

## Disappearing Butterflies, Wildflowers And the Web of Life: The Case for Social Justice

By Ambassador Howard Dee

A pleasant good morning to everyone. I thank you for this privilege of addressing this gathering of Senior Fellows of Synergos from 16 countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, United Kingdom, and United States. I will begin by assuring you that I am, by no means, an expert in social justice but I will just share with you some thoughts on Social Justice, why I think its standing is diminishing in today's society, and why this poses a new challenge to us.

The popular image of Justice is a blindfolded woman with a weighing balance to signify that everyone is equal before the law. Social justice, in my view, is when the Lady removes her blindfold and seeing the reality of human inequality, the wide disparity in the distribution of the wealth of the earth, with her scales tilted against the many poor who have neither equity nor equal opportunity, she then intervenes to give these dispossessed poor a preferential advantage to bring back equilibrium in the social order. This equilibrium that we strive for is social justice; it is to conform with the higher law of human solidarity, essential to the survival of civilization. The implications of disequilibrium is best demonstrated in the world of ecology today.



Two British ecologists presented in the Science magazine this March, (as reported by Newsweek) clear evidence that the world is in the throes of a massive extinction of living species. This phenomenon had occurred previously in history, caused by one-off events such as the ice age, volcanic eruptions or the meteorite that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

This time, they say, the cause of the disappearing species is the earth's biosystems which are dying from over exploitation. By way of illustration, a wheat farmer used to harvest a ton of wheat per acre. Now he harvests four tons. The potent pesticides he uses kill off the insects upon which skylarks feed and both insects and skylarks are becoming extinct. Likewise, the nitrogen-rich fertilizers seep to the underground water streams that then fuel heavy growth in the

vast grasslands of England, killing off delicate wildflowers. This in turn has caused seventy percent of butterfly species to become extinct with many other life species. We are told that this phenomenon is accelerating and will eventually reach 65 to 95 percent of the world's species. The delicate balance of the ecological order provided by Mother Nature is now out of sync, with its effects on man's web of life still unknown.

My thesis today is this: a similar disequilibrium is happening in the socio-economic order that could bring equally disastrous consequences to human civilization whose survival is greatly dependent upon the equitable distribution of social and economic benefits that are the fruits of human labor.

Historians tell us that land and labor are the two primary factors that are at the beginning of every human society. God gave land and its natural resources to man to exploit with his labor for his sustenance and well-being, to become fully human. The laws of nature provide limits to the exploitation of the earth's resources beyond which its biosystems will perish to our detriment. Similarly, if human labor is exploited inordinately, our humanity diminishes and a disequilibrium sets in with dire consequences to our human web of life.

Unlike the laws of nature, the laws of global commerce and industry do not provide ethical or moral constraints to the exploitation of human labor, except perhaps child and slave labor. By way of example, with the advent of globalization, scores of transnational companies have closed down their factories in the Philippines and moved production elsewhere where wages are lower. These companies now import their products to sell here with no compunction of destroying the workplaces of our people who consume their products.

A similar injustice is perpetuated by our own compatriots. With deregulation of labor laws, an estimated million casual workers are floating in Greater Manila, in workshops, in our modern shopping malls, in fast food chains and factories. They are contracted as daily minimum wage workers with no social security benefits, without job tenure, laid off and rehired periodically, remaining casual workers all their lives. With unemployment in Manila slums as high as 30 percent, human labor has become another commodity that can be bought cheaply. This injustice to our humanity is one reason why 63% of Filipinos are poor, and in Manila with a population of 12 million, 52% survive on a subhuman existence with less than \$1 a day, 50 cents of which goes to food.

Sadly, the global engine of commerce is fueled by a liberal capitalism that subjects our workers and wage earners to the vagaries of an unbridled, undisciplined market with little regard to justice, equity and social cohesiveness.

The UNDP aptly describes this tragic situation when it said: "Economically, politically, and technologically, the world has never seemed more free – or more unjust." In the last decade of globalization, the share of the poorest 20% of the world's peoples, was reduced by half, from 2% to 1 % of the world's income, and still falling.



The UN Secretary General recognized the danger posed by this inequity at last year's World Economic Forum, when he warned that 1 billion people live in extreme poverty and that this will cause some poor countries to collapse in conflict and anarchy. The deprivation of human security of the poor, he said, presents a grave threat to the security of societies and world peace. My country falls into this category of nations at risk.

Does this institutionalized poverty not present a clear case for social justice? Not in the view of the western

establishment. The Economist on March 13 asks on its cover: "Is it a matter of justice?" It then replies: "The toll of global poverty is a scandal but deploring economic "injustice" is no answer." What is its answer then? The answer, it says, is a need for compassion but it quickly added that "a compassionate regard for the poor is a very different thing from a zeal for "justice." That zeal", it says, "continues to do nothing but harm." Webster defines compassion as pity and sympathy, feelings associated with the dead or dying, as in compassion for this naked African boy with an empty bowl.

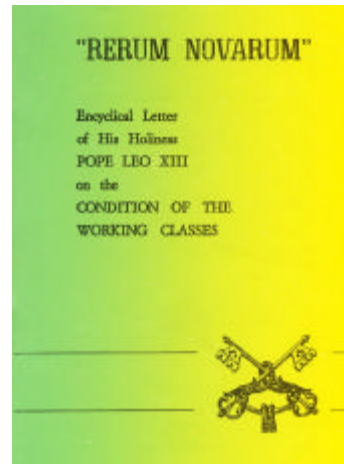
Globalists shun the ideal of social justice as it implies an obligation to restore social equity, a goal that is anathema to global liberalism and its unbridled freedoms. They fear anything that resembles socialism's false promise of equality. But, in reality, as Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales of Manila emphasizes, the poor seek not equality but merely a means to survive in dignity, a chance to live as human beings as intended by the Creator of life.

During ancient times, the Jewish people would declare a Jubilee Year in honor of Yahweh every 50 years, during which all slaves were freed, all debts forgiven, all land returned to their original owners and all social disputes settled. This was their way of practicing social justice. Why, we must ask, is the cause of social justice in such dire straits today? Why has it, as a human ideal, diminished so much in value? As I ponder upon this woe, it occurred to me that the British farmer who cares not the loss of butterflies and wildflowers, the American industrialist who worries not about destroying the workplaces of our workers, the Filipino businessman who keep his laborers forever as casual workers, all three men, in the pursuit of gain, have lost something in common - a sense of our shared humanity – the simple values that make us fully and truly human.

Twenty-four centuries ago, at Athens, the seat of western civilization, Aristotle taught philosophy and ethics. He identified the virtues that make man fully human and taught that without these values, man is not truly human. Among the cardinal virtues are justice, wisdom, prudence, temperance and fortitude. These virtues are the butterflies and the wildflowers that are now being crowded out from the human web of life. Their loss may not be noticed, but it will surely distort the way we live and how we relate to one another.

Aristotle taught that Justice is the complete and supreme virtue, because of all virtues, it requires the good of fellow-men. Its social dimension is the very essence of justice. He taught that justice is not a part of virtue but the whole of virtue; its opposite, injustice, is not a part of vice but the whole of vice. If Aristotle were to return today, he would decry our situation as a grave injustice. When Pope John Paul II came to visit the Philippines, he saw the stark contrast of two opposite worlds existing side by side and he called it a scandal to our Christian faith. He told our Bishops that we will lose our nobility as Christians if we continue to build a society with unjust social, economic, political and cultural structures.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Leo XIII, foresaw what was to come to Europe – a revolution of peasants and workers, oppressed by the elite. To hold back the tide of socialism, he issued the revolutionary encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and aligned the Church with the working class. But his call for social justice fell on deaf ears. Communism spread to half of the world and after causing the death of one hundred million people, it then collapsed on its false promise of social equality. Today, history is repeating itself. The forces of global liberalism dominate the world's economic and political systems, promising global equity and prosperity.



## Fresh development policies needed to cut world poverty

By Frances Williams in Geneva

Increased trade has not led to reductions in poverty among the world's poorest countries and will not do so without an overhaul of development strategies, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development said yesterday.

In its latest report on the world's 50 least-developed countries, UNCTAD said that least-developed countries (LDCs) have open trade regimes – after removing from international financial institutions. However, poverty rates have scarcely budged in a decade, leaving half their population living on less than \$1 a day.

On present trends, far from halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, as called for by the UN's millennium development goals, numbers will rise from 334m to 471m in 2015. This will make the LDCs the focus of global poverty in the future, UNCTAD said.

"It is wrong to expect trade liberalisation and integration into the global economy alone to do the trick," Charles Gore, main author of the report, said. UNCTAD's analysis showed that export growth only rarely led to sustained poverty reduction. Though a poor trade performance tended to increase poverty, a good trade performance did not necessarily reduce it. Countries that opened their economies modestly during the 1980s did better than those that opened them the most.

The report said structural weaknesses in the poorest economies – over-reliance on primary commodities – increased trade from generating a virtuous circle of investment and entrepreneurial activity. Reports of most LDCs were concentrated in primary commodities or were "narrow" activities – for instance, in export processing zones – that do not touch the vast rural majority.

UNCTAD recommends a development approach to trade, in which aid, debt relief and trade are harnessed to poverty reduction, rather than trade-led policies that assume development will follow. Improvements in the international trade regime, while welcome, will have little impact on poverty, it said.

In particular, it calls for more investment in developing LDCs' productive capacities, including essential infrastructure. Development aid has risen increasingly in social spending rather than productive investment, UNCTAD said.

Though growth in per capita GDP and exports in LDCs outstripped that of other developing countries between 2003 and 2008, UNCTAD questioned whether this was sustainable.

www.undctad.org

### The world's 50 least developed countries

1. Mali	18. Sao Tome & Principe	33. Central African Republic	48. Uganda
2. Cape Verde	19. Comoros	34. Eritrea	49. Yemen
3. The Gambia	20. Senegal	35. Nigeria	50. Solomon Islands
4. Guinea-Bissau	21. Mauritania	36. Chad	51. Afghanistan
5. Guinea	22. Burkina Faso	37. Mozambique	52. Ethiopia
6. Sierra Leone	23. Mali	38. Guinea	53. Eritrea
7. Liberia	24. Niger	39. Rwanda	54. East Timor
8. Togo	25. Nigeria	40. Benin	55. Laos
9. Sierra Leone	26. Niger	41. Chad	
10. Congo	27. Nigeria	42. Ethiopia	
11. Central African Republic	28. Nigeria	43. Ethiopia	
12. Eritrea	29. Nigeria	44. Ethiopia	
13. Nigeria	30. Nigeria	45. Ethiopia	
14. Nigeria	31. Nigeria	46. Ethiopia	
15. Nigeria	32. Nigeria	47. Ethiopia	
16. Nigeria	33. Nigeria	48. Ethiopia	
17. Nigeria	34. Nigeria	49. Ethiopia	

The truth is now out. The UN Conference on Trade and Development said last month that “Increased trade (with globalization) has not led to reductions in world poverty and will not do so without an overhaul of development strategies”. “The contrasts between rich and poor countries in the 1960s remain today. The gap has widened in many regards”, it said.

The UNDP concurs. It also announced that its millennium goals for 2015 would not be met. It said that “On present trends, far from halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, as called for by the UN’s millennium development goals, numbers of the poor in Least Developed Countries will rise from 334m to 471m in 2015.” That’s almost a 50% increase instead of a 50% reduction.



Is international aid our hope then? Not according to the World Bank which reported that “the developed world’s interest in combating world poverty is near a low point as it is worried about other things: terrorism, budget deficits, Iraq and world leadership.” Official development aid, as a percentage of GDP, is actually diminishing. Given these realities, what are we, as social justice workers, then to do?

First of all, the urgent situation calls for us to review our own strategic planning. When the UNDP, UNCTAD and the World Bank are returning to their drawing boards for new strategies to combat poverty, it cannot be

business as usual for us. Our programs and projects must be geared to the attainment of equilibrium in the social order. This must be our main focus.

Second, we must bring the case for social justice to the world of globalization. Globalists must realize that unbridled free trade and liberal capitalism does produce inequities that are harmful to the human web of life. Social justice demands that the conduct of trade and the exploitation of human, natural and material resources must pass the test of ethical and just behavior. Compassionate aid alone cannot bind the wounds caused by systemic injustices and inequities. Trade, aid and development must contribute to the equilibrium of the social order on which hinges the peace and progress of the world.

Third, we must reinforce our advocacy to demonstrate that Social Justice is the sane and civilized way to provide human security, prevent social upheavals and fight terrorism. Social justice is about restoring man's humanity to man – about regaining the virtues that define man's humanity, preserving the values that make up our human web of life; because whether we recover them or lose them forever, will determine the survival of our civilization in the inexorable march of human history. For this we need the Aristotelian virtues of wisdom, fortitude, temperance and above all justice.

## II

### **Building Alliances for Social Justice In the Philippines**

I have changed the title of my assigned topic to “Building Alliances for Social Justice in the Philippines.” It is appropriate that we talk about building assets for social justice, as the poor are recognized not by what they possess but by what they do not possess. The World Bank defined this dispossession of the poor as the lack of opportunity, the lack of security and the powerlessness to change their situation.

*“The lack of opportunity is due to absence of assets such as shelter, health services, clean water, electricity and sanitation, jobs, education, land, capital and access to credit. Lack of Security is due to no protection vs. job loss, hunger, sickness or accident, natural disaster, demolition or relocation. Powerlessness is the inability to change their situation for the better, inability to exercise their freedoms and rights.”*

This dispossession of tangible and intangible assets results in their social exclusion and the constant threat to their human survival. Our success or failure as workers for social justice, therefore, can be measured by the extent to which we restore or do not restore these three assets that make up the human security of the poor. Our approach therefore must be holistic.

The poor are not entirely without assets. Their most valuable asset is their very person, their human values and innate humanity, their passion for work, their inborn skills, their adoptability, their fortitude under trying conditions. These are the assets that we can help them build upon to restore their humanity.

Traditionally, this role of restorative justice belongs to government. Thus John Rawls, in his Theory of Justice, considers justice as the highest virtue of social institutions. Unfortunately, in the real world, governments of poor countries such as the Philippines, are so saddled with systemic inefficiencies, debts and deficits, that our social institutions

are ill equipped to fulfill this role except marginally. The handicap of the public sector is magnified by its inability to regulate pernicious trade and anti-labor practices to protect the poor sectors from exploitation as we discussed earlier.

The shortfall of government response to the overwhelming numbers of poor magnifies the important role that the NGO community can and should play. We can no longer remain at the peripheral of this social malaise. Rather, we must see the deficiencies of government as opportunities for intervention. But the sad reality is that we are equally starved of resources, and are highly dependent on external aid, which, by and large, may not be imaginative, innovative, and willing to take risks.

Over the years, I have found the combination of a holistic approach to development of a specific target sector undertaken with an alliance of many actors as the most effective and enduring way of building social assets. The building of alliances of institutions and people with common interests and goals brings together the resources, human and material, the technical expertise and management skills and the commitment of new allies towards a common good.

My first experience was in 1972 when Communist flags were marching on the streets of Manila, creating a revolutionary environment as a prelude to martial rule. It was evident that civil society needed to respond credibly. Our approach was to enlist allies in the business community who shared a common vision for the creation of a business foundation for social justice. Over a hundred corporations joined the launching of Philippine Business for Social Progress which to this day has become the flag carrier of the business community in Philippine social development.

A second experience in alliance building was presented in 1985 by the Ambassador of Canada who wanted the private sector to organize a consortium of NGO networks to access development funding from CIDA. The need was to develop alternative aid implementing mechanisms outside of a Government that was then controlled by a corrupt dictatorship. This resulting alliance of five networks gave birth to the Philippine Development Assistance Program, which is now on its 18<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

Assisi Foundation is engaged in several alliances which promotes social justice on three fronts. The first front is a holistic approach to bring justice and development to the most depressed and marginalized sector that is composed of twelve million Indigenous Peoples with 120 ethno-linguistic tribes. A first alliance was formed by peace advocates with the Government of President Fidel Ramos to advance a Social Reform Agenda that worked for sectoral goals, including the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act which mandated the transfer of five million hectares of ancestral lands to the Indigenous Filipinos. With its passage, we were then given an official mandate by President Macapagal-Arroyo to put in place government supporting mechanisms for the implementation of the new law. For this, we built a second alliance of CSOs, IPOs, government and international agencies. When eventually realized, this would be the largest transfer of land assets to a marginalized sector in the name of restorative and redistributive justice.

Yet this noble enterprise is continually hampered by new forms of injustices perpetuated by warring groups, powerful political forces and private interests. The continuing need to support the government effort is addressed by Tabang Mindanaw, a third alliance of seven private foundations and the Catholic Bishops of Mindanao to implement a Human Security Framework that addresses their empowerment and cultural integrity, leadership

training, ancestral domain protection and development, indigenous education and peace and security concerns, again in an holistic approach.

On a second front, Tabang Mindanaw, in another alliance of domestic and foreign agencies, has been rehabilitating war-torn villages and transforming them into sanctuaries of peace, to rebuild the lives of civilian evacuees of armed conflict between government and Muslim rebel forces. To date, 54 such sanctuaries of peace have emerged from the ravages of war. The first task was to mobilize support to feed the evacuee families, then to negotiate with the warring parties to respect the peoples Sanctuaries of Peace. Then to rebuild their houses, farms, mosques, schools, water systems, to provide livelihood, and to establish a culture of peace among the Muslims, Christians and Indigenous Peoples living together. We are now winding down this work which will be turned over to the Bangsamoro Development Agency of MILF in accordance with the peace process.

A third front of alliance building is still in the planning stage. It is a regional approach to development that we have never attempted before. It encompasses the people of three island groups of Mindanao: Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi (BASULTA) which comprise the poorest region in the Philippines with about a million inhabitants. Their average lifespan is 12 years below the national average. In Sulu, 92% of the people are below the poverty line. In Tawi-Tawi, only 25% have access to clean water. Infant mortality is twice as high as the rest of the nation. Among the IPs, only one in two reaches adulthood. If these million inhabitants comprise a nation, it would be the poorest in the world. This endeavor requires a Herculean effort and we will call upon everyone to join in a collaborative program: CSOs, government, international agencies, and even international NGOs who may wish to join us in an alliance to uplift entire communities from perpetual poverty.

BASULTA will be our litmus test of building alliances for social justice for peace and progress. It presents a formidable challenge to the viability of our nationhood as a Christian, Muslim and Indigenous nation. It will also test our own values of courage and perseverance as social justice workers. It is our hope that some of you will want to walk the way with us.

Howard Q. Dee  
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