



**UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY**

## **Matteo Ricci International Award**

*Lectio Magistralis*

**The United Nations University: For a dialogue between cultures**

Facoltà di Scienze politiche, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Milan, 27 October 2009

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Rector, United Nations University, Tokyo

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

[Greetings]

### **A. Opening & reflections**

I am honored to be with you today to receive the *premio internazionale Matteo Ricci*.

Established in 1998, the award has previously recognized the achievements of three great men:

- (1) Father Giuseppe Pittau was conferred the award in 1999 in recognition of his role as Rector of Sophia University;
- (2) Fra' Andrew Bertie in 2006, in recognition of his exemplary leadership as Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta;
- (3) and more recently, Father Gianpaolo Salvini in 2008 for his contribution to academia and most especially, for his efforts at promoting a humane approach to global development, regardless of historical, civil, political or religious contexts.

I am the fourth person to be honored with the Matteo Ricci award, but I stand at the end of an even longer line of illustrious personalities honored by the Facoltà di Scienze politiche dell'Università Cattolica di Milano. In the time spent preparing for this occasion, I have kept in mind their many accomplishments and wish to thank Dean Quadrio Curzio and the awards committee for having given me the opportunity to speak with you today and therefore, to stand in their company.

The themes that run through this talk echo the beliefs that motivated these men throughout their outstanding careers. I believe all would agree that dialogue, justice, dignity, risk and responsibility are defining features of humanity. My talk, therefore, can only build on the work of those that have come before me since these issues have been debated since time immemorial.

My talk will begin with a discussion of new global challenges and how institutions and research agendas have been shaped to address them. I will then present an interpretation of justice based on the work of the American political scientist, John Rawls. I find this particular interpretation useful as we reorient our values to foster a dialogue between cultures. Finally, I wish to discuss the meaning of dialogue itself, and why the United Nations University is

uniquely placed to encourage a dialogue of trust, necessary to arrive at reliable responses to sustainable global development.

(i) Matteo Ricci

Before going further, I would also like to take the opportunity to say a few words about the man after whom this prize is named.

Received into the Society of Jesus at the Roman College in 1571, Matteo Ricci became a scholar of philosophy, theology, mathematics, astronomy and later of the Chinese language. In addition to his work as a Jesuit missionary, Father Ricci is credited for publishing the first maps of China to be made available to the West. His contribution in the field of mathematics is equally important. Among other accomplishments in this field, he is known to have translated the first six books of Euclid's Elements in Chinese and for having revived and augmented the knowledge of trigonometry during this period.

Toward the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in collaboration with the Jesuit priest Michele Ruggieri, he authored the first Chinese-European dictionary and introduced the romanization of the Chinese language. As a side remark, I would point out that Ricci's Chinese-Portuguese dictionary remained buried for years until Father Pasquale d'Elia uncovered its existence in the Jesuit archives in Rome, leading to its republishing in 2001. He is also credited for the first translation of a Confucian work in a European language.<sup>1</sup>

In many respects, I feel a great affinity with this man. Beyond our common bond as scientists and mathematicians, I believe we share a sincere concern with the deeper problems faced by humanity.

Father Ricci's life work remains a testament to the resilience of the most basic, but essential, human virtues: tolerance, respect, and piety; his many achievements balanced on the fulcrum of an age: the *Age of Discovery* (l'età delle scoperte).<sup>2</sup>

To receive a prize in his name is to be measured by the yardstick of profound human achievement.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we stand back and admire the results of a careful balancing act: an enduring bridge between Eastern and Western cultures that has spanned more than four centuries. The resilience of these ties have been tested in the past, just as surely as they are being tested at this very moment around the world, as we try to find solutions to some of the most important challenges humanity has ever faced.

Here, it is necessary for me to pause and make a single point very clear. At the heart of the issues that I will speak about today is the notion that humanity must face the challenges of the

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<sup>1</sup> Camus, Y. (2007). Jesuits' journeys in Chinese studies. *World Conference on Sinology 2007*, Retrieved from <http://www.ricciamac.org/doc/JesuitsJourneys.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> According to David Arnold, ('The Age of Discovery 1400-1600', 1983), the 'Age of Discovery' represents the time period when "Europe's knowledge of the world underwent a fundamental transformation" (p. xi). Key to this transformation were the many leaps in navigation and cartography that "linked the oceans of the world into a single system of navigation". The wealth of geographical knowledge soon translated into expanded networks of trade and consequently, influence.

future *together*, united by a common sense of responsibility. This vision for humanity must include all races, creeds, cultures and belief systems.

It has taken us centuries to come to a point where many, if not most of the peoples of the world, recognize and accept the indisputable necessity of a dialogue between cultures. Although this understanding is becoming more widespread, I have not come here today to suggest that our work is done. Quite the opposite, much remains to be done. Humanity, however, no longer has centuries to spare.

Without a doubt, the next few decades will test our common resolve like never before in the history of the human race.

How do we ensure that we are prepared for these challenges? I believe that awareness and the ability to respond swiftly on a global level are both key features of our preparedness.

(ii) A Common Mission

Today, there is no appreciable difference between the major problems facing, for example, the Italian state and those faced by other nations of the world. Disassociating ourselves from problems that are not immediately evident, not immediately threatening, and not immediately visible is both irresponsible and unacceptable. Thankfully, with time we have become more adept at recognizing the interconnectedness of our societies and hence, our collective responsibility.

Speaking at a high-level meeting of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in 2008, the former Italian President, Giorgio Napolitano, agreed that we now see the “confirmation of the growing interdependence that characterizes globalization and that conditions our common future;” adding that “in representation of our people and our countries, we must all be fully aware of our responsibilities and join forces in striving towards a more cohesive and orderly form of global development.”<sup>3</sup>

The *Facoltà di Scienze politiche*, founded in 1926, has built on the vision of the University’s founder, Agostino Gemelli, to educate “young people trained in the study of the economic, political and social disciplines, so enabling them to tackle the great problems of Italian society.”<sup>4</sup> We see that the seeds of interdisciplinary thinking reach back many years in this university.

However the ambitions of this faculty have grown over time, as has the scope of its programmes. The bright minds that fill the halls of this institution are no longer confined by the boundaries of a single state; their time not monopolized by the challenges faced by only one nation. Where one formerly found instruction in and debate on the ‘great problems of the Italian society’, now, the focus of inquiry has widened to cover the challenges of an interconnected world— of a global community— of humanity.

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<sup>3</sup> FAO, (June 2008). *Statement of the President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Giorgio Napolitano*. Retrieved from [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/foodclimate/HLCdocs/HLC08-Rep-E.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/foodclimate/HLCdocs/HLC08-Rep-E.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Quadrio Curzio, A. (2007, October 10). *The Faculty and its Development*. Retrieved from [http://www3.unicatt.it/pls/unicatt/consultazione.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=9955&id\\_lingua=4](http://www3.unicatt.it/pls/unicatt/consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=9955&id_lingua=4)

I am pleased to see that 83 years after its founding, this faculty endeavors to train young people in this spirit of global partnership. This institution remains all the more relevant and useful today, because it equips its students with an education enabling them to put themselves in the service of the world and consequently, to join in the struggle against the pressing global problems of our day.

Returning to the subject of the FAO's high-level meeting, let us consider for a moment the food shocks of 2007 and 2008 to illustrate why a global partnership is so vital.

In the span of twelve months, from April 2007 to April 2008, the world saw food prices soar to their highest levels ever, the result of an 85 percent increase in global food prices.<sup>5</sup> Never before in recorded history have we come so close to the staggering figure of 1 billion undernourished people.<sup>6</sup> Food riots and protests broke out around the world; in Mexico, in China and even here in Italy, where the cost of grain rose suddenly by 22 percent, resulting in a national day of protest.

This crisis, like many others, took the greatest toll in the developing world. Nearly half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa were facing a food crisis in 2007.<sup>7</sup> Of the additional 75 million people that joined the ranks of the chronically hungry, a disproportionate amount are from developing countries.<sup>8</sup> And I would urge you to consider the wider context as well. Whereas food expenditures in the developed world represent on average 20 percent of the household income, food expenditures in developing countries represent 50 to 60 percent of household income and it is not uncommon to see this figure rise as high as 80 percent.<sup>9,10</sup> Consider too that each year more than 7 million children under five die of malnutrition. That is the equivalent of 55 full jumbo jets crashing every day. The food crisis has been referred to by some as the 'silent tsunami'<sup>11</sup> and our inability to stem chronic hunger, 'mild murder'.<sup>12</sup>

We have let the stubborn statistics of poverty and famine remain a tragic yet defining feature of our 'Age'. We must do more than simply acknowledge the staggering brutality of these numbers. We must develop the strongest intolerance to their existence. Our policies, our leaders, our communities must reject the conditions that have ensured their continued inflation.

In the food crisis we see an example of a global challenge. In this instance, we can also point to recent global action aimed at preventing any further deterioration of circumstances. Among the many recent coordinated actions, in July of this year the G8 leaders met in

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<sup>5</sup> UNCTAD, (2008). *Tackling the global food crisis*. Retrieved from [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/presspb20081\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/presspb20081_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> FAO, (2008). *The state of food insecurity in the world*. Retrieved from <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/i0291e/i0291e00.pdf>, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> 20 out of 47 countries.

<sup>8</sup> FAO, (2008). *The state of food insecurity in the world*. Retrieved from <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/i0291e/i0291e00.pdf>, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> USAID (2009). *USAID Responds to Global Food Crisis*. Retrieved from [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/foodcrisis/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/foodcrisis/)

<sup>10</sup> Findlay, A.M., Paddison, R., & Dawson, J. (1990). *Retailing environments in developing countries*. London: Routledge, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Holt-Giménez, Eric (2008). The world food crisis. *Food First Policy Brief*, 16. Retrieved from <http://www.foodfirst.org/files/pdf/PB%2016%20World%20Food%20Crisis.pdf>, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF (1995). *The progress of nations*. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/pon95/nutr0007.html>

l'Aquila— just five hours away from where we are gathered today— to ensure coordinated support of global food strategies. The result: a pledge of USD 20 billion to stave off worsening levels of global hunger.<sup>13</sup>

It is morally imperative that the leaders of this generation and of all future generations understand and appreciate the interconnected nature of global problems. And just as the leaders come to this appreciation, junior and senior professionals, bankers and financiers, clerks, secretaries and the laymen of society must do so as well. And they must endeavor to go beyond this understanding. They must appreciate that in all contexts, in all countries, it is an inescapable fact that the poor, disenfranchised and sick bear the brunt of any crisis. It is fine to have policy solutions guided by lofty ideals, yes, but we must not forget that action must follow understanding, as our misguided actions result in loss of life. This is unacceptable.

The world community is desperately in need of citizens with global perspectives founded on the principles engendered by Matteo Ricci; those of tolerance, respect, responsibility and piety. Piety as an attitude alone is not enough; our actions must echo the piety of conviction.

Piety in this case must speak to all creeds and belief systems. The piety that is called for is piety towards our fellow man. We demonstrate this piety through our fidelity to principles of justice, equality and dignity. We demonstrate our piety by choosing not to accept that so many live in abject poverty. We demonstrate our piety by putting faces on the statistics and understanding that even I, one person far removed from crisis, hunger and disease, am responsible for the fate of those less fortunate. It is what this faculty of political science has aimed to teach its students and it stands at the core of the United Nations University's mission.

Article I of our Charter clearly states that the United Nations University shall be “an international community of scholars, engaged in research, postgraduate training and dissemination of knowledge.”<sup>14</sup>

We shall “devote its work to research into the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations and its agencies [...]”<sup>15</sup>

And our research programmes, will be designed to focus on the “coexistence between peoples having different cultures, languages and social systems” and “universal values related to the improvement of the quality of life.”<sup>16</sup>

## **B. The Meaning of Dialogue**

For over 35 years our Institution has been devoted to these noble aims and this is what I would like to touch upon now. In particular, I would like to speak to you about the nature of the United Nations University and the role it plays in furthering a dialogue between cultures.

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2009, September 26). *Remarks at Food Security Event Co-Hosted with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon During the UN General Assembly*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/09/129673.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Charter of the United Nations University, Article I, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

This is at once a simple and complex task.

It is simple because as Rector of this Institution I am able to point to numerous accomplishments that would not be possible were it not for a deeply rooted respect for intercultural dialogue. Our global collaborations, networked research projects, international students and faculty, and unique research outputs are evidence of this.

More complicated, however, is defining the conditions that allow for dialogue, cultural effervescence, and for the rich symbiosis that naturally evolves from their union. I wish to focus on this equation for a moment, in order to highlight the importance of ‘the parts’ before discussing the impact of the whole.

The foundation of dialogue, we can agree, is openness and acceptance of the risk of trust. Trusting is always a risk, but one we must be willing to take. Without it, we seek only to protect our own interests and wellbeing. More importantly, we cast our counterparts, ‘the other’, in a shadow of self-interest and hostility. Indeed, it is the fundamental misconception about ‘the other’ that inhibit some from seeing that artificial walls keep us from achieving the full potential of our race and dignity for all. This position was best articulated by the Argentinian-Canadian novelist Alberto Manguel in his influential 2007 Massey Lecture.

“Our life is never individual,” says Alberto Manguel, “it is endlessly enriched by the presence of the other, and consequently impoverished by his absence. In our search for structures within which we can be with one another, we may have ended up with societies from whose benefits we all seem destined to be excluded. Disregarding the abuse of human rights for the sake of economic partnerships, allowing the devastation of the planet with the excuse of ever-increasing financial benefits, refusing to adopt scientific solutions because of superstitious beliefs: all these things allow such partnerships, profits, and beliefs to override the responsibilities we have toward each other, toward ourselves individually, and toward the world.”<sup>17</sup>

The reality today, is that the peace that so many seek is all too often thwarted by a dialogue built on a foundation of mistrust. We, the United Nations University, facilitate a dialogue built on trust. But what does this mean and more importantly, how do we do this?

Among other things, it is our roots in the United Nations system that allows us to have a dialogue of trust. H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore recently emphasized the important role of the United Nations in moderating a dialogue between nations and cultures at the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly. Archbishop Migliore noted that “the more the interdependence of people increases, the more the necessity of the United Nations becomes evident. The need to have an organization capable of responding to the obstacles and increasing complexity of the relations between peoples and nations thus becomes paramount.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Manguel, A. (2007). *The city of words*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, p. 34, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Migliore, C. (2009, September 29). Address by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore. *General Debate of the 64th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations*. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/VA\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/VA_en.pdf), p. 2.

The United Nations University is neutral, un-biased and has as its sole mission arming the citizens of tomorrow with knowledge built on cooperation, respect and science. It can and does act as a bridge between cultures, enriched by the plurality of its membership. A precondition to our research and therefore an essential component of our success is a dialogue of trust.

True, the United Nations can still do more and my University can as well. I am aware of this fact, and it rings true with many world leaders also. But, in this sometimes unstable world, the continuing legitimacy of the United Nations and our research platform inspires me with hope that a dialogue between cultures can be achieved and that we will be at the centre of it.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev took a similar position when he spoke at the recent G8 meeting. “The UN is far from perfect,” he iterated, “and it is true that we may need to make some decisions on modernizing it in the near future, but we simply do not have any other universal platform for resolving global problems.”<sup>19</sup>

We are mindful of the need for change and remain aware that the world community beckons us to act quickly. I believe that the United Nations University is at the centre of this cycle of critical debate and self-improvement. It is the mission of my University to infuse the United Nations with the research and balanced perspective necessary to culminate in substantial and substantive change.

### **C. Our Responsibility to Sustainable Global Development**

I want to assure you as well, that our actions are not tainted with the pessimism that abounds in the media. Arriving at a sustainable global development agenda is no easy feat. However, given the current state of world affairs and the multiple crises we are forced to juggle at once, I promise you, we have never been more committed to this cause. The science that is meant to support this endeavor is inexact. We, the international community, have made errors in the past and may very well commit more as we try to better our understanding of the dynamics underpinning a sustainable approach to development. This will make the work of the United Nations and my Institution more susceptible to criticism and attack. But this too, we acknowledge, will help forge robust research, if only because we will need to defend it before a global audience weary of history’s mistakes.

#### **(i) Responsibility and Justice**

I hope it is clear to all of us by now that the road to self-improvement must be lined with bold new research. Research that dares to question the status quo and which never ceases to evaluate the appropriateness of our actions and policy responses, ensuring they are fair and just.

John Rawls, the eminent American political scientist dedicated his opus magnum to the study of the question ‘what is just’. He opens his 1971 treatise, ‘A Theory of Justice’, by making the following statement:

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<sup>19</sup> Medvedev, D. (2009, July 14). Press conference of the President of the Russian Federation D.A. Medvedev following the G8 Summit . *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva*, Retrieved from [http://www.geneva.mid.ru/press/e\\_2009\\_24.html](http://www.geneva.mid.ru/press/e_2009_24.html)

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.<sup>20</sup>

He affirms, correctly, that society favors certain starting places over others. This understanding is foundational to his theory of justice, which he further develops by using a simple thought experiment. Those of you familiar with the work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant, will be familiar with the hypothetical experiment. Rawls invokes a hypothetical ‘original position’. He describes it as “a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice.”<sup>21</sup> The features of this hypothetical situation are such that, “no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength and the like.”<sup>22</sup>

From behind this “veil of ignorance”<sup>23</sup> people derive governing principles that can be said to be just. They are just because they do not prejudice our starting places. They are just because they do not favor my strengths and natural endowments to the detriment of yours. They are just because they would be applied equally to all.

In order to devise such a thought experiment and more importantly, to implement its logical conclusions, we must be able to look beyond our ‘finite’ and ‘local’ selves. When confronted with statistics of famine, poverty, disease, some will answer: “Why should I care?” The answer seems plain and self-evident: it is unjust not to care.

In the work undertaken at the United Nations University, we remain cognizant of the fact that announcing a new statistic or a new policy is not enough. There is considerable energy devoted to helping people understand the meaning of the numbers, the essence of the research; as much for them as individuals as for their communities. And to effectively convey our message we must be as willing to speak as to listen. This is typical of how we approach our dialogue with communities and between cultures.

We are fundamentally a global institution. We reach from the global to the local; seeking not only to internationalize our research, but to strengthen our local roots by combining local and global aspects in research and teaching.

In ‘Democracy and Education’, John Dewey writes,

We sometimes talk as if ‘original research’ were a peculiar prerogative of scientists or at least of advanced students. But all thinking is research, and all research is native, original, with him who carries it on, even if everybody else in the world already is sure of what he is still looking for.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

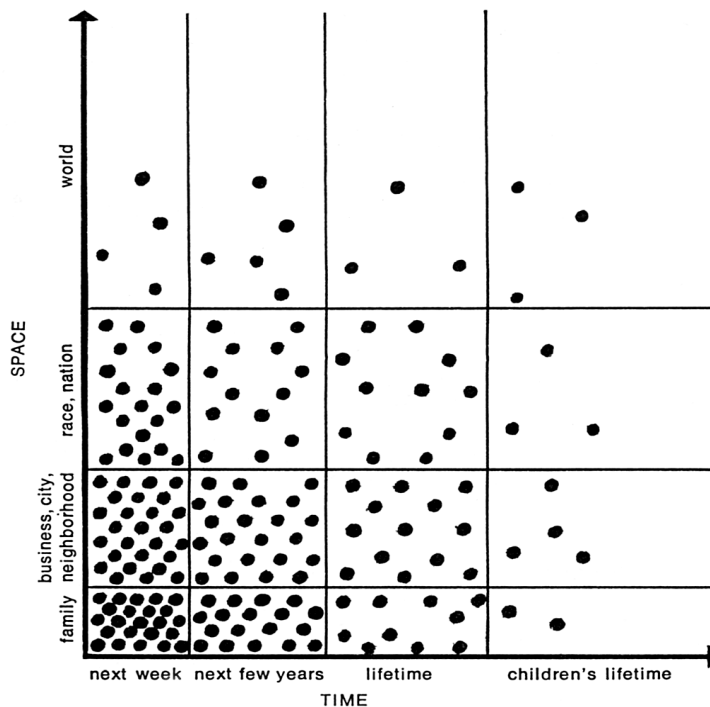
<sup>24</sup> Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan, p. 146.

In order to bring more native, local and original knowledge to the surface in a global pool of ideas, the United Nations University has embarked on an ambitious mission to twin all of its research Institutes in developed countries with partners in developing countries. Research will focus on the problems that affect developing and transitional countries, as a means to enhance capacity for human and social development.

(ii) Human perspectives

A simple graph can be used to describe the scope of our mission and work. This graph, I borrow from the visionary work of the Club of Rome. In 1970, a group of ambitious scientists led by Dr. Aurelio Peccei came together to discuss a singular *world problematique* troubling men of all nations: “poverty in the midst of plenty; degradation of the environment; loss of faith in institutions; uncontrolled urban spread; insecurity of employment; alienation of youth; rejection of traditional values; inflation and other monetary and economic disruptions.”<sup>25</sup> These deliberations gave way to groundbreaking research, the results of which were first published in the 1972 work ‘*The Limits to Growth*’.

**Figure 1 HUMAN PERSPECTIVES**



The graph I wish to share with you maps out the limits of human perspective as seen by the authors of this report. The question, ‘why should I care?’ is fundamentally a question of human perspective. Human perspective can be either narrow, focusing on individuals and their immediate reality or wide, taking in the realities of peoples that live near and far, in the present, as well as in the future.

<sup>25</sup> Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J., & Behrens III, W.W. (1972). *The limits to growth*. New York: Universe Books, p. 10.

This graph has two axes: the x-axis represents time, increasing from the present as you move away from the origin; the y-axis represents space, beginning with an individual and gaining in size as you move away from the origin. Falling within these axes, we find many dots, each representing a possible human concern.

The concern of all humans, it is argued, falls somewhere on this space-time graph. The concerns of the majority of people will fall close to the origin; they are concerned with issues that are more immediately perceptible both in space and in time. As we move away from those aspects of our life that are easily perceptible, we find only a small concentration of human concern. The needs of a starving child at the opposite end of the planet 25 years from now will be less of a concern to most people than if that child was in his or her community, today.

But this graph tells another story as well. For the 1.4 billion people living below the line of absolute poverty, set at US\$1.00 a day, the primary concern can be nothing other than survival: food, shelter and safety. In other words, things which are immediately visible and immediately threatening. They too will find themselves represented in the points closest to the origin. Without the basic necessities, they are deprived of the luxury to dream of distant years and far away places.

The mandate of the United Nations University includes a focus on those areas where only a fraction of the world's population is showing active concern. While delivering research results that can better the lives of those living in the present, in communities close to our Institutes, we also try to ensure that the benefits that stem from our policy prescriptions last for generations to come, that the dividends of our research find their way to the four corners of the globe. This is the meaning of sustainable global development.

The architects of this graph paint a stark picture and suggest, on a rather somber note, that "it is the predicament of mankind that man can perceive the problematique, yet, despite his considerable knowledge and skills, he does not understand the origins, significance, and interrelationships of its many components and thus is unable to devise effective responses."<sup>26</sup>

Yet I wonder, in the 37 years since this report made its first appearance, if this pessimism still reigns? If so, is it justified? As we have seen from the statistics of malnutrition and hunger, some of the world's most perverse problems persist. But can we not in 37 years point to some measure of progress? Some sign that those global efforts aimed at achieving a better world have borne fruit.

### (iii) Successful Global Partnerships

Of the work undertaken at the United Nations University, I can point to multiple successes that would dampen this pessimism. But let's consider the global report card instead. Let us consider the evolution of both our 'knowledge and skills' and whether this evolution has contributed in some concrete way to 'effective responses.'

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<sup>26</sup> Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J., & Behrens III, W.W. (1972). *The limits to growth*. New York: Universe Books, p. 11.

The very first World Bank Development Report, released in 1978, reported that 800 million people were living below the line of absolute poverty, some 18 percent of the total population. That figure has now swelled to 1.4 billion or, 21 percent of the total population.<sup>27</sup> Even when we account for the impact of changing demographics, we still find an increase of 3 percent in poverty levels over the past 30 or so years. And yet, despite these disheartening figures we can still point to some success.

It was in this same period that we witnessed the boom in microcredit lending. And while global statistics have yet to be compiled, the success stories pouring in from around the world indicate a concrete step in the right direction. The hope that this initiative engenders is so great that the Nobel Committee saw fit to award Mohammed Yunus and the Grameen Bank the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

Alex Counts, President and CEO of the Grameen Foundation, notes that Bangladesh, a country with no social safety net, boasts more than 20 million microfinance clients. As a result, the country has been able to reduce poverty from more than 60 percent to less than 40 percent.<sup>28</sup> In Brazil, 15.7 million people are estimated to be working in the informal economy as microentrepreneurs; they outnumber formal sector entrepreneurs by more than three to one.<sup>29</sup>

I have had the opportunity to witness the benefits of microcredit in Brazil, in person. The United Nations University had been asked to supervise a regional sustainable development project for the Banco do Brasil. And in February 2008, I was taken on a project inspection tour in a remote part of the Brazilian countryside. I was not told beforehand what I might find once we arrived at our destination.

When I arrived, I found myself surrounded by some cows, a dozen goats and a handful of sheep that were mingling with a precious few chickens. If it was the magnitude of the project they were trying to impress me with, I thought to myself, they were failing terribly.

The Banco do Brazil project leader, who was also my escort, seemed amused and I, admittedly, must have seemed a little confused. When I asked why they had chosen this exact location for my visit, he instructed me to go speak with a farmer standing not too far from me.

When I did, the true value of this project and of microcredit lending became clear. I listened to the farmer as he related to me the exact conditions of the place where I was standing before he joined the microcredit project. He owned not a single animal; had no money to begin cultivating the land or raise livestock. He did not even hold the deed to the land that was, for all intents and purposes, his own. I was, it turns out, mistaken about the magnitude of the project's impact.

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<sup>27</sup> World Bank. (1978). *World Development Report 1978*. Washington: World Bank, p. iii.

<sup>28</sup> Hechler-Fayd'herbe, N. (2009). Microfinance: Three perspectives on the achievements, challenges and future of microfinance. *Credit Suisse Research Quarterly*, Retrieved from <http://www.grameenfoundation.org/pubdownload/dl.php?pubID=65>

<sup>29</sup> (2005). *International Year of Microcredit 2005: Fast facts*. Retrieved from [http://www.yearofmicrocredit.org/pages/reslib/reslib\\_recreading.asp#fastfacts](http://www.yearofmicrocredit.org/pages/reslib/reslib_recreading.asp#fastfacts)

This project does not promise riches, nor is the Banco do Brasil simply distributing money without accountability. The power of microcredit stems from a single and simple fact: we are allowing people to put their hands on the first rung of the ladder that leads to social emancipation and the restoration of dignity.

The regional sustainable development projects initiated by the Banco do Brazil in which we are proudly participating, have thus far involved 771,300 families in 4,622 municipalities. Over USD 2 billion has been disbursed in the form of microcredit loans. Now, you may be wondering how safe these investments are? According to one of the project leaders, the losses incurred in this type of lending are 40 percent less than is the case with normal lending. At once an astonishing and inspiring figure, I would say.

But we return to the Club of Rome's *world problematique* and the pessimism it stirs. Indeed, the pessimistic airs of some would suggest that global partnerships are handicapped significantly from the outset. The most common charges go to inflated bureaucracies, corruption or simply, as Samuel Huntington famously suggested, to the "vacuousness of Western universalism."<sup>30</sup>

But we can temper this pessimism by pointing out some significant advances in the area of global health; again, the result of effective policy responses. The history of the smallpox disease provides a case in point. This disease has been credited for both the decimation of populations and the collapse of empires.<sup>31</sup> The global response to this scourge is perhaps the most impressive instance of global partnership I can point to.

The eradication of smallpox has been dubbed "one of mankind's greatest achievements"<sup>32</sup> and "the greatest public health achievement in history."<sup>33</sup> And it could not have been possible were it not for a truly coordinated global partnership. Today, it remains the only disease to have been permanently eradicated. The World Health Organization team that led the final eradication programme over 13 years consisted of 687 WHO workers from 73 countries. Countless lives have been saved as a result and it is estimated that over US\$ 1 billion is being saved annually in global health expenditures on account of this worldwide intervention.<sup>34</sup>

I began my discussion of global development by saying that it was an inexact science, that there have been pitfalls and that we always run the risk of succumbing to these. We see, however, that in some cases well-planned policies can have an immediate and substantial impact on some of the more disturbing figures I have presented. But not all our endeavors are equally successful. The role of academics and researchers is to bring forward interdisciplinary evaluations and solutions, ever mindful of the lessons of the past, as well as the needs of the present and future.

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<sup>30</sup> Huntington, S. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Touchstone, p. 318.

<sup>31</sup> WHO. (2009, June 30). *The work of WHO in the Western Pacific Region: Chapter 27, Smallpox*. Retrieved from <http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/04CC351A-FC5D-4DA4-AF21-9A4A96906E3D/0/chapter27.pdf>, p. 258.

<sup>32</sup> Prometheus Books. (2009, June 19). *Smallpox: The Death of a Disease*. Retrieved from <http://www.firstscience.com/home/news/infectious-and-emerging-diseases/smallpox-the-death-of-a-disease-page-4-1-66019.html>

<sup>33</sup> WHO. (2009, June 30). *The work of WHO in the Western Pacific Region: Chapter 27, Smallpox*, p. 258.

<sup>34</sup> Behbehani, A.M. (1983). The Smallpox Story: Life and death of an old disease. *Microbiological Reviews*, 47(4), 455-509, p. 499.

(iv) An Emphasis on the Role of Education

This brings me to the final point I wish to raise: the role of education in achieving sustainable global development. More specifically, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that education, properly utilized, is the single most effective way to bring about not only a dialogue between cultures and civilizations, but also to ensure quick, effective and equal global development. To illustrate my point, I would like to share another story with you.

Some years ago, water experts devised a very simple method for sterilizing drinking water that contained potentially harmful bacteria. The method is known as SODIS, Solar Water Disinfection. It is simple and straight-forward.

Step 1: wash the interior of a clear PET bottle

Step 2: fill the PET bottle with water.

Step 3: leave the bottle exposed to sunlight for a period of 6 hours or more.

Step 4: drink<sup>35</sup>

This simple procedure, it is argued, could save hundreds of thousands of lives in poor, disease-ridden countries.<sup>36</sup> Already, it is being used by as many as 3 million people in 30 different countries.<sup>37</sup> If such a simple procedure can supply clean drinking water to the poorest parts of the world, the implications would indeed be colossal.

The results, however, have been mixed; but, not because the method doesn't work. Results have successfully been replicated in laboratories and some communities have reported very important reductions in the number of deaths related to diarrhea. Studies in Kenya, for instance, show that there is up to 25 percent fewer cases of severe diarrhea in communities that have adopted this method of water purification.<sup>38</sup> In Bolivia, this figure is even more impressive, with 40 percent fewer cases reported. But why aren't similar results more widespread?

Researchers have boiled it down to a few key possibilities; and chief among them is a lack of education and training. The enduring challenge according to the head of the SODIS reference centre is convincing people living in villages and urban slums that simply exposing a bottle to the sun will provide them with safe drinking water.<sup>39</sup> It proves more difficult than one would expect to implement such a simple solution to so big a problem. The need to build capacity among the world's poorest is, here, made clearly evident.

The United Nations University is not, as I have already mentioned, a traditional university. One distinguishing feature is its decentralized structure. At present, we have 13 research

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<sup>35</sup> SODIS. (Retrieved 2009, September). *SODIS Method: How does it work?*. Retrieved from [http://www.sodis.ch/methode/anwendung/index\\_EN](http://www.sodis.ch/methode/anwendung/index_EN)

<sup>36</sup> Swissinfo. (2009, August 26). *Study questions benefits of clean water project*. Retrieved from [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/science\\_technology/Study\\_questions\\_benefits\\_of\\_clean\\_water\\_project.html?siteSect=511&sid=11127816&cKey=1251799848000&ty=st](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/science_technology/Study_questions_benefits_of_clean_water_project.html?siteSect=511&sid=11127816&cKey=1251799848000&ty=st)

<sup>37</sup> Pabón, C. (2009, August 31). *Study pours cold water on solar disinfection*. Retrieved from <http://www.scidev.net/en/news/study-pours-cold-water-on-solar-disinfection.html>

<sup>38</sup> Swissinfo. (2009, August 26). *Study questions benefits of clean water project*.

<sup>39</sup> Meierhofer, R. (2009, August). *SODIS implementation put to the test*. Retrieved from [http://www.eawag.ch/medien/bulletin/20090819/solar\\_waterdesinfection.pdf](http://www.eawag.ch/medien/bulletin/20090819/solar_waterdesinfection.pdf)

institutes located in 11 different countries, all of which are coordinated by the headquarters in Tokyo, Japan. We recently asked these Institutes to provide a list of research impacts they aimed to achieve in the next two years. Of the 54 planned research programmes for 2010 and 2011, capacity development figures most prominently. Over 80 percent of our research programmes planned for the next two years have a focus on capacity building capacity in developed and developing countries. A conservative estimate of our investment in this area amounts to approximately USD 20 million.

The lessons of the SODIS project confirm that our investment in education and thus, the future of global development, is relevant and meaningful. The United Nations University's capacity building initiatives are one way of ensuring that other development projects benefit from the training and knowledge needed. In addition to furthering academic knowledge in a number of fields, we aim to teach the teachers and ensure that our research is relevant to the needs of our global audience; an audience which consists of the literate and illiterate, the sick and the healthy, the needy and the well-off, without excluding the multitude of possibilities in between.

Education is the cornerstone upon which we are building a dialogue between cultures for this civilization and future civilizations.

### **C. Final Remarks**

The statistics I have presented today give us pause and remind us that we are far from achieving the goals we have set for ourselves. Perhaps the most well-known goals are the Millennium Development Goals, formulated and agreed upon by the world leaders in the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration.

Progress reports since the year 2000 have shown us that we are simply not doing enough or that we are not doing it well enough. This could lead some to despair and conclude that our progress is too slow to matter, our goals too lofty to be achieved. I urge you not to succumb to this conclusion. To the contrary, if we are determined to make a real difference, not just in words but in actions, the MDGs will provide us with the perfect opportunity to demonstrate our common resolve. The pitfall, of course, is that inaction will prove the insincerity of our pledges. This is the risk. Now we must embrace the responsibility we have to ensure the former prevails over the latter.

The dialogue between cultures which I have come to speak about today will play a pivotal role in forcing us to accept our responsibility toward one another, paving the way for the necessary common resolve.

At the end of the Second World War, a time of great human loss, tragedy and pessimism, a great American writer was awarded the Noble prize in literature. In addition to his many literary works, William Faulkner has become well-known for his unwavering optimism in the human spirit, captured in his 1950 Nobel acceptance speech. His speech has been hailed as one of the most significant addresses in the history of the Nobels and I would like to end my talk today with an excerpt.

It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one

more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.<sup>40</sup>

The growing dialogue between cultures is but one manifestation of this spirit.

Thank you.

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<sup>40</sup> Faulkner, W. (1950, December 10). *Banquet speech*. Retrieved from [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html)

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