

***Palavras por ocasião do recebimento do  
William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding***

Fulbright Association

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May I thank the Honorable Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, for his generous words.

I am very pleased, Ambassador Haass, to be greeted by a personality of your intellectual and political stature.

I bore witness to the outstanding work you did for the promotion of Inter-American relations during your tenure at the Department of State, which kindly hosts us this afternoon.

It is my great honor to receive the J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding. I am deeply grateful to the Fulbright Association and its cooperating associates.

I see the award as a symbol of the friendship the Fulbright Program has always shown towards Brazil and its people. The Fulbright Program has increased knowledge of Brazil in the United States and of the United States in Brazil , including in my alma mater , the University of São Paulo.

I highly value the extraordinary contribution the Fulbright Program has given over the last decades to the improvement of dialogue among peoples and cultures. You did justice to the career and spirit of late Senator J. William Fulbright.

It is under the inspiration of the founder of this renowned international educational and cultural exchange program that I would like to share with you some thoughts about the current challenges and prospects for international understanding.

Wherever we happen to be, in Washington or in São Paulo, in Europe, Asia or Africa, we live today in a risk society. One may argue that earlier generations also had to sail into uncharted waters. But no doubt we are experiencing uncertainties of a new kind. We are no longer obsessed with risks coming from tradition or nature. We are now mostly concerned with risks created by the very impact of our developing knowledge upon the world. We are primarily threatened by what we may call “manufactured risks”. Climate change falls

into that category. So does the meltdown of national economies through market instability. Not to mention the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the specter of terrorism itself.

Examples of man-generated risks thus abound, but effective solutions, I am afraid, do not. Now and then regressive utopias are brought to the floor. The radical ecology discourse is a case in point. On denying our capacity to command nature through science and technology, it places modernity under a negative sign.

Others have been preaching isolationism as the best therapy. The level of a country's exposure to economic and security risks would be commensurate to the extent of its interaction with the outside world. It goes without saying that neither way is sustainable in the long run. After all, the clock of history is unlikely to run backward. Nor should it do so.

If we are to succeed in dispelling global threats, it will be through more rather than less technical innovation. Our very capacity to tell how concrete and imminent those threats are is contingent upon available knowledge and technological resources. What we know for certain is that we are not speaking of local phenomena.

No place on earth is impervious to the effects of occurrences like climate change, infectious diseases, financial crisis, drug trade or terrorism. They cut across national jurisdictions. Hence the fallacy of autarchic solutions. Hence the illusion that a single state or community could tame contemporary hazards on its own.

Transnational problems require global responses. How should those responses be worked out? What paths should be trodden to enhance prospects for international cooperation and understanding? It is fair to acknowledge that some important ground has already been covered.

Suffice it to mention the multilateral normative network set up since the end of the Cold War. States are committed as never before to universally agreed norms in fields like environmental protection and human rights. The cycle of United Nations Conferences initiated in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 played a crucial role in this regard. It was then that the global civil society emerged as a major actor in the search for a democratic global governance.

Had it not been for the active participation in it of civil society, the Rio Conference would hardly have been so seminal in its results, among which the emblematic Convention on Climate Change. No less decisive was the influence of non-state actors and the world public opinion in the setting-up of ground-breaking institutions like the International Criminal Court.

The fact is that, profiting from the resources made available by the information technology revolution, a true global public space came into being during the nineties. In this contemporary agora, views are expressed and actions taken on a broad range of issues by multiple stakeholders. States have lost monopoly over the global public agenda.

It is true that none but state agents act out of popular mandates. But the legitimacy of civil society groups is of a different nature and should be evaluated accordingly. It rests on what comes out of their activism. They are what they do. Their power is contingent not on the authority to decide or enforce. But on the capacity to argue, denounce, propose, experiment and innovate.

There seems therefore to be no contradiction between the role of the state and that of civil society. On the contrary, the state and civil society appear to form a partnership well entitled to pursue the cause cherished by many of democratizing democracy. This entails both global and domestic objectives. The global challenge would be that of contributing to fill up the existing deficit of governance in international affairs.

Economy has turned global, but politics has not. The interdependence of markets has not been matched by an updating of the Bretton Woods system. The international community is still lacking mechanisms that could effectively follow up and control financial volatility. The United Nations is not exempt of reform either.

The methods of the organization are to be brought in line with the goals of the Millenium Declaration. A step in that direction has been the decision by Secretary General Kofi Annan to broaden the discussion on ways to strengthen the participation of civil society in the UN system.

As to the objective of democratizing democracy in domestic fronts, it will evolve within the discretion of national constituencies. But, again, it is only expected that the worldwide trend of expanding the role of civil society in the establishment, implementation and control of public policies is kept up. Simply because we are referring to a no-loser situation.

The State saves funds and wins credibility. Civil society broadens its share in the conduct of the common good. The citizenry is better served. And the polity as a whole becomes more accountable. One may add that the more democratic a local experience is, the better its chances of being globally consequential are.

Conversely, the less oligarchic the international system becomes, the more consistent with local aspirations it will be. For instance, let us take the HIV prevention and control experience. The participatory nature of the Brazilian HIV program, led as it is by a State-civil society partnership, helped raise support for Brazil in its dispute with the pharmaceutical industry within the World Trade Organization. Conversely, the outcome of that multilateral dispute has produced priceless benefits for the local treatment of HIV worldwide.

Global has become local and the other way round. This is a defining feature of globalization, in its dramatic bouleversement of the notion of space. Some feared that globalization would simply pull away power from states to the global arena. And so did globalization, depriving nations of some of the leverage they once had, but it has also produced an opposite effect. It has created pressures for local autonomy. It has helped revive cultural identities, endowing communities with new practices and means of expression.

As a result the world after globalization is far from looking like a homogenous and monotonous landscape. It resembles a rich mosaic instead. The challenge before us is that of ensuring that all parts fit together in

cohesive but plural geometries. How can we best get there? Is it just a matter of political engineering? Or is the international community in need for a new ethics, an ethics of solidarity and tolerance?

Most certainly, it is. It is high time absolute notions of good and evil are shelved in. They simply do not fit the world as it is. The international community is too diverse to be straitjacketed into Manichean models. Nations themselves are usually too plural to be depicted as uniform entities, be it under a positive or a negative light. The United States and Brazil are good examples.

Our nations have been plural from the outset. Our background is European, but we managed to call in new peoples and cultures to share our eventful sagas. Multiculturalism is our trademark, not to mention social mobility. We are definitely forward-looking nations. Let us continue to strive together for a more inclusive, democratic and peaceful future for us all. The United States deserves it. So does Brazil. And so does the world at large.

Thank you very much.