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“Global Governance: Achievements, Prospects and Crucial Problems”



“The concept of global governance needs to take on a deeper meaning and be seen as the only realistic manner of governing in a more and more complicated and interdependent world.”

As a direct outcome of globalization, global governance has gradually strengthened the idea of justice as a common feature of contemporary societies. Yet today’s complex human, political and economic relations require continuous public forums but also binding commitments that enhance, yet go beyond, those arrangements that intergovernmental institutions have made since the end of World War Two.

Over the years these intergovernmental organizations have addressed a host of global needs. For instance, the United Nations Security Council has passed resolutions dealing with issues of global concern such as conflict related to authoritarian regimes, economic and trade embargoes of rogue states such as Iraq, nuclear-threatening states such as Iran and North Korea, and calls for judicial procedures for ex-militants condemned for crimes against humanity (e.g. Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Cambodia). The World Bank has provided financial and technical assistance in developing countries around the world, working especially through its high concessional lending facility, the International Development Association, to combat poverty, create conditions for sustainable growth, and increase public and private cooperation at the state level. Investments in infrastructure in Sudan and Sierra Leone, in road networks in Afghanistan, in improving livelihoods in Cambodia with land grants, and in financing water and sanitation service improvement in Kenya-, are only few examples of what World Bank has achieved.

In the realm of trade, the World Trade Organization has enhanced negotiations on multilateral trading, regional cooperation, and competition policies, among others, while bridging disputes between member-states within its dispute settlement mechanism. The Cairns Group, constituted by the major agriculture-exporting countries, is said to be one of the most powerful subgroups bringing together developed and developing countries with common interests to press the World Trade Organization to fully take account of the topics discussed in the Doha Rounds of multilateral trade negotiations.

In addition to these efforts, global governance has also achieved many safeguards with respect to the merits of democracy and deliberative governance around the world. For instance, The United Nations, with its monitoring mechanisms, -as well as nongovernmental organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch- are active in Africa and the Middle East, where devastating post-conflict conditions, electoral fraud, poverty and disease are widespread and states either have no means to deal with them or purposely decide to ignore them. In addition, the UN Security Council plays a decisive role in resolving armed conflicts and bringing transitional peace. Thus, in Afghanistan in 2001, in Iraq in 2003, and in Lebanon in 2006, the UN intervened militarily; and in other cases, as in Cyprus and Kosovo, UN field units maintain peace and guarantee democratic stability. Overall armed conflicts, though always threatening, have dramatically decreased in number since 1950 due to the UN’s military enforcement mechanism.

Along with these achievements, there have been breakthroughs in global governance that need to be strengthened in the coming years. Among these, the most prominent include the need to enhance the role of global civil society organizations in international affairs not only as a major feature of democracy but also as a core element of cooperative human action that is institutionally recognized because these groups possess expertise that states need in dealing with high-risk issues such as immigration, gender rights and environmental protection.

In addition, global action is needed in the field of green growth, where until recently, despite ambitious conferences and international forums (e.g. the G20), there has been no significant progress. Environmental protection needs to be linked more strongly with sustainable development, biodiversity and water management; the benefits of conserving natural resources need to be further secured and aligned with internationally accepted legal norms; and the transition to low-carbon economies needs to be accelerated. In this respect, environmentally responsible economies can work toward global prosperity, as well as deeper and broader equality regarding access to wealth, and they can deal more effectively with poverty and unemployment by creating sustainable jobs in a business-friendly environment.

Moreover, efforts to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals, with special reference to education and health, must be better coordinated and speeded up at both national and international levels. Primary education and literacy for people between 15 and 24 years of age are an indispensable right and a fundamental obligation for every state. In addition, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases is also a core priority for the UN, but current data show that both the incidence of lacks of prevention and death rates remain high, with no considerable signs of decrease. Improving education and health conditions in a more efficient manner can upgrade living conditions, augment employment chances, and narrow the political and economic gaps between global regions with different rates of development.

In efforts to expand the scope of global governance, two fundamental obstacles impede cooperation: the strong, pervasive notion of the "Nation" and the sovereign state; and the strong tendency of each member of the international community to mistrust the merits of global governance. With respect to the first obstacle, globalization is not yet perceived as the norm for global action, and the need for interconnectedness is deeply contested. The civic culture and tradition of the nation-state as a unitary actor on the international stage are still very strong and governments thus tend to act in a more introverted than extroverted manner. With respect to the second obstacle, the tendency of overriding national interests to create wide mistrust within international organizations hinders the formation of effective mutual agreements. Striking examples are the recent conferences about climate change and environmental sustainability, and the discussions about how to deal the international economic crisis.

Therefore, though intentions are still promising, action is lagging and disorder pervades the international system of governance. The concept of global governance needs to take on a deeper meaning and be seen as the only realistic manner of governing in a more and more complicated and interdependent world. There is still much room for constructive action, and all concerned nations and organizations should participate in this challenging task.

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