within our religious traditions we shall find a most positive resource that can mobilize us and empower us in this struggle. Contemporary societies have suffered, as faith communities drifted away from their rich heritage. The wisdom and guidance present in religious teachings on matters of justice and tolerance and on the virtues of sacrifice, compassion and generosity, remain unacknowledged and unrecognized at best and misunderstood or misrepresented at worst.

We have the urgent need to not only recognize this resource but also to arrest the current trend of recruitment of religion to serve causes that may be dressed in the garb of the 'sacred' but may serve very 'secular' purposes. We should call upon our religious and spiritual leaders to raise their guard



against this exploitation and deny the recruitment and conscription of religion to serve unholy wars that are launched as the 'crusades' of the holy and the '*djihād*' of the oppressed. Islam teaches us that the biggest '*djihād*' we have to fight is one that overcomes one's selfishness and avarice. What wisdom there is in this pronouncement! What better way to fight poverty and injustice in today's world?

Thus, from this gathering of concerned and committed individuals representing the Christian and Islamic faiths at the 3rd VICIRoTa in Vienna, with due respect to and in acknowledgement of our own and each other's religious traditions, we, the gathering of Christians and Muslims assembled around this Round Table today, shall send forth an urgent call to leaders, policy makers and individual actors to increasingly draw upon our rich spiritual and religious traditions, and indeed resort to all positive means at our disposal, to address the alarming presence of a worldwide crisis in human society which continues to harbor poverty and injustice in a time of plenty. Our religious institutions can provide their traditional wisdom and long-standing experience of running reputed institutions of learning, of charity, of health and community care that for ages have served humanity through alleviating suffering and through providing healing to the sick, the needy, the poor and the downtrodden.

While our faith enables us to bear hardships and adversity, it ennobles us by giving us the strength and the opportunity to serve causes beyond ourselves and to render deeds that are worthy of our humanity. As the Qur'ān says:

*Indeed the men who practice charity and the women who practice charity and [they who] have loaned Allāh a goodly loan – it will be multiplied for them, and they will have a noble reward.*

Al-Qur'ān, Chapter 57, Verse 18

## Questions and Interventions

strained relationship between self-interest and egoism

**GABRIEL** It was very interesting for me to listen to the presentation of Dr. Saleha S. Mahmood, and I would like to refer to what she said at the end of her paper, i. e. to the problem of egoism. Adam Smith's writings are well-known. This liberal thinker was fascinated by

the assumption that it helps all people if they pursue their self-interest. The modern economic activity is based on the fact that we do not live on the good will of our neighbour, for example, of our baker or butcher, but on the conditions that they pursue in their self-interest when we get their products from them, like bread or meat. Initially, this seems to contradict the teachings of Christianity and Islam that urge us to overcome egoism.

Here the question arises whether the need for accumulation, the saving of capital is not to be seen as a necessary human requirement and the basis of any dynamically developing economy? Whereas, in medieval times, beggars and the poor were also recognized in our societies and their livelihood, although in a very limited way, was placed at their disposal, in the early modern age, we started to see them as nonproductive members of the society and locked them up in workhouses to make them earn their money themselves.

What does this strained relationship really look like between that kind of egoism which we have to fight in the biggest *djihād* – as was explained in the previous paper – on the one hand, and the economic self-interest which we have to pursue, on the other. In this context, are there not two different world views confronting each other: one that ranks self-interest first becoming increasingly influential in our societies, and the other, our world views in Christianity and Islam? In addition, we are facing the fact that in economic conditions that are going through a time of upheaval, the unequal distribution of wealth usually becomes ever increasing, and because of manifold opportunities to acquire these or those goods, an entirely different social dynamism emerges as compared to a steady society. What counts is to have more, in order to be more. I do not know how to solve this problem either, but it is a problem that we, Christians and Muslims, have to confront.

**MAHMOOD S. S.** I realize increasingly that we are now addressing this at a structural level not at an individual one. We have not addressed the psychological issues involved. Through the antecedent statement, which I think is important to take into account, the personal issues slipped in – the human



traits of selfishness, greed and avarice. It occurs to me as a sociologist that we consider the human societies in many ways to be superior, but maybe it is exactly the other way round: that the animal societies are more rational, more just and balanced. Is it not true that human greed and avarice create the rich and the poor, which we do not have among the animals? Animals do not eat more than what they need to survive, but humans would kill and hoard. And that is where our religious teachings, that we have been taught, have come in – against hoarding, greed, selfishness, and so on. The fact is, we have these structural aspects that have been mentioned and we must deal with them. But we need perhaps another focus and another conference to address the individual and the psychological issues as well.

the role of religions in the struggle for just conditions

**BSTEH** Is it possible, from the perspective of a sociologist, to assess to some extent the role of religion in history within the framework of man's endeavours to create just conditions in human society? Did religion have a positive effect on the organization of a

just society, and if that is the case, in which way and to what extent? Undoubtedly, we also have to note negative effects, if we think of those currents in Christianity only, which were prone to discover in the riches – that man may hoard in his lifetime – a sign of divine election.

**MAHMOOD S. S.** I think that religion has served mankind much more at the individual level than at the institutional level. The negative role of religion in history that we see in creating conflicts has overshadowed the role it has played in the lives of the common individuals in providing them faith, succour and strength in manifold ways – by helping the needy through their local community networks, through mosques and *madrasas*, church-schools and charity provisions, etc. So at the grass roots, at an individual level, religion has throughout history done a great deal to support people. But in its institutionalized form it has time and again been used by particular interest groups to serve certain purposes and interests, even promoted militant rivalries and wars.

So much is said about religion as a source of conflict, and it has created them. It has earned that reputation. At the same time, it has also contributed tremendously to the lives of individual people. And there are the unsung heroes and heroines, the Mother Teresas, of all times. That function has been served by people of religious faith who have helped with their hard work, who have established foundations and similar things in almost all countries around the world to assist the poor and the needy. In sum, at a personal level religions have contributed throughout history, but at an institutional

level they have been and are still being exploited by individuals and various interest groups; and so, time and again, they engaged in promoting and generating conflicts.

differentiations concerning the term selfishness

**KHOURY** What was said before with regard to selfishness, probably makes us aware of the usefulness to differentiate between a kind of 'selfishness' which may be necessary, at least at the outset, to acquire

and enlarge property, something that seems to be of fundamental importance for the life of the individual as of the society. At the same time we have to take our responsibility seriously, namely the social commitment which subsequently is connected with the acquired property. In other words, selfishness to a certain degree at the outset, yes; further up the path, it has to be overcome by aiming to lead to a deeper understanding.

... and the major *djihād*

**MAHMOOD S. S.** I would like to add some explanations concerning the difference between 'self' and 'selfishness', the way I use these terms. An acknowledgment of the 'self' is essential for the human spirit. Yet, when in actualizing the 'self' boundaries are transgressed, 'selfishness' takes over and thus the social commitment is weakened. I did not intend entering into the discussion whether we are basically selfish or not selfish, egoistic or not egoistic. I would rather focus on the Islamic teaching to overcome selfishness through the 'major *djihād*', the '*djihād 'alā l-nafs*'. The term refers simply to the struggle with your 'self' to overcome one's base instincts and the 'selfishness' engrained in human nature. The reference is that we should try to control our self and, therewith, fight the biggest *djihād* that we have to fight: the struggle with ourselves, with our desire to be selfish, as part of it.

we have to face the challenges of this day and age

**KHIDOYATOV** When speaking of the need for reformation of Islam, I refer to the fact that the Qur'an acquired its present form 20 years after the death of Muhammad, during the time of the biggest struggle between

the Omayyads and the followers of 'Alī. That is why a lot of terms entered the Holy Qur'an that are in fact unacceptable for the present day and age, such as the term *djihād* in the meaning of killing the infidels; similarly numerous prohibitions such as the prohibition on depicting animals or the human face. The Bible, too, was the only sourcebook of Christianity, but Christianity has gained the inner strength to reinterpret its relationship to the Bible. So we must also adapt the Qur'an and Islam to the new period, to the modern age. Otherwise the Qur'an runs the risk of becoming a sym-



bol of conservatism, and I think that we should not permit this. In the past the Qur'ān has mainly addressed the *Umma*, the Muslim community. But today is the period of individualism, as it were, of individual selfishness. And in fact, without the individual strength and initiative of the people it is very difficult to raise the productive forces in Muslim society. That is why I think it is now the period of adaptation and we should feel challenged to update Islam to face the challenges of this day and age.

On the other hand, we must not think that it is only poverty which is at the root of all conflicts. There are a lot of other forces behind conflicts, for example separatism, radicalism, envy, etc. When *ṣadaqa* is mentioned in the Qur'ān, it speaks of charity, kindness and altruism. But it may mean at the same time the legalization of poverty. This is one reason why I feel that we must somehow think of adapting and reforming Islam. Certainly, I am afraid that, for some people, this might not be easy to accept. But life will compel us to do it, and the sooner the better.

the process of *idjtihād* is the track to renewal

**MAHMOOD S. S.** As Mrs. Belarbi already rightfully explained, we need to address each cultural and religious perspective as within a structure that is workable and acceptable within this very context. The concept and code of bringing 'reformation' into Islam is simply like getting modernization to Ethiopia. If you are recommending reformation as such to be introduced, you have to see that it works. As a matter of fact, it will not work if it is not internally relevant. Indeed we have alternative tools and means at our disposal, and they are called *idjtihād*.

The discussion that deals with the issue how the Qur'ān was produced and when it was produced, its authenticity, etc., it is not our task to get involved in it here and now, because we are simply not qualified to address it. But, as for my knowledge of Islam and its practice among the followers, yes, of course there have to be changes; you got to be adapted to current times and challenges definitely.

to be addressed through contemporary means and measures

This or any other religion cannot survive unless it meets the needs of people. But at the same time, it should remain faithful to its principles, even within certain cultural and structural requirements. And we do have the alternatives, we do have the means and the measures. So we should not isolate ourselves, as it were, in our own house and social or religious setting; that could be problematic. With reference to Professor Khidoyatov's observation that the Qur'ān is ad-

dressed primarily to the *Umma*, I find that the Qur'ān is so much more addressed to the individual. Continuously it says "Men of faith" and "Women of faith", and in doing so it addresses itself more to individuals, and not so much to the *Umma*. Furthermore, there is no claim in the Qur'ān to be only for the Muslims either – neither the injunctions nor the declarations, nor the findings. A lot of them are just addressed to those we define as Muslims. However, these comments again are beyond what is expected of me here.

poverty is not the only condition for conflicts

Finally, today it was my task to link poverty to some social condition and so I linked it to conflict. But I also said – maybe it was kind of buried in my statement – that poverty is neither the necessary nor the sufficient condition for conflict. It does not mean whoever is poor will run into conflict. There could be other reasons as well.

poverty and conflict – religion and poverty – religion and conflict

**BELARBI** Looking at the maps that are included in the paper of Dr. Mahmood which illustrate the connection between poverty and conflict, I have the strange idea that if we try to draw a map showing where Islam spreads and is linked up to poverty on the one hand, and where Christianity spreads and is linked up to poverty on the other, the same thing might happen with regard to this coloration that visualizes the connection between conflict and religion. Here, perhaps, we can find a better explanation of this reasoning and how Christianity and Islam can build this bridge to find a solution to the problem of poverty.

religion and condition of minorities

**MAHMOOD S. S.** This is a very valuable suggestion indeed. It should be my next assignment to find a map and show the overlap. In fact I have done something similar in terms of relating the condition of minorities to religion. I came to note that Muslims everywhere have high fertility as minorities. In trying to explain that further, I wanted to see if the same applied to Christians, and I found that among Christians, too, it held true. So, there is something that goes with the condition of being minorities. Similarly, we would perhaps discover that poverty generates conflict, whether it is in a Christian or a Muslim area.

Muslim and Christian world similarly affected

**BSTEH** In this context I would like to speak up for a more critical assessment of geographical issues with regard to Christianity or Islam than is generally made. The majority of Christians live in poor countries – in



Latin America, in sub-Saharan Africa and in a number of Asian countries. Not by chance, the so-called liberation theology emerged from present-day Christianity's struggle against the alarming situation of poverty in these geographical areas of our world. Therefore, we should question this widespread identification of 'Christian' and 'Western', on the one hand, and 'Muslim' and 'Eastern' on the other. Conversely, today there are some countries and entire regions situated in the so-called Islamic world that are immensely rich. If we imagine that only at some 100 kilometers distance from them indescribably poor countries are situated whose populations live in extreme poverty, a lot of current stereotypes become questionable.

Should we not simply ask together, "Where is poverty?, Where is richness?" and, "What can we do, Christians and Muslims, each one of us and all of us together, to eradicate poverty?" Is it really possible for us, adherents of all religions and ideologies, to watch people any longer who – in our world that grows steadily and ever faster together – must starve to death on our doorsteps and who, in their misery, are at their wit's end? About people of this kind we had been speaking at length during our current meeting; there are up to some 300,000 children who at present are serving as soldiers and who were mentioned in the paper of Dr. Saleha S. Mahmood. Nowadays, we talk a lot about human rights – and certainly we cannot speak enough about them and demand respect for them. But how is it possible that, at the same time, we watch people whose primary right in large parts of the world is refused: the right to live? Is there not talk of about 3,000 people who die presently day in, day out?

**MAHMOOD S. S.** Thanks to Dr. Bsteh for his comments, for it is precisely these issues that occupied me in my presentation.

concerning the situation in the countries of the Muslim world

With reference to the situation in the countries of the Muslim world, we all know that they are among the poorest in our world. A general map in my office shows the 152 countries with a development index of 100.

We find there a first and highest quartile, a second and third, and a lowest quartile with the lowest index. Every single one of these countries with the lowest indices is a Muslim country. How is it possible? It is a fact that deeply concerns us Muslims and it has a lot to do with all the misery and discontent in the Muslim world. All these countries easily become victims of aggression, but also, not rarely, themselves become aggressors. Underdevelopment has been an endemic problem in these countries in which Muslims are the majority. Ironically as well, there is ample inequal-

ity in the Christian countries – as was mentioned before – lot of wealth in some, extreme poverty in others, in Latin America, in Africa, etc. Similarly among the countries in the Muslim world you have got extremely wealthy countries; but they represent a very small portion of the Muslim population only. Yet, their standards of education, health and social development are all very low, even though they are wealthy, and their 'development' figures appear inconsistent with their social condition. When you set their 'development' against measures relating to education or other indicators of development, they will immediately appear depressed and inconsistent with their higher rank on 'development' scale. So we have a grave problem in the Muslim world and we have to address it.



# The Role of Non-Governmental Agents in the Struggle against Poverty and Injustice on the International Level

Irmgard Marboe

## 1. Introduction

In recent years a deep change has taken place in the form and nature of international relations and cooperation. The development of modern means of communication made it more and more internationally possible also for individual persons, private associations or enterprises to link up more easily. Whereas formerly the domain of international relations was primarily characterized by the interaction of States, the process of so-called globalization, which since the 1990s has been triumphantly succeeding, bears also the imprint of non-governmental agents.<sup>1</sup>

While on the one hand transnational enterprises play an important role and are greatly interested in being able to operate worldwide without hindrance, on the other hand – as it were as the general process of globalization's "spin off"<sup>2</sup> – civil society networks are increasingly developing, which oppose the negative effects of globalization or want to make use of the international network for other, non-economic, targets. Today they play a more forceful and self-assured role in the international system and lay increasing claim to the possibility of expression and cooperation. Thus far they complement the traditional forms of interstate cooperation and international relations. An international network on as many levels as possible seems to be necessary in order to accept the new challenges and problems of society.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> K. Dicke, "Erscheinungsformen und Wirkungen von Globalisierung in Struktur und Recht des internationalen Systems auf universaler und regionaler Ebene sowie gegenläufige Renationalisierungstendenzen", in: Id. et al. (eds.), *Völkerrecht und Internationales Privatrecht in einem sich globalisierenden internationalen System – Auswirkungen der Entstaatlichung transnationaler Rechtsbeziehungen*. Heidelberg, 2000, pp. 13 ff.

<sup>2</sup> P. Wahl, "Mythos und Realität internationaler Zivilgesellschaft. Zu den Perspektiven globaler Vernetzung von Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen", in: E. Altwater et al. (eds.), *Vernetzt und verstrickt: Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen als gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft*. Münster, 2000, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Thus Jürgen Habermas observes: "Die Globalisierung des Verkehrs und der Kommunikation, der wirtschaftlichen Produktion und ihrer Finanzierung, des Technologie- und Waffentransfers, vor allem der ökologischen und militärischen Risiken stellen uns vor Probleme, die innerhalb eines nationalstaatlichen Rahmens oder auf den bisher üblichen



The concept of 'global governance' too, characterizes on the international level the increasingly important role of the organizations of civil society. The concept refers to actions that are not, in the sense of 'government', carried out by instruments of State and armed with governmental authority, but are rather to be conceived as a freewill, active participation rooted in individual or social accountability.<sup>4</sup>

The UN-Commission on Global Governance, established in 1992, which submitted its noteworthy report on "Our Global Neighbourhood" in 1995, defined 'governance' as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs."<sup>5</sup>

The concept of 'global governance' since then has frequently emerged in an international context and seems to represent an approach to the manifold problems worldwide that, as experience shows, cannot be adequately solved by governments.

It is therefore no accident that the Bishops' Conference of the European Community has given one of its latest documents the title "Global Governance" in order to reflect and present therein especially the role the Churches play in the solution of the pressing problems worldwide. It is made in it an attempt to follow up the question in which way globalization may be an opportunity for all.<sup>6</sup>

Within the scope of Christian-Islamic dialogue, it seems therefore worth investigating to what extent the two religious communities can also be seen as part of this process, of an internationalizing 'civil society'. Which legal and political position can they expect to be theirs or has already been theirs? Based on their international work and their international structure, are they not particularly predestined to play an important role as 'global players' or by their participation to complement or counterbalance economic globalization?

Wegen der Vereinbarung zwischen souveränen Staaten nicht mehr gelöst werden können" [The globalization of traffic and communication, of economic production and its financing, of technology and weapons-transfer, above all of ecological and military risks confront us with problems which can no longer be resolved within the frame of nation-states or by so far usual agreements between sovereign states.] In: Id., *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie*. Frankfurt/M., 1997, pp. 129 f.

<sup>4</sup> A. Reinisch, "Governance Without Accountability?", in: *German Yearbook of International Law* 44 (2001), pp. 270 ff., 272 f.

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Global Governance (ed.), *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*. Oxford, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the European Community, *Global Governance: Our responsibility to make globalisation an opportunity for all*. Brussels 2001, pp. 19 ff. [www.comece.org/upload/pdf/pub\\_GG\\_010900\\_en.pdf](http://www.comece.org/upload/pdf/pub_GG_010900_en.pdf).

There follows a survey of the role that non-governmental agents already play today and will continue to play in future in the specific context of the struggle against poverty and injustice (of wealth distribution). Subsequent to the results of the former meetings of the "Vienna Christian-Islamic Round Table" this also has to be seen as an essential contribution towards preventing and avoiding violence and armed conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Non-governmental agents in international relations

Traditionally, the central agents of international relations are States and international organizations, namely those organizations, whose members are composed of States and whose founding treaty is a treaty of international law.<sup>8</sup> They are also called "Public International Organizations" or "Intergovernmental Organizations" and are to some extent bodies of international law.<sup>9</sup>

On the international level organizations, whose members are not States but individual persons or private associations, are in principle not legal bodies. Nevertheless, particularly such associations increasingly attract international attention and wish to participate in international decision processes or to cooperate in putting into practice international programs and projects. Frequently they are called "Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NRG)"<sup>10</sup> or "Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)"<sup>11</sup>. Sometimes "Non-Governmental Organizations"<sup>12</sup>, "Civil Society Organizations" or "Institutions of Civil Society" are simply spoken of as "Civil Society"<sup>13</sup>. At

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the conclusive communiqué of the "Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table" of October 23, 2000, in: A. Bsteh – T. Mahmood (eds.), *Reading the Signs of the Time: Contemporary Challenges for Christians and Muslims* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 1). Mödling, 2003, pp. 157 f.

<sup>8</sup> H. F. Köck – P. Fischer, *Das Recht der Internationalen Organisationen*. Wien, 31997, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Their legal status is derived from that of the States, therefore one also speaks of 'derived' subjects of international law. As to its scope it is also dependent on the States and it extends as far as it is granted by the member States. P. Fischer – H. F. Köck, *Völkerrecht: Das Recht der universellen Staatengemeinschaft*, Wien, 62004, pp. 201 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Like this above all in the terminology of the European Union, for instance in the VO of the Council of July 17th 1998 no. 1658/98 about co-financing measures with European Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in fields important for developing countries. ABL 1998 L 213, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>11</sup> The "Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the UN-ECOSOC", in brief "CONGO" is the agency for contact and cooperation in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for instance art. V sect. 2 WTO-statute.

<sup>13</sup> On the last three terms cf. especially the report of the World Commission on the Social



the same time, it is mostly left open, above all in the perspective of international law, what their legal position is.

As is well-known, the Catholic Church has a special position in this context. For historical reasons the Holy See is acknowledged to be a subject of international law and, as a so-called 'originary' subject of international law, is positioned on the same level as a sovereign State.<sup>14</sup> As such it has an observer status at the United Nations and is member of some of their special organizations.

In international relations other Churches and religious communities have no comparable status. It is therefore left open as to the role due to them within this framework and in which way they themselves want to and can get involved. Presumably, an international representative structure would be a precondition for an international appearance as a contracting partner with equal rights and as a vis-à-vis. It is indeed questionable, to what extent today the intention and the possibility to establish such a structure exist.

Independent of it, many members and followers of all Churches and religious communities are mainly organized in regional and thematically oriented associations or groups and in this form play their role as part of civil society.

### 3. Possibilities of cooperation

In recent years the possibilities of cooperation within the international framework have distinctly increased. There are different reasons for this. On the one hand States are interested in winning over public opinion for certain important international issues, whereby the engagement of organizations which work closely with people can make a decisive contribution. On the other hand these organizations often have a specific knowledge, experiences and possible access in different issues which make it appear desirable and meaningful to have them participate in the processes of decision as well as entrusting them with carrying out and operating international projects. Here we could enumerate many examples above all from recent years. In the following only those activities are described which play a special role in the struggle against poverty.

Dimension of Globalization (ed.), *A Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities for All* (2004), pp. 10, 40, 44, 142, etc. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/wcsdg/docs/report.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> In this context we should in detail consult H. F. Köck, *Die völkerrechtliche Stellung des Heiligen Stuhls: Dargestellt an seinen Beziehungen zu Staaten und internationalen Organisationen*. Wien, 1975.

## 3.1 United Nations

### 3.1.1 Consultative status

The United Nations opened the door early to civil society agents. In its art. 71, the 1945 statute provides for the Council for Economic and Social Affairs to make consultative agreements with non-governmental organizations dealing with matters within their own competence. These comprise "international economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related affairs".<sup>15</sup>

By such an agreement organizations are given "consultative status". In the resolutions of the Social and Economic Council, which put art. 71 into effect, criteria may be found for the organizations that are eligible.<sup>16</sup> They should have members in at least three countries, a representative character and international reputation, be democratically organized and mainly financed by their national suborganizations or individuals, whereby other sources, primarily public subsidies, have to be declared.<sup>17</sup>

In the United Nations system, religious organizations are dealt with as NGOs, although they are mostly not democratically but hierarchically organized and establish their authority on the basis of holy texts, the charisma of individuals or a hierarchical tradition. They themselves also mostly reject being classed as NGOs.<sup>18</sup> The term 'NGO' is felt by them rather as a limitation and restriction and is therefore not in keeping with their self-definition.

A similar view is also held by political parties and employee- or employer-associations, which also do not like to be called 'NGOs'. However, the term prevailed within the framework of the United Nations. Yet, it is more and more used as *pars pro toto* for a generally understood "civil society".<sup>19</sup>

The organizations are divided into three groups, the result of which is categorized rights of participation.<sup>20</sup> The first category comprises the so-

<sup>15</sup> Art. 62 of the UN-Charter.

<sup>16</sup> They are primarily Resolution 288 B (X) of February 27th 1950, Resolution 1296 of May 23rd 1968, Resolution 1297 of May 28th 1968 and Resolution 1996/31 of July 25th 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. especially Resolution 1296 (1968) of May 23rd 1968 of the Economic and Social Council.

<sup>18</sup> P. Willetts, "What is a Non-Governmental Organisation", in: UNESCO (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*. [www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/CS-NTWKS/NGO-ART.HTM#Part1](http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/CS-NTWKS/NGO-ART.HTM#Part1).

<sup>19</sup> In this context we should also consult the accounts of the UNCTAD-Conference, where the NGOs are mentioned only as one among several "major groups of society".

<sup>20</sup> This categorization goes back to earlier Economic and Social Council resolutions, which regulated the regime of the Consultative Status, as particularly Res 288 B (X) from 1950 and Res 1296 (XLIV) from 1968. This "Three-Class-System" was sometimes strongly



called “general consultative status” and denotes such international NGOs, as have a fundamental interest in almost all the affairs that are dealt with in the Economic and Social Council. The second category concerns international NGOs, whose targets agree with only a few domains dealt with by the Economic and Social Council and it is therefore given a so-called “special consultative status”. Finally there is also the third category, the so-called “roster-status” for NGOs, which qualify neither for the first nor for the second category, but can still make an important contribution to the activity of the Economic and Social Council. Among them are mainly national NGOs.

Presently 2,418 Non-Governmental Organizations have consultative status in the Economic and Social Council, 131 of them the general one, 1,376 the special one and 911 roster-status.<sup>21</sup> Remarkable is their increasing number; above all since the 1990s, thus in the period that is also called the age of globalization.<sup>22</sup> Here religious groupings are represented as well as political alliances or employee- and employer-associations. Many of them also have general consultative status, therefore having the most far-reaching competence. Among them are: Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities), Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, World Fellowship of Buddhists and World Muslim Congress.

Organizations with special consultative status include: CARE (Christian Action Research and Education), Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement, International Buddhist Relief Organization, International Islamic Relief Organization, Islamic Relief, World Council of Independent Christian Churches and World Jewish Congress.

Roster-status, for instance, is due to Catholic International Union for Social Services, Islamic-American Zakat Foundation, United Methodist Church and World Islamic Call Society.

What kind of advantage does this consultative status give or what can the NGOs really bring about in the Economic and Social Council of the United

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criticized, it is however still contained in the new Res 1996/31. Cf. for instance F. Pons Rafols, “La actualización de las disposiciones que rigen el estatuto consultivo de las organizaciones no gubernamentales en las Naciones Unidas”, in: Departamento de Derecho Internacional Público/Universidad de Navarra (ed.), *Anuario de Derecho Internacional* (1998), pp. 381 ff., 414.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/> (as matters stand on May 10, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Whereas in 1968 only 180 organizations had consultative status, until 1992 this number had increased up to 744, in 2000 up to 2,050, today it is 2,418.

Nations? Formally consultative status only means very limited possibilities of cooperation and has to be particularly differentiated from the rights and possibilities of observer status. Whereas “observers”, i. e. States without membership<sup>23</sup> or special organizations<sup>24</sup>, can participate without the right to vote in the consultations of the United Nations organs, the organizations with consultative status only have the right to support by consultation the Economic and Social Council.<sup>25</sup> When they have general or special consultative status, they can have written statements distributed as official UN-documents<sup>26</sup> and make oral statements during a meeting.<sup>27</sup>

In practice the value of consultative status is having free access to conference premises and thereby to the delegations of the member states as well as the possibility of directly contacting the technical branches of the United Nations secretariat.<sup>28</sup>

For the United Nations the value of consultations with the NGOs lies primarily in receiving expert information and consultation as well as the possibility to integrate public opinion in decisions.

### 3.1.2 Participation in conferences

What is remarkable above all is the increasing participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in great international conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations. Whereas in the 1970s such participation was still rather sporadic and subject to great restrictions, since about 1990 the organizers have also attached importance to not renouncing pertinent expert knowledge on the one hand, and to possibly achieving a great public effect and to spreading conference topics on the other. At the margin of these conferences so-called “alternative forums” were assembled in order to comment unofficially on the official conference results.<sup>29</sup> They also knew how to arouse wide public interest in their claims.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. UN-Charter, art. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. UN-Charter, art. 70. It concerns international organizations which entered a special agreement with the UN-Economic and Social Council. Presently the UNO has 18 special organizations, for example UNICEF, UNIDO, WHO or UNDP.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. W. Hummer, “Internationale nichtstaatliche Organisationen im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Abgrenzung, Handlungsbefugnisse, Rechtsnatur”, in: K. Dicke et al., *op. cit.* (fn. 1), pp. 45 ff. 98 f. and 107.

<sup>26</sup> For NGOs with general consultative status the limit are 2,000 words, for those with special consultative status 500 words. Cf. Res. no. 1996/31, item 31 lit. d) and e).

<sup>27</sup> Res. no. 1996/31, item 32.

<sup>28</sup> W. Hummer, *op. cit.* (fn. 25), pp. 113 f.

<sup>29</sup> The first campaign, which addressed a broad, worldwide public, was carried out in order to pass the Children’s Rights Convention, in whose frame also a World-Children-Summit



### 3.1.3 Participation in programs for the struggle against poverty

NGOs also take part, more and more frequently, in programs for the struggle against poverty. Here the World Food Programme (WFP) of the United Nations may be mentioned as an example. In planning as well as in deciding about the individual projects and also in carrying them out and evaluating them it integrates NGOs.<sup>30</sup> Partners are on the one hand international NGOs from developed countries and national NGOs from individual developing countries on the other.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also actively integrates Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) into elaborating and realizing its projects.<sup>31</sup>

For many years the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has been cooperating – above all in the field of education, where these projects are an essential aspect in the struggle against poverty in the developing countries – with non-governmental organizations which are particularly concerned with children and family welfare. This cooperation has intensified<sup>32</sup> since in 1989<sup>33</sup> the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was passed.

### 3.2 International Labour Organization (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) can be seen as paving the way for the possible cooperation of non-governmental associations within the framework of (public) international organizations. It was founded in 1919 by Section XIII of the Treaty of Versailles<sup>34</sup>, its roots however reach back to the time before World War I. In the second half of the 19th century,

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was organized in New York, in which 159 States and 45 NGOs participated. W. Hummer, *op.cit.* (fn. 25), p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> WFP (ed.), *Annual Performance Report 2003 (2004)*, pp. 9, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Within the framework of UNDP the importance of cooperating with these civil society organizations is more and more strongly emphasized. Thus, UNDP defines its present relation to the "CSOs" as follows: "UNDP's collaboration with CSOs has expanded and diversified significantly, particularly within the framework of Sustainable Human Development. Over the years, UNDP has gradually strengthened its staff capacity to work with CSOs. It has simplified rules and procedures, in addition to developing policies and strategies to facilitate UNDP-CSO collaboration. The strategy paper entitled 'UNDP and Organizations of Civil Society: Building Sustainable Partnerships', approved in 1993, provided the framework for UNDP's collaboration with CSOs. Based on the lessons learned in the process of its implementation, UNDP has adopted a number of measures aimed to improve the way in which UNDP works with CSOs." <http://www.undp.org/csopp/CSO/NewFiles/policies.html>.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF (ed.), *Annual Report (2000)*, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Passed by the UN-General Assembly, Resolution 44/25 of November 20, 1989.

<sup>34</sup> H. F. Köck – P. Fischer, *op. cit.* (fn. 8), pp. 427 ff.

in large parts of Europe industrialization linked with liberalism led to the pauperization of the working class and to the social question becoming urgent. At first the idea that labour protection was necessary was propagated from the private side and subsequently was supported strongly also by the Catholic Church, which in 1891 found expression in the Encyclical "*Rerum novarum*" of Pope Leo XIII.<sup>35</sup>

From the beginning the main aim of ILO has been the realization of social justice as a precondition of lasting world peace.<sup>36</sup> In the so-called Philadelphia-Charter of 1944 about the aims and purposes of ILO, the principle is affirmed that all human beings have the right to strive for material welfare and intellectual development in freedom and dignity, in economic security and under equally favourable conditions. The "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" from the year 1998 confirms that social justice is the key to worldwide and lasting peace and that therefore the struggle against worldwide poverty remains one of the most important tasks of ILO.

The integration of non-governmental agents into the ILO threefold parity structure, making international employee- and employer associations official partners with the same rights as government delegations, was often considered to be the key to its success, so that it survived until today as the only institution of the League of Nations.<sup>37</sup>

The merits of ILO primarily consist in having elaborated numerous conventions for the protection of employees.<sup>38</sup> They are not only contracts legally binding according to international law, but beyond that are part of the "UN Global Compact"<sup>39</sup>, a so-called code of honour for enterprises, which was established in 1999 under the auspices of UNO and which more and more enterprises accept, above all those who operate internationally.

Beyond that, in 2002 the "World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization" was founded, which was to deal with the social effects of globalization and to elaborate proposals towards taking them increas-

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. in this context H. F. Köck, *op. cit.* (fn. 14), pp. 552 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Preamble sect. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. W. Hummer, *op. cit.* (fn. 25), p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. especially the Conventions no. 105 about the Abolition of Forced Labour (1957), no. 100 about Equal Payment for Equal Work of Men and Women (1951), no. 138 about Minimum Employment Age (1973) and no. 182 about Prohibition and Direct Measures to Abolish the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999); cf. survey of all conventions on ILO-Homepage: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convidisp1.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Portal/Default.asp>.



ingly into consideration. Beside governments and parliaments economic and multinational enterprises, trade unions, academic circles and other "Civil Society Organizations" were also represented in this commission. In February 2004 the Commission presented its first report entitled "A Fair Globalisation. Creating Opportunities for All".<sup>40</sup> A central claim is the comprehensive and democratic cooperation of people and countries in shaping policies that concern them. For this purpose the contributions to the social dimension of globalization of enterprises, trade unions, networks representing knowledge and claims and "Civil Society Organizations" would have to be increased.

### 3.3 World Bank

Since 1990 the World Bank has intensified its cooperation especially with non-governmental organizations. It was taught by the partly very bitter experience that without the direct implication of those concerned projects for the struggle against poverty do not work. Ever since, under the catchword "participation", great value has been set on the participation of Civil Society Organizations in planning as well as in realizing its projects. Under "participation" is understood: "the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services."<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime a large part of the projects approved by the World Bank is carried out with NGOs participating in them and also subject to continuous control and evaluation.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.4 World Trade Organization (WTO)

Whereas within the framework of the 1947 GATT, the forerunner of the World Trade Organization, no institutionalized cooperation with NGOs was provided for, the 1994 WTO Statute takes into account the increasing importance of the NGOs. Therein the "General Council" is authorized to provide for consultations and cooperation with non-governmental organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Some "Guidelines for Arrangements on Relations With Non-Governmental Organizations" were passed and initiatives started towards greater

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn.13).

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/participation/participation/participation.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> I. Shihata, "The World Bank and Non-Governmental Organizations," in: *Cornell International Law Journal* (1992) 623. A. Reinisch, "Governance Without Accountability?," in: *German Yearbook of International Law* (2001), pp. 270 ff., 293.

<sup>43</sup> Art. V sect. 2 WTO-Statute.

transparency and an increased dialogue with NGOs. On the homepage a forum of its own was installed, where the WTO for its part turns towards the NGOs, conversely however, position-papers of NGOs were published continuously as well.<sup>44</sup>

However, up to the present an institutional integration of NGOs in the sense of a 'cooperation' has been missing, NGOs have no observer status or a role of their own in resolving disputes.<sup>45</sup> They have however been given access to Follow-up WTO Ministerial Conferences and were permitted to participate in plenary meetings.

Thereby NGOs increasingly acted as a political lobby, voicing serious criticism of the projects of the World Trade Organization. This finally also contributed to the failure of the Ministerial Conferences of Seattle (1999) and Cancun (2003). In a similar way, the NGOs were successful even already in the framework of the OECD when the planned "Multilateral Agreement on Investments" (MAI) – that was expected to replace or complement the huge number of existing bilateral treaties (BITs) – failed especially due to the major resistance offered by the NGOs.<sup>46</sup>

## 4. Problems and dangers

The increasing participation of non-governmental organizations in shaping public opinion and realizing programmes on the international level, however, is also seen critically. Within the given context, the following aspects should be dealt with: the issue of responsibility and legitimation and the danger of instrumentalization.

### 4.1 Responsibility and legitimation

In view of the manifold activities, jurisprudence, particularly in the field of international law, draws attention to the dangers resulting from the fact that

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.wto.org/english/forums\\_e/ngo\\_e/pospap\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/pospap_e.htm).

<sup>45</sup> Dispute settlement is one of the central fields of the new WTO. Since therein the positions of the States concerned have to be balanced against each other and thereby the issue is often also the relationship between the principle of free trade and other political targets – as for instance the protection of the environment and employees – as partners in the procedure or as "amicus curiae" NGOs could certainly make an important contribution. Yet, this is unprovided for in the confidentially carried out panel-procedures. Nevertheless NGOs have also forwarded to the organ, that takes decisions, unbidden position-papers, which finally did not remain ineffective. Cf. in this context W. Hummer, *op. cit.* (fn 25), pp. 139 f.

<sup>46</sup> E. M. Graham, "Regulatory Takings, Supranational Treatment, and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment: Issues Raised by Nongovernmental Organizations", in: *Cornell International Law Journal* 31 (1998), pp. 599–614.



the former are acting in a field legally not more precisely defined.<sup>47</sup> The existing norms of international law are not directly applicable to them, nor can they be definitely classed for the most part with the legal regime of an individual state. The basis for cooperation is mostly offered by "Memoranda of Understanding", which are hard to classify or by contracts under private law according to national law.<sup>48</sup>

The problems resulting from this affect above all questions of responsibility and legitimation. Responsibility is particularly important with reference to maintaining human rights standards<sup>49</sup> and in view of financial matters.<sup>50</sup> The question of legitimation always arises when political claims are made. To what extent are non-governmental organizations democratically legitimized? In whose name do they appear in public and what are their qualifications? Does it matter whether their internal organization is democratic? These questions also concern religious communities and religious associations, when as "Civil Society Organizations" they act on national and international levels.

#### 4.2 Danger of instrumentalization

In recent years a great number of Christian and Muslim organizations have done manifold and valuable work. Caritas, for instance, has a very long experience and is widespread, but also other Christian organizations, such as the Franciscans International, Christian Aid or the Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement are active in this field. Muslim organizations are increasingly engaged in many crisis regions of the world, as for instance Islamic Relief or Africa Muslim Agency.

However, the activities of religious groupings also meet with scepticism, be it by representatives of other religions, be it by people who have a secular picture of the world. Attention is drawn to the danger that humanitarian aid is mainly given to followers of one's own religious community, or that

this aid is linked with spreading religious persuasions and customs. This could even go as far as instrumentalizing human engagement for political-religious purposes.<sup>51</sup>

Subject to such reproaches are Christian as well as Muslim organizations. The question arises as to what extent does aid given by religious organizations not always, willed or not, directly or indirectly, aim at or effect a conversion?

On the other hand charitable and humanitarian engagement is a basic element in the self-understanding of Churches and religious communities, so that they see therein a central field of their activity. In all religious communities caring for the welfare of one's neighbour ranks particularly high as to its ethical value. Therefore religiously motivated organizations are also among those which are most effective and acknowledged as doing excellent work.

Yet, how on the other hand can the reproach be confronted or the suspicion avoided that in truth only a conversion of those cared for and an increase in the number of one's own followers is intended?

In connection with Muslim organizations, Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, political adviser of the UN-Special Representative of the Region of the Great Lakes in Africa and author of the much-discussed book "Jihad humanitaire"<sup>52</sup> warns against generalizations and points out their heterogeneity. According to his observations and experience, three different types of religious NGOs can be distinguished<sup>53</sup>:

° Some organizations consider it as their one and only aim and purpose to 'do good', because the Holy Scriptures say that this has to be done. They serve every people, whoever they may be.

° Other organizations are of the opinion that charitable activities must go hand in hand with a spiritual message as well. They want to carry and introduce Islamic values into society. The result is that material help (such as food, water, shelter, care for orphans, medical aid) is combined with spiritual 'aid' (such as the construction of mosques, distribution of the Qur'ān).

<sup>51</sup> As this was for instance the case with Hamas and Hisbollah, which have prepared their political and also militant activities by intensive social engagement, in order to guarantee the support of the Muslim population. Cf. on this topic D. Lagarde, "L'humanitaire au service de l'Islam", in: *L'Express* (October 10, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> A.-R. Ghandour, *Jihad humanitaire: Enquête sur les ONG Islamiques*. Paris, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> A.-R. Ghandour, "Muslim NGOs are not a homogeneous group," in: *Humanitarian Affairs Review* (2003), pp. 54 ff., 55.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. for instance A. Reinisch, *op. cit.* (fn. 4), pp. 270 ff.

<sup>48</sup> An exception here is the European Community which, as mentioned before, by issuing decrees for certain fields, created solid legal foundations.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. for instance R. Wilde, "Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes? Why and How UNHCR Governance of "Development" Refugee Camps Should be Subject to International Human Rights Law," in: *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* (1998), pp. 5 ff.

<sup>50</sup> In the past, thus cases where donated money was misused (for instance in the Austrian Sub-Organization of World Vision) became known as well as cases of bribery and corruption (for instance in connection with nomination practices by the International Olympic Committee). Cf. details in this context in W. Hummer, *op. cit.* (fn. 25), pp. 180 ff.



° Finally, a third group of Muslims sees their only aim in protecting Muslims and in defending all Muslims whom they consider to be in danger. For this minority defending Muslims can take various forms, from caring for fundamental human needs to violent actions.

Whereas there is no doubt that the last group has to be rejected and the first will hardly cause any problems, assessing the second group seems to be most difficult. Thus, for instance, Moustafa Oman, Director of Islamic Relief, one of the greatest world-widely active Muslim relief organizations, said that man does not live on bread alone and that taking care of the values in a society is as important as caring for the daily bread.<sup>54</sup> However, the conclusions drawn from acknowledging this vary according to the respective picture of the world. For Islamic relief this means that helping one's human fellows must not be restricted to satisfying their fundamental needs, but beyond that also contributing towards building up a functioning, value-oriented society.<sup>55</sup> Islamic Relief sees itself thereby less opposed to Christian organizations, than to secular organizations who pretend to act completely neutrally but in truth, though indirectly, spread the values of the Western world and way of life.<sup>56</sup>

In recent years the great humanitarian Christian organizations have increasingly set a high value on pursuing in the first place their aim to give humanitarian aid, without any difference as to the race or faith of those in need. Although they draw their motivation and commission from Christianity, their self-understanding is primarily humanitarian and not missionary.<sup>57</sup> Yet, there are also individual organizations, above all in the USA<sup>58</sup>, which employ humanitarian help directly in the purpose of spreading their own faith.

For Muslim organizations it seems to be even more difficult to separate humanitarian engagement from spreading their faith. In those countries

<sup>54</sup> M. Oman, "Muslim NGOs Can Help Bridge Culture Gap," in: *Humanitarian Affairs Review* (2002). <http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/aid/2003/0124.muslim.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> As an example may be mentioned the activities in Bosnia, which on the one hand were a great help and also contributed towards an understanding between Christians and Muslims, on the other hand were accompanied by the construction of numerous mosques and the establishment of Qur'anic schools. Cf. M. Oman, *op. cit.* (fn. 54); A.-R. Ghandour, *op. cit.* (fn. 53), pp. 54 ff., p. 56.

<sup>56</sup> M. Oman, *op. cit.* (fn. 54).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. for instance the homepage of Caritas Internationalis. <http://www.caritas.org/> > Who We Are.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. for instance the Protestant "Summer Institute of Linguistics", linking its engagement in education in the developing countries with spreading their faith.

which give financial support most generously to the activities of Muslim organizations, such as for instance Saudi Arabia, there is no separation in the relation between state and religion either.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, in the same way a separation of charitable activities and religion seems not to be enforceable or desirable.

## 5. Prospects for the future

In brief, one can state that within the international framework an increasingly important status is due to 'Civil Society'. Churches, religious communities and religious associations are as part of the 'Civil Society' implicitly acknowledged by States, many international organizations, organs and institutions, by some of them also explicitly. Even though the denotation 'non-governmental organizations' or 'NGOs' is not always adequate or is not in keeping with the self-understanding of Churches and religious communities, they and closely associated auxiliary organizations can certainly play an important role in today's international system, together with others in the struggle against poverty.

However, despite increase in their numbers, the possibilities of the non-governmental agents must not be overestimated. Political and economic power is as before in the hands of the States and of transnational enterprises. Although we may observe effects in the processes for the formation of international public opinion when democratic votes are cast or are influencing the market, they are nevertheless limited. Engagement and achievements of civil society organizations are certainly welcome and important, nevertheless the struggle against poverty on national and international levels still has to remain a primary target of the States and (public) international organizations.

From this two consequences result for the common endeavours of Christians and Muslims: first, the States have to be reminded of their responsibility and challenged to render account as to their maintaining the obligations they accepted. One of the greatest obstacles on the path of the struggle against poverty is, among others, the so far largely unpunished non-observance of agreements and promises in matters of development aid. Thus for instance in Austria the ongoing campaign "Nullkommasieben" (zeropoint seven)

<sup>59</sup> Beside Saudi Arabia this also applies to the United Arab Emirates or Iran, which together are the most important financiers of Islamic Relief Organizations. Cf. M. Mennig, "Histoire de flouze," in: *59 Défis Sud* (2003) 41 f.



refers to the fact that as early as 1970 the UN-member states agreed to put 0.7 percent of their gross national product at the disposal of development cooperation and that so far only five countries have kept this obligation.<sup>60</sup>

A great number of non-governmental organizations, among them also many Christian organizations, support this campaign.

Second, within the framework of their possibilities and with the help of humanitarian religious organizations, the Churches and religious communities as parts of civil society can make a contribution of their own to the struggle against poverty. Carrying out programs and projects with the help of civil society organizations has so far essentially satisfied expectations. It allows flexibility in starting activities and involves a smaller amount of bureaucracy and expenses. It also makes possible a greater closeness to the people concerned and engaged, whose living conditions should be improved. Important international organizations, such as World Bank, the ILO or UNICEF, consider therefore improving and extending relations and cooperation with civil society organizations to be a crucial way of improving their programmes in the struggle against poverty.

Yet, churches and religious communities have to make their contributions with responsibility. This means that the interests of the general public have to be taken care of and not only the ones of our own religious communities. Poverty and social need are an ideal hotbed for the activities of radical religious groups. Churches and religious communities are responsible for standing up against abuse or instrumentalization by organizations close to them.

If everybody acts with due sense of accountability, today more than ever it is possible for Christians and Muslims to take action in order to make their contributions on national and international levels to the solution of the great problems facing humanity today.

<sup>60</sup> The campaign points out the fact that up to now only five countries have attained this target (for instance Denmark with 1.01%). Austria's contribution as the 8th of the richest countries is only at 0.26%. <http://www.nullkomasieben.at>.

## Questions and Interventions

questions concerning orientation, activities, cooperation and monitoring of NGOs

**KHOURY** A first question refers to the humanitarian, non-religious NGOs: do they also tend towards instrumentalizing their secularistic *weltanschauung* – as we may sometimes reproach religious NGOs for doing likewise?

Furthermore, how can we check the reliability of the various NGOs? Can we not expect them to run the risk of becoming corrupt in ways quite similar to the governmental institutions? Do adequate instruments exist for controlling their activities and finances?

Which kind of activity is more effective in the struggle against poverty: that of the governmental agents or that of the NGOs?

Could we not coordinate more efficiently the activities of Christian and Muslim NGOs and of similar institutions, for example, when working in a certain country by planning and implementing their initiatives there together? In fact, there are already some projects in African countries that are carried out by Muslims and Christians together.

Finally, would it be possible for “The Organization of the Islamic Conference”, this important international institution, to reinforce their activities in the interest of alleviating poverty in our world?

**MARBOE** Critical questioning is always advisable, in all directions, as for instance when also directed at non-religious, secularistic NGOs. Yet, we can quite spontaneously refer to very positive examples, such as to the International Red Cross, which, in its international activities, enjoys a worldwide reputation, and to its local national societies as well. We could enumerate a number of other institutions, such as “Médecins Sans Frontières” (MSF) who do not instrumentalize their missions for certain purposes, but are ready to come to people's assistance whenever acute emergency situations occur.

In this context, I am in general preoccupied with the question how the previously cited Biblical saying, “One does not live by bread alone” (Dt 8:3, Mt 4:4) may be understood by Christians and by Muslims, and how it can be put into practice without exposing ourselves to the reproach of an attempted conversion or of increasing our own supporters.

As to the danger of corruption – and in fact it is a serious problem – the teaching of international law is at present concerned with examining a possible revision of the area of responsibility of the individual NGOs. Already



the NGOs are obliged to meet certain criteria if they file an application for recognition in the framework of the UN consultative status. All these efforts aim at subsequently evaluating these criteria at regular intervals. Resolution No. 31 of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1996) has chosen to make this examination only once – in the context of granting the consultative status. A normal regular examination beyond this is demanded by the teaching of international law, but, at present, is not yet practice.

Concerning the question of the NGOs' effectivity the opinion seems to dominate in the international organizations and in the UN family that the cooperation with NGOs is more efficient than that with governments. In the framework of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World-Food-Programme (WFP), the UN organizations have cooperated a lot with NGOs. Obviously, there is the feeling that aid gets to the people more directly than via governmental institutions who are obliged to distribute the aid to the needy.

Certainly, a better coordination of religious NGOs would be desirable. According to my own observations, a certain scepticism is prevailing in this context and we cannot overlook a strained relationship among the individual groupings. That Christians and Muslims assert, cooperation for its own sake, in the interest of the needy, should be functioning marvellously, was rather not to be observed in the areas which I looked at more closely.

Finally, concerning the question of the OIC: from the perspective of international law I already noticed that this organization is called "The Organization of the Islamic Conference", although we would expect 'Countries' in the sense of sovereign nation-states rather than 'Conference'. Here I would personally like to raise the question whether the Islamic international law does not so much begin with the idea of nation-states but rather with the concept of the *Umma*, of a Muslim community that knows nothing of national borders. All the more one could certainly also expect an involvement in the struggle against poverty within its own sphere of influence.

observations with regard to the situation in Austria

**POTZ** The problems that are discussed in our context certainly are internal problems as well. This is true, for example, in Austria or in Germany of the cooperation in the framework of aid to developing countries

that is mainly organized by Church organizations and supported by the government. Then people say, the religiously-neutral State in this way supports the Church mission. This is a classic reproach. But other people do the same for political or other reasons. Is it permissible to advertise for each

and everything, directly and indirectly, except for religion? This would be discriminating against religious groups.

To increase transparency precisely in the case of these big donor organizations, a new law of association was implemented in Austria. It would be good to have a law of this kind on an international level too. The problem, here and there, is the internal democracy of associations.

The coordination of religious groups in their aid projects for developing countries, in my opinion, is no pressing problem here in Austria: the organization of 'Caritas' on the part of Catholics and of 'Diakonie' on the part of Protestants cooperate in these matters, and the Muslim religious community is about to establish a similar structure. This cooperation is most successful on the internal level, it should be practised on an international level too, but this will certainly be more difficult.

concerning the inner structure of the OIC

**MAHMOOD T.** Following the previous intervention of Dr. Marboe, I would like to add a clarifying word about the inner structure of the OIC. It is said that international law in Islam is based on the concept of

the global *Umma* and not on that of nation-states. I disagree with this belief. In any case, the OIC need not work on the basis of this idea. As is well-known, India with its 140 million Muslims and China with its very huge Muslim population have no voice in the OIC – not even as observers – whereas Uganda and some other nation-states with their very small Muslim populations are its full-fledged members.

the NGOs and women's rights

**MAHMOOD S. S.** In the context of Dr. Marboe's very interesting paper, I think first of the manifold engagement of the NGOs in the interest of women's issues.

The most diverging points of departure of the various NGOs in this matter became obvious at the past Beijing conference of the United Nations. There was a major confrontation within the United Nations between women's NGOs and their governments, on the one hand, and the UN, on the other. In that particular case for example the women-organized NGOs seemed to have dominated the UN platform. In the conflict between the women's NGOs and the religious NGOs all religious organizations were marginalized and discriminated against. So the cooperation there, as everybody knows, occurred between the Muslim organizations and the Holy See. Practically all of the panels and discussions were dominated by one theme, and that is: how to fight conservatism. In one major plenary all religious organizations supposedly were represented by feminist women who condemned



their respective religions. So there is this problem going on within UN also as to the orientation of these various NGOs.

the NGOs and the struggle against poverty

As was already mentioned in the previous paper: to fight issues like poverty, governments and NGOs have been arguing with the international organizations such as UN, World Bank, IMF and Islamic Development

Bank. The point is – in the Islamic countries as well – that governments are not capable of reaching out to the grassroots as effectively and readily as the NGOs do. Governments come and go, especially in the Third World countries. They are not always representative for all the people. So we fight for this voice of the NGOs to become more effective and to be heard. In the process for getting accreditation in the UN observer status or consultative status, many of the religious organizations felt discriminated against by the UN, because they were counted among the troublemakers. So, literally many of the religious organizations were not given accreditation, or the bar was raised for their efforts to reach the consultative status.

The UN therefore is not a totally neutral, innocent body, it is a collection of people whoever happen to dominate the agenda. For the Beijing conference it was basically the feminists who dominated the UN; for poverty issues it is more the commercial interests, the capitalists who dominate the issues. It is not so much a fight between governments and NGOs, but the problem are some NGOs who dominate the UN process. So in the case of poverty it is mostly the capitalists who are dominating the agenda and all these major events that are taking place at WTO-conferences, where you have such public anger and demonstrations happening.

There is a lot going on at the level of NGOs that needs to be addressed by the governments and by international organizations to see to it that the voices of the NGOs are heard; because ultimately – as in the case of women as well as in the case of poverty – these are the NGOs who work in personal one-to-one basis with the people.

an initiative of the Islamic Development Bank

Lately, the Islamic Development Bank, of which I am consultant, has made an initiative on the parallels of World Bank. For that purpose, I made a special visit to the World Bank to see how they are dealing with

NGOs. At that time they were organizing a major conference in Geneva, the World Bank, IMF, etc., as to how to deal with NGOs. To my consternation I found that these organizations deal entirely through governments: the money funding does not get directly to the NGOs, but to the government

and the government then decides which NGO gets and which does not get supported; so the whole thing is totally politicized then. They are now trying to reach out for somehow developed instruments so that they can deal directly with NGOs, although the governments resist that strongly.

NGOs and World Bank

**MARBOE** Thank you for this clarification and giving an account of the situation in the World Bank. Already in 1992 a detailed article by Ibrahim Shihata, at that

time Vicepresident of the World Bank, was published in the *Handbook On Good Practices for Laws Relating to NGOs*, edited by the World Bank. It should therefore be made possible for the governments to examine which NGOs are a possibility for such cooperation. But this approach was much criticized and is no longer valid today. There you could still find a definition of NGOs which explicitly ruled out any form of cooperation with Churches and religious communities. Nowadays, they try to reach direct cooperation with NGOs, without the governments being involved. This is also the procedure followed by the World Bank. Their recently edited *Guidelines for Consultations with Civil Society* (2004) testify to it.

the NGOs and the complexity of the problem of poverty

**GABRIEL** Here I would like to refer back to my paper at the outset of this meeting and once again emphasize the complexity of the issue under discussion: poverty is not only a material problem, but also includes poverty of rights, education, etc. That is why it is partly

extremely difficult to deal with phenomena of poverty. It is part of my earliest reminiscences of the time of my involvement in the field of aid to developing countries, how difficult it is to penetrate to the grass roots at all and how important it is therefore to include organizations that are partly originating from the individual countries and which are also religiously motivated.

Certainly, it would be exceptionally interesting to draw up a catalogue of criteria that are relevant for Christian and Muslim organizations to get involved in this field and which shows the forms of cooperation there are.

**MARBOE** For me, many things are still left open after this discussion, because they could only be given preliminary consideration. But I think that it brought out the way in which Churches and religious communities as non-governmental agents can and should get involved in this fight against poverty and injustice on an international level, and that in this context it is, however, also necessary to argue against instrumentalization and misuse of every kind so that solidarity is not misunderstood and practised, as it were,



in the face of an external enemy. No doubt we should be rather self-critical about mismanagement if there is any. This would be very conducive to the credibility of all our endeavours.

## Prejudices Breeding Injustices: Minorities' Predicament amid Global Modernism

Tahir Mahmood

It is on the suggestion of our friend, philosopher and guide Brother Andreas Bsteh that in the broad framework of the general topic of this VICIRoTa Plenary I am focusing my thoughts on the problems of the minorities; and I am indeed speaking on the basis of my personal observations and experience.<sup>1</sup> The laws relating to minorities – national and international – have been one of the major areas of my research interests throughout my career. My brief innings with the Indian National Commission for Minorities as its Chair and the responsibilities attached to that rather vulnerable office further enriched me with a first-hand knowledge of the prevailing conditions and ground realities.<sup>2</sup> And today I have the privilege of sharing my experiments and findings with this august multi-national gathering of scholars.

There are indeed various categories of minorities across the globe – three of whom, although not only these, viz., the religious, ethnic and linguistic – are recognized worldwide. All these, as also some other categories, may be of relevance to us here in VICIRoTa, but perhaps religious minorities have the biggest claim on our time and agenda. In any case, my work at the Indian Minorities Commission was confined to this category and I will, therefore, talk here generally of those who under the Indian Constitution are called “minorities based on religion” and are recognized by the international law as the leading group among the various minority classes.

‘Minority’ and ‘majority’ are basically arithmetical terms showing the relative numerical position of various groups within a particular political entity. “The minority of people is a number of them that form less than half of the larger group”, says a popular dictionary of English usage.<sup>3</sup> Inter-

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written before the general elections of 2004 were held in India. After the elections a new regime took over the reins of the government and since then the minority situation has noticeably improved.

<sup>2</sup> The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has been in existence since 1978 and is reconstituted every three years. This author was its Chairman during 1996–1999. In March 2005 the present government had constituted for the educationally and economically backward classes among the minorities a new commission called the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (NCRLM). The author is a member of this Commission.

<sup>3</sup> *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. London, 1987, p. 920.



national-law documents define 'minority' as "a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population."<sup>4</sup>

A big question, then, is at what level of the political set up in the modern nation-state models these tests of 'numerical inferiority' and 'non-dominant position' are to be applied in order to recognize the minority status of a particular community? The question may be easy to answer in the case of small or medium-sized countries with unitary political structures – where the respective numerical strength of various communities at the national level may be decisive. In respect of big federal countries, however, where the constituent units are political entities with varying extent of autonomy, the numerical position and therefore the minority-majority status of various communities may have to be seen, at least for some purposes, also at the state level.

Brother Andreas Bsteh had probably in his mind the small unitary states and the states within the big federal states when he made a prophesy – here in Vienna at our last Plenary – that not too far from now all of us everywhere in the world might find ourselves living as minorities. And it is no coincidence indeed that in India – which is one of the largest federal democracies of the contemporary world – we already have some examples of how Professor Bsteh visualizes the future world situation.

At the national level, while the followers of the Hindu religion constitute the predominant majority in India, all the other communities are regarded as minorities. On top of the national-level minorities are the Muslims – about 140 million – i. e., exceeding the aggregate population of England and France taken together – but yet accounting for only 13.4 % of the national population. Next to them are the over 21 million Christians, closely followed by the 16 million Sikhs, the two together having a 4 % share in the country's total population. Then there are relatively much smaller minorities – the Buddhists, the Jains, the Zoroastrians, the Jews and the Bahā'īs.<sup>5</sup>

This national-level demographic scenario is, however, not uniform in different regions of the country. The vast federal nation called India is a Union comprising thirty-five constituent units in all – twenty-eight States

<sup>4</sup> F. Capotorti, *Report on the Implementation of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966*. Geneva, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> All these population figures have been taken from the latest Census Report of the Government of India which relates to the year 2001.

and seven 'Union Territories' – among which each of the States and two of the Union Territories have their own elected governments. All the Union Territories except the tiny territory of Lakshadweep – where the population is almost entirely Muslim – are dominated by the Hindus. Among the 28 States, however, only 21 are dominated by the Hindus – in the rest of these they are a minority. While five of the States where the Hindus are a minority are dominated by some other religious communities<sup>6</sup>, the remaining two – Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur – have a unique position as every community there (including the Hindus) is a minority having less than 50 % of the local population.<sup>7</sup>

There is another notable feature of the minority situation which India does share with almost every other country of the world, and which is indeed the fundamental reason underlying all the inequities and injustices the religious minorities face across the globe. While the national-level majority – the Hindus – are unquestionably seen by themselves as the children of the soil, popular perception categorizes the minorities into the twin compartments of followers of religions of an 'Indian origin' and of a 'foreign origin'. In the eyes of a great majority of people, being a religious minority of a 'foreign origin' is no less than a stigma – sometimes a crime. Unfortunately the two largest minorities of India – Muslims and Christians – are still seen as followers of religions of 'foreign origin' – nearly two thousand and fifteen hundred years, respectively, of their uninterrupted existence in the country have not won their faiths popular recognition as 'religions of India'. Apart from being the local-level majority in as many as six constituent units of the country as already stated, Muslims and Christians are also the predominant section of the population in a sizable number of districts elsewhere in the country. These demographic realities, however, do not change in any way the popular perception which refuses to recognize the Hindus as a 'minority' and the Christians or the Muslims as the 'majority' anywhere in the country. This classification of religions with regard to their places of origin – historically true or unreasonably presumed – is, of course, no speciality

<sup>6</sup> The States of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are dominated by the Christians. Muslims are the predominant majority in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Sikhs in the Punjab State.

<sup>7</sup> Both these States are situated in the North East; and in both the Hindus (although below 50 % of the population) are the largest religious community. While in Manipur Christians are the second largest religious group, in Arunachal Pradesh there are several indigenous faiths and the followers of one of these are the second biggest community.



of India and unfortunately remains a global phenomenon playing havoc with the minorities everywhere.

Before proceeding further, let us see what is the formal legal position in our modernised world in respect of the status and rights of the minorities. Two years after the establishment of the United Nations following the disaster caused by World War II, on the insistence of the erstwhile Soviet Union a Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities was set up as an organ of the International Commission on Human Rights. In the years that followed it took many initiatives and released many studies relating to minorities and was instrumental to the eventual proclamation of a UN "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities", on 18th December 1992. This Declaration speaks of "national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities" and makes it obligatory for all the states of the world to protect their existence and identity and create favourable conditions by adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to ensure that they effectively exercise all the rights specified in the text of this Declaration as also all other "human rights and fundamental freedoms." Explicit recognition is given in its text to the minorities' rights "to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination."

Notably, the Declaration also expressly recognizes for every minority in every country the right "to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group and with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across national frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic ties."<sup>8</sup> On the national level major constitutions of the world, both in the East and the West, prohibit all discrimination and injustice against individuals based on religion or belief. Many of them contain specific provisions for the minorities aimed at ensuring them a fair and reasonable share in the national resources. In India the Constitution speaks of "religious denominations" and their internal divisions and, while guaranteeing in general to every citizen the "Fundamental Right" to "equality before law" and "equal protection of the laws", also specifically recognizes the rights of the minorities to "conserve" their distinct culture, language and script and to establish and administer their own educational institutions.

<sup>8</sup> See the Preamble and Articles 1–9 of the Declaration.

Directing the State "to endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities", the Constitution puts it under a mandate "to promote with special care economic and educational interests of weaker sections of the people." And the citizens, in their turn, are bound by a "Fundamental Duty" to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to "value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture." Identical or similar provisions relating to, or having a bearing on, the status and rights of minorities may be located also in most of the other constitutions of the nation-states across the globe.<sup>9</sup>

The modern world's politico-legal theory on the minorities is, thus, superb and indeed unassailable. A big question, however, is whether all the religious minorities or any of them – in India or elsewhere in our modernized, civilized, scientifically-developed, technologically-advanced and above all 'humanely globalized' world – are really enjoying all or any of the extensive rights recognized for them by the UN Declaration of 1992 and the respective national constitutions? Does the position of the Christians in the Muslim countries and of the Muslims in the Christian-dominated countries – and indeed of Christians and Muslims in the countries like India, and of the other religious communities in the countries dominated by the Christians or the Muslims – reflect in any way a successful implementation of the international and national legal texts on the rights of the minorities? I am afraid what I have seen in the length and breadth of India, and in most of those numerous other countries which I have been visiting over the years, do not allow my conscience to accept any positive answers to any of these questions.

The tragedy of the contemporary world indeed is that despite all its professed modernism in its political and legal theories and the claims to advancement in respect of human rights, in actual practice it does not look at the minorities in the simple arithmetical meaning of the term. Political professions apart, 'numerical inferiority' – which the legal definitions of the term 'minority' speak about – invariably becomes social and political inferiority and the numerically 'non-dominant position' is obstinately translated into an arbitrary hegemony of the predominant group. Strange and inexplicable prejudices prevail among the religious majorities against the minorities due to the latter's different religious beliefs, traditions and practices which the former disapprove – as also, in many cases, the latter's ethnic characteristics which the

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of India 1950, as amended up to date, Articles 14–16, 25–30 and 51-A.



former look down upon with disdain. The high ideals of secularism, equality before law and humanitarianism remain merely textual and fail to percolate down the social fabric and hence to change the popular attitudes among the national majorities. No amount of magnanimity and no attempt at winning hearts on the part of the followers of the minority religions carrying the tag of 'foreign origin' succeed anywhere in changing popular attitudes.

To illustrate some of my observations and experiences in this regard I have some recent media reports as also some other sources to refer to, which show where the air is blowing in different parts of the globe.<sup>10</sup>

In late March this year a leading English daily of India reported two different news items. One of these captioned "Missionary dispensaries open at temple town" reported how one Father Joseph of the Catholic Diocese was providing round the clock medical facilities to the participants in a great Hindu fair in a north-Indian city known for its ancient temples. The other item quoted the official statement of one Father Valerian Vaz of Goa's Catholic Church talking of the "miserable existence" of nearly 300 million "people living below the poverty line" and lamenting how "terror politics had infiltrated culture and religion." The magnificent services rendered by the Christians over the years towards the protection of health and promotion of education in the country are indeed highly appreciable. The massive nationwide network of Christian schools, colleges, hospitals and nursing homes is a valuable national asset. And yet the community today feels the pangs of 'terror politics' and hate campaign, often accused of trying to achieve now what 350 years of the mighty British rule in the country with its open and well known patronage of Christian missionaries had failed to achieve – viz., converting India into a "Christian-dominated state." The man in the street has been given to believe that Indian Christians – despite their Indian names, looks and dresses – are now determined to achieve that goal through the 'secret agenda' of educational and health services.

The Muslims, seven times larger in numbers than the Christians, are indeed in a worse position. Carrying on their forehead the label of being the co-religionists of those who in the name of religion had demanded and secured partition of the country at the time of securing independence from foreign rule, they are popularly believed to be carrying extra-territorial loyalties. Baselessly presumed to be the descendants of those despotic

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<sup>10</sup> Taken from various issues of the leading English daily *The Times of India*, January–March 2004.

rulers of the past who had allegedly destroyed Hindu temples centuries ago, they must face destruction of their mosques in these modern times. Deep-rooted prejudices prevailing in the society against their religion, culture, language and educational institutions make a mockery of the national and international legal documents guaranteeing them a basic right to preserve and promote these very characteristics and symbols of their identity.

Nationalism and patriotism are identified in India with the religion and culture of the majority. While nobody minds the devotion of the Hindus for the Pashupatinath Temple in Nepal and the Mansarovar in Tibet, or for that matter even of the Sikh minority for the Nankana Saheb in Pakistan, the religious emotions of the Christians for the Vatican and of the Muslims for Makkah and Madinah are generally looked down upon by the other fellow citizens. This inexplicable discrimination between the religions of 'Indian' and 'foreign' origins respectively, although illegal by the letter of the law and invariably denied by the governmental and political sources, is indeed a hard fact of life.

In independent India the Muslim minority in general, as also many sections among the other minorities, have been and remain educationally and, therefore also economically, backward. Realizing that life in a democracy is a game of numbers in which minorities may in respect of development be easily eclipsed by the dominant majority, the Constitution of India had established an educational autonomy regime for the minorities clothing them with an unfettered right to establish and run their own educational institutions at all levels. Unfortunately, no other provision of the national charter has, however, received such a shabby treatment over the years as this noble principle purposely incorporated in it in the interest of justice and fair play. Under the law as developed later and in force today no minority can set up an institution for its own children unless it agrees to educate an equal number of children belonging to the majority community. By a strange logic national integration is sought to be attained by enforcing this 'balancing' in the educational institutions of the minorities – whereas appropriately it should have been secured by ensuring a reasonable presence of children from the minority communities in the State-run and State-aided institutions where their number has always been and remains microscopic. Clear provisions of the Constitution sanctioning "protective discrimination" in favour of the weaker sections of the society are made wholly inapplicable to the minorities through their blanket exclusion from the concept of 'weaker sections' subjected to arbitrary definitions drawn from a misconceived no-



tion of secularism. It is conveniently forgotten that the ideal of secularism was adopted, at least in India, to safeguard the minorities against majority communalism and not to deny the minorities the basic human rights and civil liberties. This state of affairs blocks the way to a proper educational development of the minorities on a par with the majority and relegates them to the lowest economic strata of the society living in abject poverty.

The minority situation is not much different in the other parts of the subcontinent. In Pakistan stringent anti-blasphemy laws have been used against the Christians; and there have been reports of discrimination and even atrocities against the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. All this is surely liable to be disapproved by all right-thinking people.

However, anti-minority prejudices breeding discriminatory attitudes, causing them sheer injustices and making them economically backward, are surely not the monopoly of India and her neighbourhood. Taken as a whole, this indeed seems to be the order of the day in the so-called developed world as well. And yet it is registered at the global level with an amazing selectivity. The US statutory Commission on International Religious Freedom, set up in 1998, had in its maiden annual report observed that "Animosities within and between religious communities in India have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions – at times exacerbated by poverty, class and ethnic differences – have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country's 51-year history." Subsequent developments prompted the Commission to designate India on the list of "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs) under another report released four years later. Other "countries of particular concern" on the US Commission's list have been Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, Laos, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam – all situate in the East. Although the undercurrents of what it calls 'anti-Semitism' as witnessed in Belgium and France have been mildly disapproved in the report, it has nothing to say about the problems of the minorities in the UK and other leading nations of the West. Is this not an unjust discrimination in itself? The openly selective approach of the Commission in identifying anti-minority discrimination worldwide and, above all, its total silence on the inhuman treatment meted out to the religio-ethnic minorities in its own home state – especially in the wake of the abominable terrorist attacks of September 2001 – have irked many and are indeed irritating. No wonder in India official sources and spokesmen of the majority have greatly resented the US Commission's criticism – for reasons not all of which may be regarded as baseless.

Religious minorities, and now especially the Muslims, do face discrimination and injustice in the countries owing official or unofficial allegiance to various forms of Christianity. There have been authentic media reports about anti-Muslim feelings from the USA, UK and several other western countries – to corroborate which one has only to go through the periodic reports brought out by the impartial probing agencies like the Amnesty International and the Minority Rights Group. Of course there is nothing entirely new in this phenomenon. When I was a student in London about one-third of a century ago – when nothing of the sort of 11/9 had happened anywhere – looking at the mosques with contempt and ridicule was quite a normal practice and the so-called 'Paki-bashi' a favourite pastime of the city's skinheads.<sup>11</sup>

In today's Britain the ideal of multi-culturism is drowning in the spate of everyday demands for 'cultural assimilation' of the minorities, thwarting at the same time any attempt of the minorities to move towards it. Just feel the sense of despair and humiliation in how a leading Caribbean academic recently answered in a leading British daily the charge of not 'assimilating' with the local culture:<sup>12</sup> "It would be impossible for those of us who have lived here since the second World War not to have imbibed, shared and developed the culture into which we were plunged. We formed myriad organizations to demand our inclusion in various areas of national life, and when those areas continued to keep us out we built our own institutions. In the areas where ethnic minorities are in majority that is so because as they moved in the whites moved out. What were the minorities supposed to do? Follow the whites around, with heads bowed and tails wagging, wailing: don't go, please stay?"

It was indeed a frank acknowledgement of the prevailing ground reality when writing recently in another leading London newspaper a former Chair of the Britain's Commission for Racial Equality, Herman Ousel, said: "There are many minority ethnic people who are British to the core. Their children are immersed in British culture. They participate as much as they are able to in British institutional life. Yet they experience discrimination and exclusion. That is why they form their own organizations, business, places of worship, restaurants, newspapers and leisure facilities. There are

<sup>11</sup> The author was a research student in London at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in 1969–1971 during which period such incidents were of frequent occurrence.

<sup>12</sup> This and the next quotations have been taken from various issues of the *Guardian*, London, January–March 2004.



hundreds of talented people who experience racism in this country despite being British and committed to British culture and values."

When this is happening in a fully developed country like Britain, what is so strange about it if millions of 'talented people' following Christianity or Islam experience communalism in a developing country like India despite being fully Indian?

Professions apart, discrimination and injustice against the minorities resulting from religious prejudices remain the order of our so-called civilized world as a whole. "There is no part of me which does not feel British and no part of me which does not feel Muslim – I am a British Muslim", cries a young girl in England. Nobody listens to her. "There is no part of us which does not feel Indian and no part of us which does not feel Muslim or Christian – we are Indian Muslims and Indian Christians", cry the followers of Islam and Christianity in India; and again nobody listens.

The society as a whole in both India and the UK is a hotbed of anti-minorityism; and so it is in most of the other formerly British-ruled states now forming the so-called Commonwealth of Nations. In view of the vastly poor response everywhere to the religious liberty and equality clauses in the modern national and international laws, and indeed poorer regard for the teachings of various religions themselves on human equality and dignity, should not the so-called Commonwealth of Nations be now called the 'Common-poverty of Nations' suffering from legal illiteracy and spiritual bankruptcy?

Christianity and Islam both were born in the Middle East, but the West identifies itself exclusively with the former and, virtually regarding it as indigenous, looks down upon Islam as a foreign faith adhered to mostly by its minorities of non-western origin. I find it strange and indeed unreasonable. On the other hand, in the Middle East – its real birthplace – Christianity is hardly regarded as indigenous and is invariably identified with the Western culture. This in my opinion is equally foolish. But there are reasons for it and indeed a vicious circle. The popular perception in the UK, as a recent report puts it, is that "being a Caribbean or a Muslim is incompatible with being fully British." If people in the West do not whole-heartedly condemn this self-assumed standard of 'compatibility', how can they ever condemn the wholly absurd but certainly popular perception in India that "being a Muslim or Christian is incompatible with being fully Indian"? If they do, they will be simply throwing stones on others while living in glass houses themselves.

Is there really an irreconcilable conflict between nationalism and religion? About a century ago a renowned poet-philosopher of the East, Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, had proclaimed nation-states to be the biggest enemy of religion:

In taaza khudaon mein baraa sab sey watan hai  
Jo pairahan is ka hai who mazhab ka kafan hai  
The biggest among these new gods is the nation  
The robe of this god is indeed the shroud for religion

Today those following the majority religion in the nation-states regard religions of the minorities living there as their biggest 'national' enemy. Why? If Iqbal was wrong, can they be right?

The major factors responsible for the predicaments of the minorities across the globe, thus, are palpably discriminatory attitudes towards various religions which arbitrarily treat one or another chosen one as the only true or at least the most superior spiritual system, and the popular perceptions which see particular religions as the basic or natural religions of particular nation-states of our times to the total exclusion of all other faiths. The origin of each of our religions is at present attributed to particular nation-states, while all of them were born before the birth of the concept of such states.

This indeed is the crux of the minorities' problem. True spokesmen of all religions, and indeed of true humanity, must awaken to its potential of perpetuating discrimination and injustice against the minorities. They have to persuade people to realize and accept that all religions together are the common heritage of mankind as a whole. Their founders might have taken birth in distant history in particular towns; but no religion in itself was meant for any particular geographical area or political entity of the past or the present. The real remedy to redress the woes of the minorities across the globe lies in de-linking religions from the places of birth of their respective founders and accepting their universal character. To achieve the true ideals and objects of a purposeful globalization the origin of each of our religions has also to be globalized.

This only will of course not solve the problem. A lot more will have to be done. What and how, let the VICIRoTa deliberate upon.



different conditions of minorities in the various countries

**KHIDOYATOV** In the United States there are 25 confessions – and nobody speaks of religious minorities. In Ireland there is one single nation, and at the same time an enormous polarity between Protestants and Catholics, and in India when Mother Teresa died, in

1997, she was revered as Mother of all India. It seems to me that the inter-relationship between the religious minorities started to move a lot and their relations differ strongly from country to country and sometimes even in various parts of a country. Furthermore, we may observe here and there a very different approach to issues of assimilation and tendencies towards autonomy: so, for instance, in Afghanistan nobody wants autonomy, they want to be one nation. In other words, I think it is desirable to elaborate on the types of interreligious relationship in the various countries.

how to make already existing initiatives more efficient?

**KHOURY** We complain about the miserable situation of our world – poverty, injustice, discrimination of minorities, etc. But there are already a lot of reflections under way, as to the reasons that must be held responsible for this deplorable state of affairs and as to

how it may be overcome. Thus, in our discussions repeatedly certain institutions of the United Nations and other organizations were mentioned and at the same time we raised the question why things instead of getting better, are getting worse and worse. But let me react to this question with another question: would not our world be in a still worse condition if the UN and the various organizations were not there at all? Therefore, I think it would be appropriate to ask: how can we support these initiatives to alleviate poverty and do away with all these phenomena of great injustice in our world and of the discrimination of minorities, so that they might become more effective?

why de-link religion with its historical origin?

**MAHMOOD S. S.** The last point that struck me in the quite interesting analysis of the situation in India particularly, was Dr. Tahir Mahmood's recommendation of a de-linking between the origin of the founder of

a certain religion and the religion itself. In this context the case of Christianity was mentioned: that they have de-linked the Christian faith with the place of its origin in the Middle East where it has become a foreign religion.

Has there been an advantage, in fact, or should it rather have not taken place? I actually think there should be this recognition of the historical origin. And I would like to see how this de-linking would work to whose advantage? What are the consequences of it?

The other thing that does seem of great concern is the very complex situation of India. Perhaps Dr. Mahmood could give some further comments on these things.

concerning the situation of tribal religions in India

**MAHMOOD T.** The particular situation in India relates partly to the concern put by Professor Khidoyatov and partly what Dr. Saleha S. Mahmood said. There are millions of tribals in India, and they all have had their

own religions. So countless tribal religions can be found there. A large number of them have accepted Christianity during the British period – as a result of missionary activities, and also of educational and health promotion initiatives. This is now being described by the present leaders of the majority community as a forced conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. And it is presumed that the tribals were Hindus, whereas they were not, they had their own religion.

... and of those minority religions that are 'of foreign origin'

The leaders of the majority community have been openly saying that anybody who is born in India – unless he accepts Christianity or Islam or Judaism or Parsiism – is a Hindu. They believe that Sikhs are Hindus, and that Buddhists are also a particular facet of Hinduism. Fortunately for them, there are hardly any Jews in India, just about 6,000 people all over the country; and the Zoroastrians are just about 75,000. So mainly the Christians and Muslims are 'foreigners'. And there is a nationwide move of what they call *ghar-vāpasī* – 'returning home', that means reconverting the tribals to Hinduism.

But the basic premise that these people were born Hindu is wrong. Thus there are different dimensions of religious groupings and religious conflicts, which probably may not be easily appreciated. There are ethnic aspects of it, there are religious aspects of it – so it is a very complex situation. And if you go by the latest Census report of 2001, you will find plain things: a large number of people have said when they were asked, "What is your religion?": *sāre dharm*, what was then faithfully reported in this way by the Census counters, whereas it is in fact not a particular religion, but they were trying to say, "We believe in all religions", because they were scared to say, "We are Christians".



involvement of religious NGOs for a more efficient minority politics

What can be done, as Professor Khoury was asking, to help the UN for carrying out the provisions of relevant documents relating to minority rights or to prevent religious discrimination? I think that the religious groups, particularly the religious NGOs operating at the international level, have to play an active

role in safeguarding minority rights and should divert their attention also to countries like India.

For the rest we know that the political scene in India has improved in the past years. How long it lasts, we do not know. There are forces which are out to change the situation again to the disadvantage of the minorities. But we hope that the present conditions will last.

the problem of ethnic and national identities of religions

**POTZ** The issue of the ethnic and national identity of religions is a particularly important subject in our context. About 20 years ago, I read a report on the situation of Protestants in Spain. It referred, among others, to the story of a young Protestant who was about to join

the Spanish army and declared that he was a Protestant. In reaction to it, he was asked, "But why? Are you not Spanish?" To be Spanish but not Catholic was simply unimaginable at that time. Similarly, it is still unimaginable in Greece to be Greek but not Orthodox. Presently, in Turkey each school that is organized by foreigners must have a Turkish co-director. Turkish, however, does not mean here Turkish nationality – otherwise this requirement could also be met by an Armenian, a Greek or a Jew; the law rather prescribes that it must be a Turk by origin. And tacitly it is taken for granted that it is then naturally a Muslim; but, because of the state being secular, this cannot be expressed as such. It is rather the concept of 'Turkish origin', that takes for granted in a perfectly natural manner that the person concerned should be a Muslim believer.

existing discriminations of religious minorities

**IQBAL** In fact, in many countries minorities are exposed to various forms of discrimination, for instance in the United Kingdom, presently also in the United States, in India – currently the trend having hopefully

changed for the better – and elsewhere. Having large minorities of a different denomination than the majority, countries may feel threatened. Likewise in India the Muslim and the Christian minorities are numerically not a high percentage of the population, but still large minorities. Similarly now in Britain, they may feel that the Muslim or the ethnically foreign minorities have become

so large in numbers that they ultimately, if the demographic dispensation continues, may overtake the government one day, because they are proliferating much more. One is this fear of the political aspect and the other is the economic fear, since there are countries that have invited foreigners to do jobs that their own people were not able or did not want to carry out; but then, when the job is done, they want to drive them out again as soon as possible. In this way the religious aspect of the minority problem may well get tied up with the economy, and the situation becomes even more critical. Where the minorities are small in numbers, for instance in Austria, the problems are not that aggravating. I think that treatment of minorities in Austria is a remarkable fairness which is quoted everywhere. Similarly the Buddhists, the Jains and the Sikhs are numerically so few in India that they do not pose a threat to the rest of the community – apart from the fact that they are considered to be Hindus.

Turkey and Europe

Professor Potz has pointed to the fact that Turks want ethnic Turks to be at least co-directors in certain institutions. On the other hand, there is a widespread resistance against the admission of this country to the European Union perhaps because the much larger part of Turkey is in Asia than it is in Europe. Because economically and by other standards of democracy, etc., compared with the other ten countries that were recently admitted, Turkey has a better status.

conflict situation between nationality and religion

**MAHMOOD T.** If Turkey is called the 'sick man of Europe' that itself is a big humiliating and discriminating description. The conflict between nationality and religion is a worldwide phenomenon. Can somebody be really a British *and* a Muslim? As was already mentioned in my paper, a recent British newspaper reported that a young Muslim girl poured out her heart to Tony Blair saying, "Sir there is no part of me which does not feel British, and no part of me which does not feel Muslim. I am a British Muslim. But people ask me, 'How can you be both? You can be either a British or a Muslim.'" Similarly in the Muslim world, in the Eastern countries, in Turkey and in other places – people think that way.

The last thing I have to say is that there is a world of difference between mistreating immigrants and mistreating indigenous minorities. Muslims in India are not immigrants, they are a local indigenous group constituting a large minority. Christians are not immigrants there either. We cannot compare the Muslims of India with the Muslims in Australia, with the Turks in



Austria, or with immigrants elsewhere. What is happening to the Muslims and the Christians in countries like India, or to the Christians and Hindus in countries like Pakistan or Bangladesh cannot be equated with the problems that Muslims face in Austria or in Great Britain. Although they lived there for centuries, they retain their status of immigrants; in spite of being fully indigenous, they belong to religions 'of foreign origin'. Even though it has had a specific impact in my country only, but the phenomenon explains the trend worldwide.

## We are Unjust when We Owe a Debt to Ourselves and to the Others

Adel Theodor Khoury

*"Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker."*  
(Prv 14:31)

In dealing with my topic I would like to start from the fact that we have gathered here at the Round Table as Christian and Muslim believers who want to bear in mind the values and principles of their religions. Moreover, it is appropriate and very useful to take into consideration what was already elaborated at this Round Table as well as the knowledge and experience we gained here and otherwise in the endeavours of the Institute St. Gabriel.

I.

### 1. Complexity of the concept injustice

The concept of justice is simple to define: everyone shall receive what is due to him/her. Conversely, injustice or wrongdoing consists in withholding from or refusing somebody what is due to him/her.

Nevertheless a closer description of what injustice is and of the attitude which one has to define as being unjust proves to be more complex, and this because of the different factors that would have to be taken into consideration.

There are namely gross forms of injustice such as the abuse of power on every level, disregard of the fundamental rights of human beings (men, women, children, the sick, the aged) and of animals, and also of creation. Besides, one can discern more subtle forms of injustice, depending on which field we refer to in enumerating unjust acts.

The complexity of the concept also shows up clearly when we bring to mind which rights are violated, which perpetrators commit injustice, and which dimensions injustice can have.

### *Object*

At stake are generally acknowledged rights, above all human rights; the different goods of this earth; the support which people may expect by their life in a community; about love, without which people cannot live and prosper.



### *Perpetrators*

Injustice can be done on the part of the state and its institutions; on the part of different communities and groups; on the part of individual persons; on the part of international or internationally active organizations; on the part of foreign states, communities, groups, persons, etc.

### *Dimensions*

Injustice can have juridical dimensions: then the issue is the observation of rights and laws. It can have moral dimensions: then ethical values are at stake. It can have religious dimensions: then at stake are the commandments of God, of Jesus Christ (for Christians), or of Muḥammad (for Muslims), etc.

### 2. Fields and forms of injustice

In order to give you an idea of what I mean here, I would now like to present some thoughts about the fields and forms of injustice. I would like to enumerate here briefly, in which fields and in what form injustice is done.

#### *Injustice can be done in our thinking,*

- if, in our search for the resolution of complicated questions, we are not patient enough to think more deeply and comprehensively and to search for really adequate resolutions.
- If we do not want to learn what others believe, think and practise, and also why they are doing things in their particular way.
- If we cling to our prejudices.
- If in encountering the other we back off, if our attitude is even one of hatred and contempt.
- Even if we are indifferent and insensitive when we encounter the other.
- If we are not ready to look for ways of abandoning a one-way-line of thinking, if we do not suffer from the fact that the others find no way out and are still groping in the dark.
- If we do not accept the fact that all human beings belong together and if we are not ready to live in community with others.

#### *Injustice can be done in our spoken word,*

- when a lack of understanding and defamation obscures the tone of communication.
- If we content ourselves with vague ideas where a differentiated knowledge and differentiated assessments would be necessary.

- If dialogue is refused and polemic is preferred.

#### *Injustice can be done in what we are doing,*

- if in our relations with the others respect and esteem for their personality and identity is missing.
- If there is struggle instead of peace.
- If the sharing of material, mental, and spiritual goods is refused or simply omitted.
- If tolerance is refused, tolerance of the majority towards the minority, and also tolerance of the minority towards the majority.
- If in the economic and political fields the participation of all is not guaranteed.
- If cooperation between the different groups, communities, and nations is rejected.
- If the others are not given sufficient opportunities to make their contribution in thinking, speaking and acting.
- If a Lazarus (as a prototype of those who are suffering) or several persons in need or whole sections of the population or even whole nations of our earth lie before our door and live in want, and we carelessly enjoy our prosperity or even indulge in it thoughtlessly and wastefully, protect our wealth by means of high hurdles, pay little attention to those in need and give them hardly any effective help.

When we contemplate this list and bring to mind in which fields injustice can be perpetrated and is being perpetrated, then we are no longer surprised that the Psalmist and also Paul, the Apostle, state, "there is no one who does good. [...] no one who does good, no, not one." (Ps 14:1.3; cf. Rm 3:12).

At our Round Table more competent colleagues can say something about how to remove these abuses: jurists, sociologists, experts in the field of economy, pedagogues.

For me, as a scholar in the field of comparative religion and a Christian theologian, the issue is to show up perspectives that may perhaps here and there seem to be utopian. Yet, they may be taken for an inspiring appeal in the sense of a constructive criticism and of an urgent appeal to strive for an ideal and in striving towards it always to go further, beyond this ideal, which is to be understood not only as an idea, but as a demanding authority – a demanding authority because it is and will be origin, target, and judge of our human life and of our human history – simply because it is God.



### 3. An attempt to think in a new perspective

Here the issue is to describe injustice in the perspective of its very opposite, namely of justice

- in its most high form in God,
- in its human form, in keeping with what we owe to each other in the solidarity of a community.

As to general principles there is considerable agreement between Christianity and Islam on this level. The differences – they are sometimes aggravating – exist on the level of theoretical and theological reasoning as well as on the level of practical application.

In order not to incur the reproach of losing sight of the practical problems or of pushing them aside, the differences mentioned will now be outlined in brief, before I present my stance in short about how to deal with them adequately.

#### *Level of reasoning*

On the level of reasoning about ethical commandments, differences emerge which can call some things into question. For the orthodoxy of Islam, what is good and what is wicked is not envisaged as being based on the internal quality of human action or by consulting some norm of whatever objective kind that can be understood by reasoning man, but by ascertaining the positive will of God: in his absolute, unquestionable freedom God ordains the norms of what is good, which can be recognized in the positive ordinances of the Qurʾān which, in the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad, are again made clear by his sayings and decisions and concretized by the statements in the Islamic law tradition. The result is that the positive and freely established decrees of the Qurʾānic revelation and of the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad are the presupposition for the inviolability of all common ethical norms.

#### *Level of application*

On the level of applying ethical norms, this presupposition can now lead to a restriction on the validity of general assertions. When the Qurʾān says for instance that God “honoured the sons of Adam [...] and conferred on them special favours” (Sūra 17,70), then we could already see therein the roots of acknowledging general human rights. On looking more closely, we have to admit that the tradition of Islamic law restricts these rights wherever assertions of the Qurʾān itself and the tradition of Muḥammad’s sayings

weaken or partly withdraw them, as for instance in the case of refusing religious freedom for Muslims or of having so far rejected fundamental equal rights for men and women in the legal field, or also as regards resistance against changing some decrees of penal law. Thus, according to the Islamic perspective, the rights of God supersede human rights, as they are affirmed in secular society and by now also in Christian theology.

When the Qurʾān confirms that by being created of one primeval pair all human beings actually belong with each other (cf. Sūra 4,1), one might expect that the consequence of this would also be the universal solidarity of all human beings together. In practice, levels of solidarity towards the other humans are laid down for Muslims: full solidarity with the brothers and sisters in the faith, partial solidarity with those whose faith is different (like the Jews and the Christians), and no solidarity with unbelievers. Exempt are here the demands of justice, which indeed dictates that to everyone – i. e., also to the unbelievers – is given what is due to them. Yet, in defining what is due to the unbelievers, some modifications can be made.

Despite all these restricting elements it has to be stated that in fundamental values and ideal concepts Christianity and Islam are very close to one another.

Based on our deliberations and endeavours so far at this Round Table, we may therefore confirm that the path towards overcoming a good many differences is an open-minded dialogue held in friendship, a dialogue held simultaneously between speakers and listeners, between recipients and givers, between those who impart and those who receive.

Then we shall understand that an exclusive, absolute claim of possessing the truth and insight into the right paths to tread is only due to God and to no human being. Then we shall understand that we have to open up ourselves to one another and to learn from one another. Thus we will be helping each other, sharpening our sense of justice and strengthening our determination to stand up against every injustice.

This path will enable us to accept responsibility for our respective religious communities, for each other and the whole world and in keeping with it to serve justice and peace effectively.

Now a central concept will be presented to show what Christian and Islamic values have fundamentally in common.



## II. Towards a brother- and sisterly justice

In the declarations of Christians and Muslims, justice and peace in the world have always again been accentuated in a particular way. May I at this point be allowed to place justice at the centre of the Christians' and the Muslims' endeavours in being aware of their common responsibility in the world and plead for a justice which I have chosen to call and repeatedly referred to as 'brother- and sisterly justice'.

This 'brother- and sisterly justice' is not a naive dream facing a world that is becoming more and more cruel. It seems to me to express best what Christianity and Islam in their religious doctrines assert to be characteristic of the mutual relations between human beings. The Gospel says that those are blessed "who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Mt 5:6). The Qur'an on the other hand urgently admonishes the Muslims, "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing [...]" (Sūra 5,9).

### Reasons

Like justice in general, brother- and sisterly justice demands that everyone receives what is due to him/her. It does not renounce decrees of law, nor organs and instruments, which can guarantee a just practice in human life: laws have to be enacted, treaties negotiated, contracts concluded, conferences held, agreements kept. All this a brother- and sisterly justice affirms. Yet, it has a character of its own, a particular starting point, its own perspective, a special style of negotiating, a special target, a special quality in the resolutions passed and a special way of putting into practice the decisions taken.

Vatican II made some assertions that make clear the particular character of the justice defined here. "Men are to deal with their fellows in justice and civility [...]"<sup>1</sup> Humaneness permeated by justice also has to predominate in the political field, "No better way exists for attaining a truly human political life than by fostering an inner sense of justice, benevolence, and service for the common good [...]"<sup>2</sup> This humane justice, animated by love, also has to rule in the economic field. "God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for them on a reasonable basis [...]"<sup>3</sup> In his day Thomas Aquinas already said something

<sup>1</sup> Declaration on Religious Freedom "Dignitatis humanae", art. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "Gaudium et spes", art. 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* (fn. 2), art. 69.

similar, "Wanting to maintain peace among humans by commandments of justice is insufficient, if love is not rooted among them".<sup>4</sup>

Pope John Paul II also confirmed this in his "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 1 January 2004": "At the conclusion of these considerations, I feel it necessary to repeat that, for the establishment of true peace in the world, justice must find its fulfilment in charity. [...] Historical experience shows this to be true. It shows how justice is frequently unable to free itself from rancour, hatred and even cruelty. By itself, justice is not enough. Indeed, it can even betray itself, unless it is open to that deeper power which is love."<sup>5</sup>

1. Such a brother- and sisterly justice is one of the ordinances of faith. Believers have a sharp awareness of the fundamental equality of all beings created by God. They realize that all human beings belong together, that they are oriented towards and dependent on a worldwide communication and cooperation. All human beings are a great family, they are linked with one another in a comprehensive solidarity and a universal brother- and sisterliness. This solidarity and the brother- and sisterliness are not to be understood as a mere possibility and non-committal choice; they are binding. They contain the responsibility of all for all, a responsibility that we all owe to all human beings. As principles of a social and political order in the sense of Christian and Islamic morality they are therefore the fundament of a worldwide brother- and sisterly justice.

It is the duty of a believer, particularly of the Christian and the Muslim, to transcend the narrow limits of their persons and their environment, to find new horizons, to put into practice a form of living together for human beings and peoples, which is based on brother- and sisterliness, solidarity, subsidiarity and an attitude of bearing one another's burdens, in brief: on a brother- and sisterly justice.

2. It is not only our belief that we are all beings created in the presence of God and oriented towards God that is the basis of claiming a brother- and sisterly justice. This claim is also rooted in the fundamental need of every human being to be loved and to receive love, in order to become capable of being more and more worthy of this love and to return this love.

<sup>4</sup> *Contra Gentiles* 3, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Par. 10, "The civilization of love".



In order to unfold and to make a success of his/her life, every human being depends on his/her fellows, whose relations with him/her are a constituent part in the formation of his/her own identity and personality. Therefore every human being has the right to be treated according to the norms of a justice of love, a brother- and sisterly justice. This may be a utopia. Yet, to me such a utopia seems necessary for the life of the individual and of the community. The justice of love is not content with the minimum and with justice in the strict sense of the word. It is always on its way towards an ever greater brother- and sisterly justice, towards an ever increasing dedicated love, towards the image of the justice and love of God himself, who even loves and treats with this justice of love those who by their own fault have lost the right to his love and forbearance.

3. In a parable the Gospel tells us how our Lord Jesus Christ considers this justice to be binding (cf. Mt 18:23–35). A master had cancelled the debt of a servant who owed him a great sum of money, because he had asked the former to be patient with him. The same servant seized by the throat and throttled his fellow-servant, who owed him a small sum of money only and also asked him to be patient with him. The master of both got angry about this imprudent and hard-hearted servant and handed him over to the torturers, because the former did not understand that we are all indebted to the others and to God, that the mercifulness of the Lord, the justice of love, with which he treats us, is a binding example standing for us all.

The search for justice in this world is basically a longing for divine justice. Whoever is oriented towards God and measures his/her conduct against the justice of God feels called upon to transcend him/herself, to overcome his/her own narrow human concepts and to set out towards new horizons, the horizons that divine justice opens to him/her as a binding instruction and demand.

God, who knows man and knows the material of which he made him/her, treats one and all according to his wisdom and takes the circumstances of their life into account. He provides them with dignity and affirms their rights with reference to their nature, their abilities, their calling, their hopes, but also measured against his divine mercifulness.

"[...] since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another." (1 Jn 4:11). Since we are all the target of a merciful God's justice, we too have to accept this divine justice as the binding example for our relations and to turn our human justice into a justice of love, a brother- and sisterly justice.

### *Brother- and sisterly justice is necessary*

This justice of love is difficult to practise. Yet it is possible, for it endeavours to imitate the justice of God, since it aims at fulfilling God's own ordinance.

Brother- and sisterly justice, which endeavours to imitate God's own merciful justice, is all the more necessary, the more in the wake of irreversible globalization the structure of the industrial society becomes the social structure in the whole world. This structure is characterized by the atomization of functions and rationalization of production processes and forms of life. It does not contribute to strengthening contacts between people. On the contrary, as a result of objective, humanly neutral science and of anonymous technology, it will produce a faceless society, a society whose relationships can be formulated mathematically and controlled scientifically, and whose elements, the human ones also, seem to be exchangeable. The soul, which inspires and shapes the relationships between people, is not the subject of an economy-oriented science, and brother- and sisterliness does not figure in the program, nor is it part of the equations of product-bound technology. Thus brother- and sisterly justice is all the more necessary the more science and technology, although they guarantee our survival on earth, entail the danger of bringing about a totally administered and unlimitedly manipulable society.

Brother- and sisterly love is all the more necessary the more the scandalous gap between peoples becomes more and more tragic and the distribution of goods that are the common inheritance of all human beings turns more and more rapidly in favour of the rich and to the detriment of the poor countries.

Brother- and sisterly love is all the more necessary because the world is torn back and forth between the indispensable formation of a world community, which alone seems to be in a position to guarantee the survival of peoples, and a withdrawal from this community into the ghettos of particularism in their search for maintaining their national, religious, or cultural identity.

In the situation of the world today brother- and sisterly justice is perhaps the only true justice, which is capable of guaranteeing to everybody, to individuals and to peoples, what is really due to them, taking into consideration the fundamental equality of all human beings, their universal belonging together, their total solidarity as well as their concrete differences and the different circumstances of their life.



### III. A summary

1. In a society or a world community, which should actually be a community in solidarity, we have to ask:

◦ Who are those nobody cares for, who are neglected, have no chance, are pushed aside, excluded? And this with reference to their religion – to their culture and traditions – to their civilization and forms of life.

◦ As to living conditions, which framework has to be established so that security and confidence will come to them.

◦ Which economic measures are to be taken in order to overcome poverty, exploitation, hopelessness?

2. What do we owe to all the others?

◦ We remain unjust when help is not given;

◦ when the weak are deprived of their hope;

◦ when brother- and sisterly treatment is withheld from people.

We find the key to a just society and world community in the teachings of Christianity and of Islam, which we have to bear in mind in our thoughts, words and deeds.

The Qur'ān appeals to Muslims, "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God [...]" (Sūra 4,135). Christians too have to act in keeping with the rule which Paul, the Apostle, prescribes for them, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another [...]" (Rm 13:8).

When justice and love meet, then there will be a 'brother- and sisterly justice'.

### Questions and Interventions

nobody is to be killed for his belief

**KHODR** Could we agree, on the line and in continuation of Professor Khoury's explanations, that nobody in any circumstance should be killed by somebody else?

Because this is the point. I would go still further and affirm that our Christian concept of ἀνάθεμα (cf. Gal 1:8 f.) is no longer meaningful for me. In other words, of course you judge other people, ideas and religions, etc., but you cannot judge their attitude towards God, or God's attitude towards them. They will have to give account for that on the Day of Judgment.

an attempt on someone's life cannot be willed by God

Could we then agree – in spite of all that may be said in history – that each and everybody, be he/she atheist, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., has the right to life and that we have to respect his/her life and his/her freedom to say whatever it may be in a respectful

way. We cannot say, "Well, this man or woman disturbs our society." What does that mean? What is 'your society'? And this is the conclusion to be drawn from this attitude: to submit all revealed texts to historical analysis in order to find those texts that speak of murder and the manslaughter of the people of other nations. Religious people too were sometimes blinded by this delusion. I do not want to be judge of them, but when it is said, as for instance in Deuteronomy or in Joshua, that Yahwe asked of the Hebrews that they destroy all Canaanites, that is, my ancestors – who said so?, is it God, or rather the Hebrews who projected all that to God? We have to be clear, simple and sincere, and admit that whatever is directed against other people, their peace and liberty is no longer admissible. We have to live as brothers and sisters. Although a brother can say to his other brother, "You are in this and that wrong, you are on the wrong track", and similar things. This, I think, is the problem in the whole world.

indeed, man's life is holy

**KHOURY** In essence we do not differ in our conceptions that each and everyone is to be respected in his/her humaneness, that everyone's life is sacred and

inviolable. We may, in this or that respect, have varying ideas about how to deal with texts in our traditions which, in earlier times, were differently understood. Should we not rather begin with the assumption that in the sayings of our holy Scriptures there is a certain hierarchy?, that certain statements hold a central position, whereas others hold a less central or only a peripheral position?



beyond that the other deserves loving attention

The point not only is that nobody has the right to kill someone else, for whatever religious reason. Beyond that we should feel obliged to grant every people a loving and merciful attention. This means much more than only respecting their life; it is required rather for establishing a community, a community whose supporters we all are in the community of Christians and in the community of Muslims.

**BSTEH** The fundamental claim that every people should have at their disposal what is indispensable for their life and that if necessary, we should give it to them, certainly describes the basis for a just co-existence. However, I am very pleased that it becomes evident at the end of this year's discussions, that, beyond that, there must be in our life a certain quality of humaneness so that our life really becomes worth living. This is already true for the loving attention children experience on the part of their parents and what goes substantially beyond the necessary daily supply of calories. Their concrete expression might differ from country to country, from religion to religion, but without love I cannot think of a life that is fit for human beings and is worth living.

there may be injustice among brothers and sisters too

**MAHMOOD S. S.** Thanks to Professor Khoury a new perspective was introduced to the definition of justice, by defining justice in terms of brother- and sisterly love. For him the concept of sibling stands for fairness and justice among each other. On the other hand, it

is precisely these terms 'sibling' as well as brother- and sisterly love that conjure up several kinds of injustices too. Because for one thing there is the concept of sibling rivalry that goes back at history: Cain and Abel killing each other, that is sibling rivalry. There is also injustice perpetrated between brothers and sisters: sons get something, sisters don't get something, brothers get the benefit of privileges, sisters don't get privileged. How can we deal with those aspects of the terms 'sibling' or 'brother- and sisterly relationships' that have a built-in component of injustice as well?

'sibling' should be understood here as a religious concept

**KHOURY** The specific contextual background of these concepts has to be noted the way they are used here: it is in fact a religious background, not a sociological one. Whereas in the sociological realm brothers and sisters might treat each other in very different ways, in

the religious context I begin with the fact that the Qur'an says, "The believers are but a single brotherhood" (Sūra 49,10; cf. 9,71). I am thinking of this positive meaning of the concept when using it here: the proximity to one

another, the responsibility for each other. Likewise as the Qur'an strongly accentuates the fullness of God's mercy and underlines the fullness of mercy that people are to grant to one another, Christianity underlines the central meaning of love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you", Jesus says according to Jn 15:12. At any rate, the concept of a brother- and sisterly justice, in my understanding, points towards a merciful and loving justice.

**MIRDAMADI** Is there any clear definition of 'the poor' and 'poverty' or of 'justice' and 'injustice' to be found in the Bible?

there are binding commandments in the Bible, but no legal provisions

**KHOURY** We will not find a legal definition in the New Testament, simply because our Bible does not include a code of laws and legal provisions. What we do find there, is numerous statements about issues of poverty, justice and injustice. There are moral statements, in

other words, binding commandments how to be or rather how to become just; but how and in what way this should happen, in Christian tradition to some extent remains left to us. There is a wide scope for human freedom in order to implement justice in the life of the individual and society.

Maybe, in this context we have to note a structural difference between our two traditions. As Christians, we do have binding norms in our holy Scriptures, but for us God's commandments are not like legal provisions that are expected to become immediately effective. We are held responsible for making use of our norms and values in a way that leads to a humane society. The call to be just, therefore, is deeply rooted in our Biblical tradition; but we need not permanently search for certain statements in order to justify something that has emerged in our society.

justice and democracy

**BELARBI** What crossed my mind now, is the link between justice and democracy, since justice essentially refers to understanding the other, to respecting and

listening to the other. On the other hand, it is in the nature of democracy that we share power with others and take into consideration their different views.

human rights on the international level, a liability of the States

**MARBOE** From my own juridical perspective, I would like to refer back to Professor Bsteh's concern in the face of worldwide poverty and injustice – that the human right to life should be understood after all in a comprehensive sense. Human rights, on an international level, represent first of all a liability of the



States to recognize these rights. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, they have been further developed mainly by means of two Covenants in 1966, which came into force in 1976. Whereas the first of these Covenants refers to the economic, social and cultural rights, the second one is on civil and political rights. According to the political realities, prevailing in those days, these human rights were understood as being separate from each other. The right to life is included in Covenant 2, which is vested with substantially more effective instruments. Above all, it provides also the possibility for individual grievance procedures being referred to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The right to food, clothing, living space and health, however, is included in Covenant 1 which does not dispose of individual procedures of this kind, but is only vested with a reporting system. Yet, for many years negotiations have been continuing about a supplementary protocol to introduce also to Covenant 1 the individual grievance procedures. Some experts think that its approval is imminent, others are more cautious in this respect.

still difficult to imagine that economic rights become individually enforceable

In my opinion it is hard to imagine even today that an enforcement of economic human rights at the level of individuals will be accepted above all by the States of the Western world. In this connection I would like first to quote article 11, para. 1, of the United Nations' *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right [...]." The same article continues in para. 2, "The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed". The article still adds thereto under letter (b), "Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need." Accordingly particular economic rights are here after all already clearly defined, yet without providing the corresponding mechanisms for their enforcement. Moreover in article 11, para. 1, one also finds formulations that weaken again the duties of the States, so clearly defined before, when it says, "[...] recognizing to this effect the essential importance

of international co-operation based on free consent." Here the discriminating treatment of human rights clearly becomes obvious, which understandably the developing countries in particular deplore and denounce. In this context the "Declaration of Vienna", the final document of the Conference on Human Rights in Vienna of 1993, is considered to be one of the essential landmarks, wherein reference is made to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. Nevertheless the instruments for the enforcement of economic human rights have not been improved unfortunately until today.

relations of ethical demand and binding law

**KHOURY** The right to a say in the democratic system, i. e. the link between justice and democracy, as solicited by Professor Belarbi and likewise just emphasized by Dr. Marboe, are of a fundamental importance for me as well; they were referred to also in my presentation. Quite certainly we cannot stop at the ethical demand for a brother- and sisterly justice, we must also make the leap into legislation, into the realm of binding law. Consequently, we are here confronted with the problem of how we can bring about this democratic participation in the public institutions, in the political power and in the structuring of society, and how we can formulate human rights in such a way that they become effective.

**POTZ** At present we have the so-called "Austria Convention," which has the task of implementing a new constitution, a new basic juridical order. Politically authoritative quarters say there as well that the basic rights of a social nature, which were rightly demanded here, cannot be secured in this way.

reflections on the concept of justice

**OTT** "Brother- and sisterly justice" – a concept that appears important to me. There is a widely held pattern of thought in theological circles too, that opposes love and justice: justice is cool, balances, calculates what we owe one another; whereas love is affectionate, donates, donates perhaps without measure. In his explanations, Professor Khoury indicated another dimension of love – the love that one shows for brothers and sisters, that one has in the family. Nevertheless the old Roman definition also makes sense: "*suum cuique*"; to each one his own, that what is due to a person and what one also can demand; and this not only in issues of secular law. On the other hand, who can really say, "what is due to someone", what is the "*suum*" that is owed to a person in this or that situation? Ultimately only God can do that. And



therefore we must try gradually to enter into the perspective of God. This reminds us of the words in the Old Testament, "[...] for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sm 16:7). He looks behind things. And the striving to become just oneself, is a way of coming somewhat closer to that goal, the slow adaptation to that perspective of God which is not within our human reach in this eon.

justice in thinking,  
justice in dialogue

Professor Khoury's perception of justice in thinking and in dialogue was also important for me: that we must think and meet our neighbour without prejudice and that we must not right away believe that we have already understood him or her in what he/she really means. They could still have had in mind something else or might have liked to express the same thought once more in a new or different manner. In this case, I must be prepared to join them on their way in order to do justice to them. Thinking is like a way, and dialogue is a way on which we must join each other.

justice lived by  
Christians and  
Muslims must be  
more than mere  
legal right

**KHOURY** Justice has without doubt to do with rights, it demands rights. My intention was to ponder how this right could be put into practice. If we all belong together, then our relationships after all must have a quality other than relationships based on a code of law. Beyond it we must deal with each other in a humane manner and therefore try to be always thoughtful and inventive. When Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12), it is not yet clear in this or in another case what love really is. We must discover it ourselves. In this respect it is important that an atmosphere of brother- and sisterliness reigns among us and inspires the human relationships with our fellow men/women. I personally like to recall in this context the Qur'anic verse where those are praised "in whose wealth is a recognized right for the (needy) who asks [...]" (Sūra 70,24 f.; 51,19). It speaks of a right, not merely of voluntary alms. Therefore justice has to do with right, but justice lived by Christians and Muslims must be more than the legal right of a judge. This is exactly what the concept of brother- and sisterly justice is meant to stand for.

**BSTEH** What has been said reminds me once more of what Mr. Mirdamadi has been saying about the importance of reason. Concretely, I would understand by it also what we mean by the concept of 'conscience' – the inner light of men. For God will not ask us some day what is written in

this or that code of law, but what we have done and how we have shaped our life in its relationship with our neighbour. If we refer in this context to that whereto the other also has a claim, especially to the right to life, then this is the absolute and unconditional basis for our interpersonal relations. However, living together becomes beautiful only if we do not limit ourselves to what is the right of the other, but if we become mindful of the wishes that we can read in their eyes. The poesy of life after all is probably found only, if we come to appreciate such an attitude and practise it in cordial mutuality. This will make life truly worth living for us.



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All data referring to the time of the Round Table (2004)

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2nd Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table,  
February 21 to 24, 2002



Mödling 2004, 169 pp.  
ISBN 3-85264-603-0



Mödling 2004, 186 pp.  
ISBN 3-85264-601-4



Jounieh 2004,  
259 pp.



New Delhi 2004,  
176 pp.

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