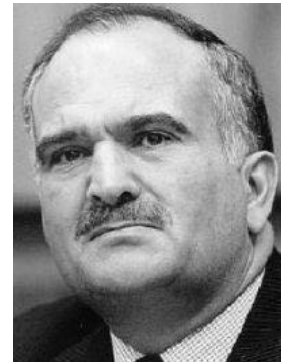


Politics

Humanity at the Crossroads

By Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of the Kingdom of Jordan



AMMAN. We stand today at the crossroads of our very existence. The choice appears stark: move further away from one another, basing our sense of self and our self-interests upon the idea of a threatening "other"; or move closer together as unique humans sharing common values that allow us to unite as one organic whole.

The first road involves a sort of "international apartheid" -- an absence of meaningful dialogue between groups. We would cultivate a siege mentality, view violence as an ordinary solution, and appreciate the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction.

The second road involves bridge-building in an inclusive civil society that appreciates a holistic approach and the belief that our human interdependence is our community. We would work to integrate our common values, have confidence in humanity, engender positive changes and promote a propensity for good -- for Mutually Assured Survival.

No matter what your religion, your language, your skin color, nationality or viewpoint, the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan have proven that we all stand at that crossroads together. Many have faced terror many times in our world. But the attack

upon our richest and most powerful nation was our final wake-up call -- the community of nations is now resolved to act.

However, resolve to act means little without true comprehension of the predicament we all find ourselves in. For resolve will drown in the rhetoric of war if an alternative is not offered to the decisionmakers, peacemakers and, yes, even the warmakers.

Ethical leadership must know a driving purpose. If it is not to appear arbitrary, leadership must be consistent with organizational values, and it must have a vision of the future in mind. It must be rooted in, or actively developing, organizational culture by putting values or principles into practice.

Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Persians, Carthaginians, Romans, Jews, Arabs and Christians have been protagonists in a turbulent global history. The underlying mode of social organization based on oppression and violence produced the culture of war -- culminating in two world wars and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Conflicts since the end of the Cold War have erupted not as a consequence of new freedom, but in reaction to earlier suppression. Ethnic and religious conflicts, demographic pressure, poverty, mass immigration and environmental pollution are the urgent challenges of the new millenium.

We should recall that one great world ideology collapsed because of its suppression of free expression, its centralized command system, and because of its lack of individual incentives and human rights. We expect the new world order to suffer the same fate if humanitarianism is overlooked or ignored. Governance is strengthened through representation and consultation, through respect of the individual and through transparency. Economic structures should respect diversity in religion, language and historical values.

Yet peace cannot arise through economic and political development alone, but requires the solidarity of each individual: I participate; therefore I am. If I do not participate, I do not exist as a citizen: this is how democracy deteriorates into market research, oligarchy, plutocracy, bureaucracy and technocracy. Peace and democracy are educated values; they are not a gift. Education is the key to liberty.

The world, our planet, is now within the reach of all people, with all its beauty -- but also with all its harshness. In the realm of culture, we must leave behind all nostalgia for the past. We must leave behind, without regret, all closed cultures that have justified their approach in terms of superiority and ideological domination. For every culture is now exposed to many currents bringing new languages and symbiotic relationships.

In our complex contemporary world, the operative concepts are connectivity and communication. To relate to each other, we need more: communication, cooperation and caring. This style of culture hinges on the dignity of the individual, a network of connections promoting the community purpose, and the ethics system of its members.

Ours is a rapidly changing world. Global transformation is taking place at high speed with few "globalizers" and many "globalized." Globalization is based on a free-market economy, not on a free-market society. Communication and connectivity are only operative concepts for those who have electricity and live above the recognized international level of poverty. The others -- two billion of us -- will become info-marginalized, an info-poor society in conflict with the info-rich.

Vigilance, and a willingness to "manage intangibles," might have prevented the catastrophes in Bosnia and Afghanistan. If we had kept the promises made in 1974 at the United Nations to allocate 0.7 percent of the gross national product of industrialized countries to the development of disadvantaged countries, some of today's "angry neighbors" might be good friends and trading partners. But things turned out quite differently.

In 1997, there were almost 800 million unemployed people on earth. Today, the world's 358 richest people own an aggregate fortune greater than the combined incomes of 2.3 billion people -- nearly 40 percent of the world. Over the past 30 years, the world share for the poorest 20 percent fell from 2.3 to 1.4 percent. In the same period, it also rose for the richest fifth from 70 to 85 percent.

So what ever happened to economic development with a human face?

We need to talk -- to develop a Parliament of Cultures, as outlined by the late violin virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin. This would be an intra-regional effort toward conversation. It would become a platform for dialogue between

regions worldwide. It would be the foundation for bridges between entire cultures, because it would provide means to locate and emphasize the values, purposes and visions that all civilizations share and will continue to share.

We need to go to the source of conflict. History shows that there is always progress if the risks are recognized early enough. The transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace is our major challenge and it means learning to live together, demonstrating solidarity, sharing knowledge and experience, and practicing the appreciation of other traditions and values. It means we must stop paying the price of war and start paying the price of peace.

Prince Hassan, the president of the Club of Rome, wrote this article for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.