Opportunities & Challenges for the 21st Century -- Need for a New Paradigm

Concept Note and Draft Agenda for a conference at the UN Geneva on June 3, 2013

The Issue

The world faces an unprecedented dilemma. Expanding opportunities are emerging side by side with intensifying problems. The proliferation of money, technology, education and global interdependence which have been the main drivers of global development is accompanied by rising levels of financial instability, pollution, unemployment, inequality, arms proliferation and social unrest. Persistent poverty co-exists side by side with unprecedented prosperity. Rising levels of inequality and unemployment are spreading discontent and social unrest at a time when social welfare nets are overstrained by an aging population. Economic growth is depleting the world’s natural resource base at an alarming rate while threatening long term catastrophic changes in climate. The competition for scarce resources is aggravating nationalist competition at a time when international cooperation is essential for coping with common global challenges. Globalization is breaking down the barriers insulating national economies, making states increasing vulnerable to destabilizing impacts from beyond national borders. Proliferation of nuclear and other weapons poses new threats to national and regional security. Humanity seems driven by mutually exclusive, contradictory goals leading to apparently insoluble problems.

These multiple challenges share common attributes:

- They all transcend narrow disciplinary boundaries
- They are interrelated and interdependent and defy solution by partial, sectoral approaches.
- They are all global in nature and cannot be fully addressed without coordinated actions by the international community.
- Approaches to resolving these challenges are subject to conflicting claims, priorities and interests.

The lack of significant progress on addressing these issues in recent years has raised doubts about the collective capacity of the human community to effectively address them.

Quest for New Paradigm

Each of these global issues is a subject of on-going analysis by leading organizations around the world. Many strategies have been formulated and projected for dealing with one or two of them in isolation and often at the expense of the others. Solutions to ecological problems usually involve economic tradeoffs that neglect the rising aspirations and expectations of developing societies and are unacceptable to most prosperous nations. Efforts to balance budget deficits and control inflation appear to be in conflict with efforts to stimulate growth and generate sufficient employment opportunities for all job seekers. Investments in security typically neglect the destabilizing impact of rising levels of unemployment on social stability. Managing ever
growing global financial resources is undermined by reluctance of national governments to cede authority to international institutions.

There is presently no consensus as to whether real, effective solutions are possible to address the full spectrum of global challenges and what those solutions should be.

Is there any way in which apparently mutually contradictory goals of prosperity, security, sustainability and social justice can all be realized?

The premise for this initiative is that there are in fact viable solutions to address all of these challenges, but that it can only be found by looking beyond the prevailing framework of values, ideas, strategies, policies, and institutions on which current solutions are based. In other words, there is need for a new intellectual paradigm with the following characteristics:

- It fully comprehends the interrelationships and interdependence of all dimensions of global society and social development.
- Its goal is to optimize human welfare and well-being for all human beings.
- It recognizes that universal human values are not merely inspiring ideals. These values are the only viable basis on which sustainable progress for humanity is achievable.
- It gives central importance to the full development and utilization of Human Capital as the driving force and Social Capital as the most essential enabling technology for rapid social evolution.

The World Academy of Art & Science has recently launched an initiative bringing together like-minded organizations and individuals to identify the core elements of an integrated perspective, comprehensive strategy and detailed policy framework capable of addressing these multiple challenges through a more fundamental paradigm change.

The Geneva conference will be the second step in this series and will be followed by discussions in Alexandria, Egypt, North America and other locations.

One anticipated outcome of the program will be a definitive report exploring the interrelationships between peace, security, economics, employment, global governance, rule of law, ecology, social process, technology, organization, education, research and individuality as dimensions of a comprehensive and integrated perspective.

Geneva Conference

A conference at Palais des Nations, Geneva will be conducted on June 3, 2013 with participation of major international organizations and NGOs.

The objective of the conference is to sketch the outlines of a comprehensive approach for dealing with the major challenges facing humanity today.

The conference will address the following fundamental questions in an interrelated manner:

1. Economy & Employment: How can global food security, full employment and abolition of poverty be achieved within a decade?
2. **Energy & Ecology:** How can global living standards be raised to middle class levels without depleting or destroying the environment or depriving future generations of the capacity to sustain these achievements?

3. **Human Capital – Education, Health & Welfare:** How can global levels of education and public health be raised to OECD level?

4. **Money & Finance:** How can the necessary financial resources be generated and mobilized to achieve the goals described in the first three questions?

5. **Security:** How can we permanently eliminate war and WMD that threaten to destroy all other development achievements?

6. **Global Governance:** How can we design and implement a system of global governance capable of implementing necessary measures to achieve the other five goals for the welfare and well-being of all?

The scope of discussion will encompass

- Common root causes of the multiple global crises
- Ideas, principles and values on which comprehensive solutions need to be based
- Strategies, policies, proposals, legal and institutional mechanisms
- Actionable steps

The format will include a few brief presentations, but most of the time will be devoted to a systematic open discussion of core issues. Prior to the conference, participants will be invited to submit articles, papers, relevant information and comments relating to the conference topic for circulation to other participants and for possible publication after the conference.