

DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY

by Douglas Roche

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Notwithstanding past efforts by the international community, one-fifth of the world's 5.8 billion people live in extreme poverty. The UN has developed an integrated agenda reinforcing all the components of sustainable development, at the core of which is the recognition that the human person must be the central subject of development. In other words, people have a right to development.

There is no doubt that over the past 15 years, the world has seen spectacular economic advance for some developing countries, bringing rapidly rising incomes to more than a quarter of the world's population. But the same period has seen unprecedented decline or stagnation, reducing the incomes of another quarter of the population. The world has become more polarized and the gulf between rich and poor has widened even further. Of the \$23 trillion global Gross Domestic Product in 1993, \$18 trillion was in the industrial countries and only \$5 trillion in the developing countries, with 80 percent of the world's people. In 1960, the richest fifth of humanity had an income thirty times greater than the poorest fifth; in 1990, the richest fifth's income was sixty times greater. The 1996 Human Development Report stated that the assets of the world's 358 billionaires exceeded the combined annual incomes of countries with 45 percent of the world's people.

How can poverty be reduced unless a great deal more of the resources now available are put into the alleviation of distress, the development of the human person at the local level through education and health? How will any form of equity be established unless more resources are aimed at developing people who are at the bottom of the economic ladder? Years after the end of the cold war, the world's governments continue to spend more than \$800 billion a year on arms and the arms trade is once again expanding. Though the bulk of military spending is on conventional arms, the possession of nuclear weapons by the powerful is driving militarism around the globe. Grotesque imbalances result:

In at least 84 countries, military expenditures exceed expenditures on health alone.

In one out of three developing countries, military expenditures exceed half or more of all expenditures on health and education. In more than one out of six developing countries, military expenditure actually exceeds combined expenditure on all forms of health and education, in eight cases by two to four times.

The countries spending the highest proportion of their resources on military uses are also those countries whose standing in human development lags most behind their standing in wealth and GNP. In contrast,

countries with the lowest military expenditures generally rank considerably higher in human development than in GNP per capita.

Sustainable development requires huge investments in scientific research, technological development, education and training, infrastructure development and technology transfer. But the goals of sustainable development set out in the 1992 Earth Summit's major document, Agenda 21, are blocked by political inertia, which countenances continued high military spending. The Committee on Sustainable Development, an international nongovernmental organization, has urged governments to reduce military expenditures by 5 per cent per year for five years, redirecting these funds to sustainable development. The opposite is happening. Arms merchants will make billions of dollars from NATO expansion as the new members re-equip to Western standards. A Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1997, intended to renew the 1992 global commitment to sustainable development, was an abject failure. It could not agree on the wording of a political statement and did not even consider the transfer of military funds to sustainable development. The Western nuclear powers are primarily responsible for keeping the relationship between disarmament and development off the political agenda.

There is a dynamic, triangular relationship between disarmament, development, and security. The more disarmament and development are advanced, the more security is enhanced and strengthened. But most nations haven't yet made the mental leap that security today requires the development of the human being, not the preparation for war.

There are fresh ideas for new sources of money to stimulate the development process. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali suggested a fee on speculative international financial transactions. Because of the \$1.3 trillion traded every 24 hours in the global market, the smallest taxation, which would hardly be noticed, could finance all the UN's development programs. A levy on fossil fuel use or its resulting pollution has also been suggested, but has elicited a hostile reaction from the petroleum industry. A tax on international travel is long overdue. Such programs would foster a greater sharing of resources between the developed and developing world in ways that would not hurt the developed world.

The question of equality is central to any discussion of development. We do not yet have an understanding of equality in the world. Of course, we are not all equal: some people are born with high intelligence, some with low intelligence; some with handicaps, some without handicaps. There is a distinction between equality and sameness. I interpret equality to mean equitability. The world's lack of equitability is shown most dramatically in the split between the North and the South. The world's population will reach 8.2 billion in the next twenty years; approximately 7 billion will live in the South, 1 billion in the North. The ecosphere stress factor is worsening: approximately one-fifth of the world in the North has access to and control over three-quarters of the capital and technology and resources of the world, while four-fifths living in the South have access to only one quarter of the capital and technology.

The North resists even a dialogue on global economic negotiations to take on questions of resources, raw materials, trade, and finances so that the South would have equitable access to these means of ensuring the fulfillment of basic human needs on a universal basis. This perpetuates great divisiveness in the world.

We have not yet begun to understand the full meaning of human rights, despite their proclamation in rhetorical ways. I don't dismiss the need for declarations and for articulating a concern. But when it comes down to it, we are tolerating intrusions on human rights every day. It's violence to have 30,000 children dying daily of waterborne diseases and malnutrition. It's violence against our planet to have the ozone layer depleted by states which put industrial development before the good of the environment. It is certainly violence against me personally to be subjected to the effects of weapons of mass destruction with the power to decimate huge areas of the world.

The need for a new understanding of the roots of violence in the post-cold war era is perhaps seen most clearly in this concept of equality. How to build equitability into human (and thus state) relations is a huge challenge as we enter the new millennium.