

Reflections on International Solidarity in an Interdependent World

Shyami Fernando Puvimanasinghe

Author & Researcher, International Law & Development, Human Rights & Global Governance

*The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet [each individual], each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others. Some consume the Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death – Our Common Future, 1987. Similarly, throughout the world, we see a rise in conflicts and civil wars, and discrimination of all kinds. This stands in stark contradiction with Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: **All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.***

The previous speakers addressed the issue of international solidarity from several perspectives. Two of them dwelt primarily on principle, and two essentially on related practice. The principle is well established. The practice bears testimony to the existence and the power of human goodness towards others. The primary value of this side event, the way I see it, is that it seeks to address both principle and practice. The principle of international solidarity is contested by a few, but the overwhelming majority sees its potential worth. At another level, a gap has been identified between principle and practice. My reflections relate both to the fundamental value of international solidarity and to prospective approaches to bridging this gap.

Both **human rights and international solidarity** are deeply rooted in realities which go far beyond the legal arena, and depending on how we perceive them, can lead to a soul searching inquiry at a fundamental and existential level- to look within ourselves, and consider how we connect to the rest of **humanity**/our social environment, and our home, the natural environment, and to question the values and value systems we uphold. In an increasingly globalizing world, troubled by the turbulence of multiple crises including climate change, natural and man-made disasters, the interdependence of all persons and the planet earth is highly visible, although this has always been part of our reality. The human rights implications, both positive and negative, of a deepening and widening global economy are profound. Human rights have their basis in **human dignity**, by virtue of which all persons have the same value and constitute one humanity. **A society based on solidarity, is rooted in social justice and human dignity, where a person has a value for being, rather than having or producing. The fact that more than one billion people suffer from poverty and hunger, is an indicator that as the human race, we are failing to live as one family.** The law, including human rights principles, are a means to an end, in particular, to the ultimate goal of **social justice**, the paths to which lie both within and beyond legal interventions. **An integrated, cohesive, holistic and humanist approach** - touching on different dimensions of human existence - ecological, religious/spiritual, philosophical/ethical/moral,

social, cultural, economic, legal, political and personal – are useful in considering international solidarity.

Ecological - The first law of ecology is that of integrity - that everything in nature is connected to everything else – as in a spider’s web - well illustrated by the phenomenon of climate change, which affects all life on earth. From an environmental perspective, we comprise one species - global warming knows no national boundaries, earthquakes and floods make no distinctions.

Religious/Spiritual - Spiritual wisdom through the ages, made a plea that we treat others as we would like to be treated. Christian scriptures emphasizing universal love, so well illustrated by the story of the good Samaritan, set on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, some 2000 years ago. Other religious traditions have much the same message, like universal brotherhood in Islam. Buddhist and Hindu philosophy extend notions of tolerance, compassion and *ahimsa*/non-violence to all living beings, including animals and plants.

Ethical/Moral – While the law has a certain dominion over defining, interpreting and implementing human rights, these rights themselves, are deeply embedded in ethical, moral and also spiritual values. Public international law is rich with aspirations and ideals.

Social - The historic struggles against slavery, colonialism and racism were driven by moral, ethical as well as religious principles. The struggle for independence led by Mahatma Ghandhi appealed to universal values, so did the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King Jr. and the anti-apartheid movement of Nelson Mandela. A society based on the conception of solidarity makes tolerance a central value, and has no space for discrimination of any kind whatsoever.

Philosophical/Academic – Many have made the case for global social justice, among them, John Rawls and Thomas Pogge. It is argued that obligations arise between persons by virtue of the global social and economic processes that connect them across national jurisdictions. Structural social injustices can cause harm to people, requiring a conception of responsibility that recognizes this connection - I.M. Young, Onara O’Neill, Rui Balthazar Dos Santos Alves. Writers have also stressed the need for a heightened coordinating role for international institutions, in ensuring accountability, cohesion and coherence, including policy coherence.

Cultural – The African notions *Ubuntu*-I am what I am because of who we all are- and *Botho* -to earn respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by first empowering others- are examples of cultural values embodying a sense of community and solidarity, similarly, in Latin America, the Bolivian Alternative for the Americas, or Brazil’s policy of solidarity diplomacy. The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Charter and the Arab Charter on Human Rights all underscore the need for solidarity.

Economic - Unbridled market economics and globalization were not intended, even by the founding fathers of economic liberalism, John Stewart Mill and Adam Smith (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759: *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776) who accepted that the market must not

sell its soul to the evil of unalloyed economic efficiency, but instead, must recognize and respect the social ends it seeks to serve, and that moral and social implications must guide and justify the enterprise. David Kinley has argued the case for *Civilizing Globalization* (2009), and Jeffrey Sachs in *The End of Poverty: How we can make it happen in our lifetime* (2005) calls for an enlightened globalization- Where we commit to ending poverty, adopt a plan of action, raise the voice of the poor, restore genuine multilateralism, reform international economic institutions, strengthen the United Nations, harness global science, promote sustainable development, and make a personal commitment. Economic development must serve to enhance human rights and human security, human, social and sustainable development and peace, security and friendly relations among nations. The invisible sphere of the market requires regulation through the visible hand of government. In the absence of a world government, multilateral institutions have a seminal role in ensuring justice, equity and cohesion on the international plane.

Political – The slogans of the French revolution- liberty, equality and fraternity, underscore the value of solidarity. Millennium Development Goal 8 on a global partnership for development and all the MDGs, are premised on solidarity and shared responsibility, fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration. States need to ensure that their policies both at the national and international levels, do not contribute to human rights violations in other countries. In an era of Global Governance, all have responsibilities. Rights have concomitant responsibilities. Governments have a primary role in leadership, policy-making and regulation. But this has to be accompanied by a strong role for civil society, academics, the media, the private sector, and all persons. There is a special role for spiritual leaders. So too for artists and sportsmen and women, as arts, culture and sports bond people together in fellowship and solidarity across all divides.

Legal – Human rights and international solidarity need to permeate law and policy in international economic relations - trade, foreign direct investment, international cooperation, assistance and aid, debt relief, access to medicines, transfer of technology, environment, intellectual property, sustainable development and financing for development. Much progress has been made, at least in theory, from Rio to Johannesburg in Sustainable Development; from Monterrey to Doha in Financing for Development and from Paris to Accra in aid efficiency. International law relating to solidarity sees steady evolution from the Charter of the United Nations through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Conventions, especially on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Peaceful and Friendly Relations between States, the Law of the Sea, the Vienna Declaration, Declaration on the Right to Development, Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals. The Right to Development requires that the same constituent principles that we accept at the national level- equality, equity, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability and participation, must also apply at the international level- mandating a single standard at all levels. The right to development belongs to peoples and individuals, and its realization requires commitment by all governments, the support of all other stakeholders, and education and sensitization of people, both in developed and developing countries. Both the right to development and the principle of international solidarity

contribute to the progressive development of international law for just, equitable and sustainable development. Public International law evolved in separate compartments, and is therefore fragmented, for instance, economic law and human rights. A holistic approach requires us to look at the points of convergence and divergence, and search for synergy.

Personal – *In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground- A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now* – Wangari Maathai. Our actions - and inaction - touch people every day across the globe, which in turn, calls us to act, and rethink our engagement with the world. Jeremy Rifkin (*The Empathic Civilization: The race to global consciousness in a world in crises*) challenges us to think about what may be the most important question facing humanity: Can we reach global empathy in time to avoid the collapse of civilization and save the Earth? *Let no one be discouraged by the belief there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills....against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence....Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation* - Robert F. Kennedy. Social change and reform means reaching out to the minds and hearts of men, and to the depths of the human spirit. My message is a simple one of hope and possibility. In all humility, it is my view that there is a role for us all, whatever might be our position in life, to contribute to change. Education – both formal and non-formal - has in my view, the most crucial role to play, in building a more socially just global society. ***Education can promote empowerment and empathy.*** The importance of the family, as the basic unit of social cohesion, is fundamental, because it is our first social experience for learning kindness, empathy and love, caring and sharing. Education of women and girls is key, as universally, the earliest and most formative years of a child's life, are still in the care of their mothers - The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, even in a world where we stand up for the equality of men and women. ***We need a humanist approach- Building a more humane society based on empathy and empowerment, integrating a generosity of thought, sentiment and action, which requires a change in how we think, how we feel and how we act.***

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made a plea for selflessness and solidarity and the building of bridges to include the entire international community. Kofi Annan, *In Larger Freedom* said 'This kind of cooperation not only advances everyone's interests but also recognizes our common humanity'. *Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.* – Eleanor Roosevelt, "The Great Question," remarks delivered at the United Nations in New York on March 27, 1958.

