

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Global Cultural Diversity Conference, Sydney, 28 April 1995.

I

It is hard for Australians to think of cultural diversity as a problem - either for individual states or for the international community. As you will have heard already from so many speakers at this Conference, our lives in this country have been immeasurably enriched by the presence among us of men, women and children from over 140 different countries, and every major racial, religious and linguistic heritage. Certainly I know that my life is going to be enriched by the lower House electorate I hope to represent in the next Parliament, which at last count had among its 75,000 voters people from no less than 78 different national or ethnic groups - European, Asian, Middle Eastern, African, South Pacific and Latin American!

In the conduct of our own international relations, I can confidently say, as Australia's Foreign Minister for nearly seven years now, that that diversity has been an unequivocal plus. It has created, first of all, what I might call a 'psychology of internationalism' - a healthy consciousness that we have a wider world around us, and that we ought to be actively engaged in defining and finding our place in it. As the demographic face of Australia has changed - as new generations of old Australians have become directly exposed in their daily lives to more and more people from outside, and particularly from our own region - attitudes have changed.

Multiculturalism has changed our mindset, away from the inward-lookingness of earlier generations, when Australia felt isolated and geographically distant from Europe and the US - from the time when we were scared of our neighbourhood. By contrast, now, we ourselves are - and are seen by our regional neighbours - as an active participant in Asia, not as an outsider looking in.

We are much more outward looking, interested and engaged in the region. We now recognise, unashamedly and unselfconsciously, that the Asia Pacific, of the East Asian hemisphere in particular, is our region, where we live and where our future lies. This neighbourhood is where we must find our security, and where we can best guarantee our prosperity. Our neighbourhood is not a threat to be feared; it is an opportunity to be welcomed.

Of course the presence in Australia of so many people with strong links with, strong memories of, and strong identifications with, various overseas homelands sometimes means that disputes and conflicts in those homelands resonate loudly in Australia. Vietnamese Australians, Jewish and Arab Australians, and Serb-, Croatian- and Bosnian-Australians - to take just some of the most obvious cases - have had many emotionally wrenching experiences of this kind over the years, as their countries have been torn apart in civil wars. But it is a testament to the maturity of multiculturalism in this country, and the community institutions that support it, and the great majority of the individuals concerned, that we have so successfully been able to avoid importing the tensions of war abroad into the Australian community. Certainly it seems to be overwhelmingly understood and accepted that the conduct of Australian foreign policy must be in the interests of Australia and all Australians - not those of any other country, and not for the benefit of any particular group in Australia that maintains a strong allegiance elsewhere.

There is one more point to be made about the impact of Australia's cultural diversity on the conduct of our international relations. Multiculturalism has given us not just a new outlook on the world, but new resources and capacity, a whole new human skill-base, with which to deal with it. Our migrant communities - and the language teaching they have helped stimulate, especially Asian languages - have created a massive new pool from which we can draw for professional expertise in the conduct of our diplomacy and in the conduct of our trade.

People have an image still of diplomats as elegant men in striped suits with public school accents. But nothing could be further from the truth so far as today's Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is concerned. Fully 24 per cent, one in four, of my departmental officers are now men - and women - who were born overseas, or born in Australia of non-Australian-born parents. And they come from an astonishing variety of backgrounds. You don't need statistics to tell the story. The names of our officers make it clear enough: Phong Bui, Zuli Chudori, Bobo Lo, James Nachipo, Remo Moreta, Jimmy Kwong, Chulee Vo-Van - and the list goes on and on.

In my own ministerial office in Parliament House, I have had among my dozen personal staff this year a Japanese-Australian adviser, and others born in (or of parents from) France, Greece, Italy and the UK. In my Melbourne electoral office I have had Maltese and Italian-born staff members, and two from Vietnam. Bringing with them the insights born of their own unique cultural upbringing and experiences, these officers and staffers broaden the information, experience and cultural instinct base upon which Australian foreign and trade policy is generated, developed and practised.

While Australia's cultural diversity has been for us a strength rather than a source of problems, the unhappy reality, as we look out upon the wider world, is that our experience has not universally been shared. There are all too many parts of the world where ethnic, religious and nationality based rivalries have been exploding into deadly conflict, which established state structures, and the international community, have been in all too many cases powerless to contain.

At the end of 1989, hopes were bright for a new era of peace after decades of sterile confrontation between the superpowers. And there have been remarkable advances, for example in Southern Africa and the Middle East, in solving some of the world's most intractable problems. But these successes stand in contrast to the nightmarish conflicts of Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda which, unfortunately, are only the latest and most prominent of a long string of deadly conflicts *within* state borders, tearing existing states apart and far exceeding the threats to peace posed by conflicts between states. No less than 79 of the 82 armed conflicts which occurred around the world between 1989 and 1992 were conflicts within states. And in 1993, the last year for which we have complete data, every one of the 34 armed conflicts which occurred was intrastate in character.

Conflict within states is, far more often than not, based on competing ethno-nationalist or religious claims. In the case of the former Soviet Union the transition from state repression to relative political licence has facilitated the emergence of long-suppressed ethnic, religious and political hatreds - and created new ones: the fighting in Chechnya is only the latest in a string of more than 20 violent conflicts which have resulted in thousands of deaths and over a million people displaced.

Of course ethnic or religious difference is not, by itself, a recipe for conflict within states. Australia is just one example, among many, of a highly successful multi-ethnic, multicultural society in which tolerance and peace prevail. One of the few positive lessons that can be drawn from post-World War II Yugoslavia, based on the high rate of intermarriage which occurred among the different ethnic groups, is just how mutable supposedly immutable ethnic hatred can be.

While ethnic and religious differences are not in themselves causes of conflict, they may become so when historical grievances - sometimes as much imagined as real - are exploited by unscrupulous political leaders. That is especially so in periods of economic decline. In almost every case of major intrastate violence, from the former Soviet republics to Rwanda - indeed, throughout the entire "zone of conflict" which includes the former communist states, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Central and Latin America and South Asia - ethnic and religious conflict has been associated with significant periods of declining per capita gross national product, the rise of demagogic politics, and the intensification of chauvinistic myth-making. Contemporary ethnic violence stems as much from deliberate

government policies as from inherent communal antagonisms.

There is little evidence that violent intrastate conflict is likely to decrease of its own accord in the near to mid-term future, with some ethnic movements seeking to secede and create their own states, some seeking to overthrow existing regimes, and others seeking substantial degrees of autonomy. The decline in individual living standards, and the erosion of good governance, with which civil strife is so closely linked, will not be quickly reversed anywhere in the zone of conflict, although the states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are at least able to build on already established infrastructures and systems of education and administration which are lacking in, for example, most African states.

The defeatist response to the agony of large-scale continuing deadly conflict of the kind I have been describing is simply to contain it at the margins - to focus on maintaining the integrity of existing borders and wait for the fires within them to burn out. We are all conscious that that hands-off, look-away attitude is growing: the opinions prevailing in the new US Congress are only the most conspicuous manifestation of a much more widespread reaction.

But the international community cannot just look away when people are dying in their hundreds of thousands and being displaced in their millions. We have a responsibility - acting through the only universal and fully empowered international institution that we have, the United Nations - to do everything that reasonably can be done to prevent that conflict occurring, to settle it when it does occur and to alleviate its consequences.

Part of that responsibility is straightforwardly moral - the obligation of us all, as human beings, to do what we can to help our fellows in distress. People all around the world do respond this way when they are directly and personally touched by people's distress. The great opportunity presented by modern communications technology is for that touching to occur on a greater scale than has ever previously been possible, as images of famine, fighting and suffering, and all the human emotion that goes with them, are brought into our living rooms around the world. The unhappy accompanying irony, however, is how erratically and arbitrarily the power of the media actually works: making us acutely concerned about the tragedies unfolding in Bosnia and Burundi, but supremely indifferent to the equally stark tragedies afflicting the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone and a dozen other places currently out of sight and out of mind.

Moral questions aside, the other strong rationale for a sense of responsibility toward these conflicts is the international community's self-interest. Most intrastate conflicts have the potential to expand and become conflicts between states, affecting an entire region. This is particularly the case in parts of the developing world, like Africa, where state boundaries were created artificially by colonial powers and have divided traditional political communities. In these

countries as in many others (only about one-in-five states around the world are more or less ethnically homogeneous), the 'nation-state' is a confusing misnomer, and conflicts can expand following ethnic lines rather than state boundaries. This type of conflict is therefore likely to generate massive movements of refugees who cross borders in an attempt to escape aggressors from another ethnic group and join some of their own: this is one of the main reasons why the number of refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has increased from 13 million at the end of 1987 to 26 million at the end of 1994. The massive cost of caring for these people is reason enough for the international community to be taking a more activist approach to the prevention and resolution of the conflicts which create so many refugees.

The UN Charter gives plenty of encouragement to those who would rise to this challenge. True it is that the standard Charter references to peace and security are to "international" peace and security, and that Article 2.7 limits the UN's right to intervene in matters "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state". But it should never be forgotten that the UN Charter is at least as much about economic and social development, and about the protection of human rights - including the most basic, the right to life - as it is about protecting the territorial integrity of states. Human security was as important to the UN's founders as state security, and if there is a will by UN members to tackle the problem of cultural-diversity driven conflict, then the UN Charter allows ways for that to occur.

III

In defining what it is that the international community can actually do to address these problems, a useful conceptual starting point is the idea of *cooperative security*. This is an approach placing emphasis on preventing security problems from arising in the first place. It embraces three separate ideas - collective security, common security and comprehensive security - which have been around for a long time. Perhaps the most important single component of cooperative security, in the present context, is the notion that economic and social cooperation needs to be combined with purely military security, in a multi-dimensional approach: this makes cooperative security a particularly appropriate reaction to the current problems of intrastate, cultural diversity-driven conflict.

Cooperative security brings together the peace-and-security and social-and-economic sides of the United Nations' work. The effect is to make irrelevant the sterile and false debate which often rages over choices between the two, because it accepts that both are vital to the search for peace, and that both are indissolubly linked. It forms part of the effort to reintegrate the United Nations - the goal of linking once more the three basic Charter objectives of peace, development, and human rights and justice. Under a cooperative security approach, challenges to peace can be matched by a set of responses graduated to cover the entire spectrum of situations, both before and after the threshold of armed conflict has been crossed. At one extreme this would involve long-term programs to improve economic and

social conditions which are likely to give rise to further tensions. At the other end, it includes the enforcement of peace by military means.

For present purposes, I shall concentrate on preventive strategies - peace building and preventive diplomacy. There are good practical reasons for doing so. What is absolutely clear, in a world where commitment and resources are always likely to fall short of aspirations, is that it makes far more sense to concentrate efforts on peace building and other preventive strategies than on after-the-event peace restoration. That holds as much for intra- as for interstate conflicts: Violent conflicts are always far more difficult and costly to manage and resolve than non-violent disputes, and failed states are extremely difficult to put back together again.

'Peace building' is itself a term with many dimensions, extending to the construction of international laws and regimes as well as to specific in-country programs of economic, social and institutional strengthening. I have always thought it a waste of a good phrase to confine the idea of peace building to situations of post-conflict reconstruction, as the Secretary-General has been inclined to: the idea I think applies equally well to long-term preventive strategies focusing on potential causes of insecurity within particular countries. Peace building strategies in this context are those seeking to encourage equitable economic development, to enhance human rights broadly defined, to facilitate good governance and to inculcate a culture of peace and tolerance: UNESCO's 'Action Program to Promote a Culture of Peace', launched in 1993, is an important example of what might be done in this last respect.

These goals should be pursued not only for their own sakes, but also because making progress toward them contributes powerfully to national and international security. Policies that enhance economic development and distributive justice, encourage the rule of law, protect fundamental human rights, and foster the growth of democratic institutions are also *security* policies. They should be recognised as such and receive a share of current security budgets and any future 'peace dividends'.

There needs to be a higher profile within the UN system for peace building, and better coordination of the different UN, regional, and national efforts that address different parts of the peace building agenda. Mobilising as it does non-security programs for security purposes, peace building lies at the intersection of the UN system's political and security agenda, and its economic, social and cultural (including human rights) agenda. That gives it the opportunity to get momentum from both, but also to fall between two stools - unless some important organisational changes are made. I have argued elsewhere what those changes should be, but this is not the occasion now to pursue that hobby horse!

Preventive strategies have to address not only the underlying causes of insecurity, but actual disputes that may, if not resolved, deteriorate into armed conflict. Peace building, then, has to be supplemented by active *preventive diplomacy*.

One perhaps normally thinks of this as something done to resolve or contain disputes occurring between states. But it has equal application to many situations of internal ethno-nationalist and religious squabbling. The Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), for example, has pursued preventive diplomacy missions, in many cases focusing on minority rights issues, in Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The missions are small, not highly publicised, and only take place with the consent of the relevant governments. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has also been involved, with some early successes, in seeking to help resolve minority conflicts in Albania, Estonia, Latvia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary and Slovakia. Creative political solutions, involving power sharing strategies and the like, can be found and negotiated to many problems involving disaffected national minorities. Where there is a will to peace, a way - again - can always be found.

While prevention is always better than cure, it remains important that there be some credible international capacity to deal collectively and forcefully with deadly conflicts that cannot be prevented or resolved by other means. This raises many more issues than we have time to discuss here, including for example the question of whether it is desirable and possible to improve the UN's rapid reaction capability by establishing a standing volunteer force.

But there is one important threshold question about intervention that it may be useful to mention now. One of the biggest stumbling blocks has been the absence of agreed criteria to determine whether intervention in an essentially intra-state conflict is warranted in a particular case. I think it is possible to draft criteria for intervention which might gain reasonable acceptance, and would suggest, as a starting point for debate, the following combination:

- that there is a consensus that not just any human right but the most basic, the right to life, is under direct and widespread threat;
- that there is no prospect of alleviation of the situation by the government - if there is one - of the state in question;
- that all non-military options have been considered, tried where appropriate, and have failed;
- that there is a report from an impartial and neutral source, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, that the humanitarian crisis can no longer be satisfactorily managed;
- that there has been consultation reflecting not only a wide spectrum of expert advice but, so far as possible, the views of external and internal parties involved;

- that there is a high degree of consensus on the issue between developed and developing countries; and
- that hard-headed assessments have been made about the international community's capacity, in terms of human resources, finance, and organisational skills, to follow through from addressing the immediate crisis to helping the affected state regain its viability as a functioning sovereign state able to take care of its own citizens.

IV

Even if the world can never be made absolutely safe for all its peoples, we are beginning to learn how to make it much safer than it has been. Technology, trade, and telecommunications are bringing us closer together. Across national borders, institutions, practices and outlooks are becoming more alike. As a result, countries, cultures and peoples are becoming less alien to one another than has been the case in the past. Even in our own Asia Pacific region, with all its extraordinary racial, linguistic, political and cultural diversity, a number of commentators have been remarking on the convergence factors at work: the emergence of a 'new Asia Pacific cross-fertilised civilisation' (Funabashi), or a 'fusion of Western and East Asian cultures' (Mahbubani). Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' seems a long way away from the Asia Pacific that I at least think I know.

The ideal of nations and communities living and working together in peace and security - enjoying, in the words of the UN Charter, "better standards of life in larger freedom" - should be closer now to realisation than at any previous time in modern world history. Expectations have been both raised and dashed by the swirl of events since the end of the Cold War. But there are signs - certainly in Europe, the Americas, the Asia Pacific, and maybe at last in the Middle East - of a culture of tolerance and cooperation beginning to emerge to replace the culture of conflict that has prevailed so long.

That mood must now be systematically tapped and translated into effective institutional structures and processes, above all through the UN - as I have said the only fully empowered cooperative security body with global membership that we have. Change needs a measure of intellectual consensus among decision makers about applicable principles, and a clearly defined set of practical proposals for reform. This Conference has been an ideal opportunity to advance the cause of constructing, both within and between states, a global culture of tolerance - helping us all to learn not only how to live with diversity, but to become positively enriched by it. We have learned here this week that societies can be rich in racial, religious and linguistic diversity - in cultural diversity in every sense of the term - without compromising their sense of national identity. There is nothing in the water here to make us particularly unique: Australia's multicultural success story not only should be, but can be, universalised.

But this all needs commitment, and stamina, from the governments and individuals who, at the end of the day, have to make it happen. Member states of the UN, when they accede to its Charter, commit to its whole agenda. That means cooperating to achieve tolerance between peoples, and to achieve peace, security, stability, and well-being both among and within states. There could be no better time for renewal of that commitment than this International Year of Tolerance and 50th Anniversary Year of the coming into force of the United Nations Charter.

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