

Jacques Attali's keynote address closing the 57th Annual DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations General Assembly Hall, September 10, 2004

Let's have a dream: Imagine we are not gathered today in the hall of the General Assembly of the United Nations (so generously put to our disposal by the Secretary General and above all by my friend the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Shashi Tharoor), but rather in the hall of a "General Assembly of the United Organizations", a new international institution that would bring together all our organizations regardless of borders, color, sex, race, generations, all willing to work towards one goal: the good for humanity.

Let's imagine the decisions such an Assembly could make ! How much different would the world be if such an organization could influence the nature of development, the share of world resources, the evolution of international law and the means set up to have it abided by.

This dream is realistic: Today, our organizations, called NGOs, have more influence on the destiny of humanity than many nations that have a seat in this hall.

Even in the worst dictatorships, women, men and children have improved their living conditions by regrouping themselves, apart from politics. Many major changes over these last fifty years, in international law, in the relations between populations, in the conception of democracy and the nature of economics, have arisen from our organizations: the fight for human rights, the humanitarian action, emergency medicine, the right to die with dignity, the right for birth control, women's rights, the duty of humanitarian action, the consideration of new diseases, children's rights, the protection of environment, the right for free education and health services, the right for information and freedom of association have originated neither from political parties, private corporations, administrations or unions but rather from the work of

intellectuals taken over by organizations like ours, who proclaimed themselves in charge of the evolution of the planet and the needs of the human species.

Even though, some that have nothing to do with NGOs, such as cults and terrorist organizations, would call themselves so, NGOs represent the avant-guard of what will become a better world tomorrow: a world made of diversity, tolerance, altruism and interest in the happiness of others.

The world shall be as such, and I am convinced about it. Because if it does not, the world will stop existing due to terrorist violence, environmental disorders, inequalities and all other ills that our organizations precisely endeavour to fight.

What we discussed here constitutes the necessary condition to the survival of humanity. The survival or the death of civilizations depends on our actions. I would like, to end our summit, by describing twelve major facts and by making twelve proposals.

Twelve facts.

1. Despite the progress accomplished in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals set by the UN, many of them will not be reached - and I am not only talking about Africa - within 2015. Furthermore, these goals, among which some are not quantifiable, do not correctly describe many situations of misery and disorder, such as poverty, ill-treatment of women, childhood deprivation, war, fear, insecurity, lack of access to basic resources, inequality. For instance, public aid to development – in percentage of the national gross income of donor countries – has reached rock bottom and the amount intended for the poorest countries has reduced even more. Duty-free exports from the poorest countries towards Northern countries are continuously falling, except exports of weapons and oil.

2. Poverty, the prime cause for violence, destruction of public services and decline of democracy, will increase, in all its aspects. Today, nearly a quarter of the humanity survives on less than two dollars per day (which is the real poverty line), but in thirty years to come, if there are no changes, nearly half of the humanity will

be affected by poverty. At the other end of the social ladder, wealth will be held by a handful of people. There will then be no possible world order and terrorism will have given way to a real war, between the well-off and the others, and even within the richest nations.

3. And yet, more than ever before, our planet – especially the superpowers – has the political, financial, economic and technological means to solve all these problems ; it also has the military and environmental means to commit suicide. It is now doing both.

4. Governments and political or terrorist movements can shape the political map of the world but they cannot define it by themselves. Under the attack of market globalization, very old nations are breaking up; new nations are forming ; dozens of States can no longer defend their identity and ensure a solidarity system for the poor ; many areas in the world, countries and cities, are becoming no-go areas where law enforcement officials cannot access anymore.

5. Private Corporations are more than ever taking part in the change of the world, through the way they are implementing technical progress, the way they are making the very nature of work, distraction, training, and consumption evolve. But, they are constantly obsessed by rapidity requirements and even if they are today infinitely more influential than governments, they no longer have, despite their increasing size, the means to work on what is at stake when it comes to the sustainability of development.

6. Long ago, alongside governments and firms, organizations enabling people to help each other were created. The first organizations that appeared, known as political parties for those alongside the government, and unions for those alongside firms, no longer have the means to deal with all the new issues that are not enough mastered, linked to other issues that go beyond politics and economics, two closely linked entities.

7. To tackle these new issues, new organizations, NGOs, non-profit organizations providing goods and services for the dignity have appeared. They are implementing simple and universal values; today's human rights, but also yesterday's and tomorrow's. These rights, that are not only Western values, have originated simultaneously, as had democracy, in many civilizations.

These NGOs play a significant role worldwide, probably more than 1/10th of the activity in the world. They represent a wonderful tool to transform the economic, political, social and cultural landscape of the Planet. Through their action, they contribute to make the world more tolerable and, more particularly, help the United Nations carry out their peacekeeping and development mission.

8. NGOs must not become an excuse to make unfairness and horrors happening in the world seem more bearable; neither must they become, as it sometimes happens, auxiliaries to forces at war, and finally they must not be abandoned, as it happened in Irak, without any protection in areas where civil wars have broken out.

9. NGOs can give sense to globalization, which often is only, without them, the International of markets and wars. These organizations today include the concepts of global government, fraternity, rights of future generations, social equity, women's and minority's rights.

10. NGOs give a sense to democracy, which often is just a travesty of elections, with no real deep-rootedness in people. NGOs are the first ones to fight for the implementation of the foundations of democracy: freedom of expression, protection of women and children, fight against death penalty, right to work, right to credit, right to housing.

11. NGOs give a sense to the fight for sustainable development, a concept that they invented. NGOs are the leaders in the fight for the protection of diversity, languages, cultures, plant and animal species, climate and rare resources.

12. Today, NGOs can efficiently fight against poverty, in many respects: cultural, moral and financial. More specifically, only they know how to help the most underprivileged to become independent, that is through microcredit, main tool of the future.

For these twelve facts to be tackled, here are twelve projects that could become yours.

Twelve projects.

1. The institution where we are today, arisen out of the Second World War, started to operate effectively only after the end of the Cold war, precisely

when, which is an irony of fate, nations that are represented in the UN were losing power compared to private corporations.

Therefore, it is now high time to give birth to the globalization of democracy instead of a third World War.

2. In the same way as the modern State derived from feudalism and capitalism from professional guilds, NGOs are creating a new dynamic that is both trans-border and nomadic. This dynamic will one day be stronger than the market and political forces.

3. First of all let's get rid of an unjustified indictment ; I do not like the name that others saddle us with : « NGO », a word of three letters representing three out of the three most hated words in any language : « non », which refers to destruction , « governmental » which makes us think of the State apparatus and finally "organization" which brings back to bureaucracy. Nothing worse could exist. We should not accept this name anymore and let's find another one: I would suggest "Solidarity Institutions". This is not an anecdotal debate. One is nothing if one shall not name oneself. Discussing about the name is precisely discussing over the purpose of our action.

4. Our solidarity institutions must become more professional, more legitimate in the designation of their leading organs, more transparent in their financing. They would thus get more means and power. A code of ethics should define the conditions of admittance in the group of those who will have the right to send their representatives to our future global assembly.

5. Since a United Nations Assembly already exists, and since firms have thousands of places to meet, Solidarity Institutions should also have their own institution. In some way, it has already started having one since the setting up of the social forum, in Porto Alegre. To go even further, today's wonderful meeting, that we owe so much to the General Secretariat, should become institutional and autonomous. Therefore, I dream of a UN of NGOs, or rather of a World Solidarity Institutions Organization: the WSIO.

6. Such an organization should not be a means to congratulate oneself, but rather an opportunity to define together new lines of action alongside governments and firms, so as to lay down the goals for the fifteen years to come. Goals that should be more ambitious and stricter because the contradictions our planet is victim of will soon be much more acute tomorrow than they are today at every level.

7. A world without poverty is possible if microfinance becomes a priority. Microfinance is the only way human beings can earn their living. Today, more than 60 million people have already access to it. In twenty years to come, this number could reach 1 billion. This is what I am working towards, with PlaNet Finance, an organization that gathers and supports the efforts made worldwide to give each and every one the possibility, through microcredit, to implement his/her dreams.

8. A world without dictatorship is possible. To reach this goal, the right to interfere in countries that kill or ill-treat their population should be better recognized. And no dictatorship should be authorized to sit in this hall.

9. A fraternal world is possible. It should be possible to give each and every one the means to have access to basic needs, that are water, air, food, accommodation, knowledge, freedom.

10. Eventually, such world governance should have the means to finance such goals, through a global tax on emissions of carbon dioxide, which constitutes the most dangerous kind of pollution.

11. Governments will not be able to reach these goals by themselves and it is not the role of private corporations to do it. To achieve these goals, it will be necessary to make intelligence, fraternity, respect of the other, tolerance, curiosity, volunteership, the pleasure of pleasing, the pleasure of making someone else happy triumph over the values of nation and market. Or all the values that would entail the notion of humanitarian and volunteer action.

12. To take up this difficult bet, it is necessary to strengthen the means that Solidarity Institutions have. In every country, these Solidarity Institutions, should be fiscally favored and everyone should, in his/her life, have the right to devote some time, that should be paid for, to a solidarity organization of his/her choice. Should also be proclaimed the principle according to which any country

that prevents local solidarity institutions from developing freely should be excluded from international aid.

Twelve facts, twelve projects. Even if they cannot be implemented from one day to the next, they can be implemented rapidly: you have indeed shown, for long, that reaching the impossible was for you a challenge that is slightly more interesting than the others...

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Finance.