

**BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD VALUES:
ENVISIONING A POSITIVE CULTURE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMA
Workshop Series**

**WORKSHOP III: THE APPLICATION OF UNIVERSAL VALUES TO POLITICAL
INSTITUTIONS – THE ROLE OF NGOs
22 May 2008, 777 UN Plaza, New York**

DEBRIEFING SUMMARY

Featured speaker: Mr. Jonathan Granoff
Facilitators: Ms. Alisa Clarke, Dr. Joni Carley

Observations and remarks by Mr. Granoff, President of Global Security Institute:



Mr. Granoff expressed concern that there are several challenges that face human survival which require global analysis to understand clearly in order to develop effective policies. He suggested that clarity of understanding cannot be obtained when addressing protecting the global commons – the living systems upon which civilization depends such as the oceans, the rainforests, and the climate – crushing poverty or the elimination of nuclear weapons when viewed through national and religious prisms.

In addition to there being threats which are universal in nature he posited that there are also ethical norms and values which are similarly universal. In this respect he made reference to one of his publications[1] where he noted “Human society has ethical and moral norms based on wisdom, conscience and practicality. Many norms are universal and have withstood the test of human experience over long periods of time. One such principle is that of reciprocity. It is often called the Golden Rule: ‘Treat others as you wish to be treated.’”¹ One could extrapolate from this to suggest that nations should treat each other as they wish to be treated. He related experience with Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy Administration, who contacted him about this publication and acknowledged that he was still learning about its relevance to larger global issues. In fact one can find the argument regarding the importance of global ethical norms in Mr. McNamara’s book Wilson’s Ghost.

The speaker noted that he especially drew inspiration from the work of Judge Christopher Weeramantry whose work on universal values and policy suggests that application of these principles leads to both inner harmony and stability as well as harmony and stability between nations. He said that this understanding was the foundation for devoting his life to the elimination of nuclear weapons, in that the instability wrought by the lack of application of these principles thwarted humanity's security by tearing the fabric of cooperation required by so many global issues.

One of the key problems arising from applying universal principles was the fact that key actors are necessarily confined by their professions to advancing much narrower interests. For example diplomats must advance national interests in much the same way as a director of a corporation must advance its business interests. These interests are not necessarily opposed to greater public good but there must be some group of actors whose duty is to advance the public good, the greater perspective, the needs of even future generations. It thus becomes the responsibility of global civil society to ensure that global nuclear disarmament, environmental responsibility, policies responding to the needs of the poor, and human rights are values placed into the public debate alongside business and national interests. The UN system anticipates such advocates and we must seize this duty with vigor.

Mr. Granoff concluded that we are the first generation to decide if we are the last. He emphasized that individuals are most deeply and passionately driven by values, and that religious fundamentalists the world over have seized the values debate and used values to divide people. We must assert that there are universal values and we must invoke them to advocate for greater unity.

Follow-up discussion:

In response to questions and comments raised, Mr. Granoff affirmed that legal and moral knowledge has not caught up scientific knowledge, and that a lot could be learned by looking at political relations in relationship to natural systems, a new bio politics. The reality of the biological systems of the planet cannot be rationally overlooked any longer. For example, the oceans have limits and if we are to be responsible we must honor those limits.

The workshop segment was separated into several exercises:

In “Vision quest: a positive culture”:

Participants were invited to take a moment to remind themselves what brought them to work in the international community and to reconnect with that original compelling quality. The facilitator then asked for each person to envision a values-based system in the year 2018. The different visions were grouped around the areas of “Governance”, “Love” and “Peace”.

For “Reality check: what elements for a values-based culture currently exist?”:

Participants examined how their experience of the current international system reflected the dimensions they had identified for their future vision. Both supportive and obstructive factors were noted. Positive elements covered the freedom NGOs have to express ideals, the fact that different groups are forced into dialogue, the coming together of like-minded persons, sharing, the desires of many for peace, and representation in the system. Negative aspects included poor leadership and models, inadequate application of knowledge, lack of inclusiveness, arrogance, greed, secrecy, hypocrisy and the economics of weaponry.

Under “Options and mapping”:

The facilitator asked for participants to group themselves around their preferred visions and to identify as a group the different options which could take them from their current reality to the future vision qualities. For “Governance”, recommended approaches involved developing and implementing practical steps, and cooperation among democracies to avoid dictatorships and control international conflict. For “Love”, the need was identified to do work on one-self, developing confidence in convictions, finding and maintaining sources/concrete examples of love in one’s own life and being open to the perspectives of others. Suggested measures for “Peace” encompassed communication, modeling peace in one’s own behaviour, respecting cultural and religious differences, creating social and economic justice and overcoming isolation.

For “Way forward: Me, we and the millennium”:

The facilitator invited each participant to declare what concrete, practical action they would take in moving forward on their selected option from that day, and these commitments were shared with the group in plenary.

[1] “Nuclear Weapons, Ethics, Morals, and Law” of the Brigham Young University Law Review, Volume 2000, No. 4, p. 1431. http://www.cmf.ch/events/crans_montana_forum2008/main.php