

From Promises to Practice:

A call to Action

Remarks by

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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Under the banner of “From Promises to Practice” we met and we shared our knowledge and pooled our experience... and now, three days and 40 sessions later, reflecting on 150 presentations, and our countless discussions, what have we achieved?

I believe that we leave here incredibly enriched, by the thoughtful presentations, and the hearty discussions and vehement disagreements... and I believe that we can rightly say that in the crucible of debate and the temperance of civility and mutual respect, we found the common ground: a profound commitment to the welfare of the human family, the entire human family.

We refused to forget the voiceless masses and recognized within them individual beings, our brothers and sisters, not to be forgotten in the anonymity of multitudes or the haze of distance ... And that is important in this time of the inhumanity of people to people

Further, I think that we have braided together the different strands of the puzzle that we confronted: Why the promises of scientific breakthroughs are not being translated into the practices that can alleviate the misery of millions and safeguard the environment for future generations...

We recognized the needs for change and action based on a common purpose. Action that recognizes the past and current successes and builds upon them. Action by all actors, on all stages, to address the priorities of our times and to bring the blessings of peace and the blanket of security to all members of the human family.

We specifically focused on actions in the domains of:

- Food and hunger
- Public health and private medicine
- Environment and economy

We recognized the needs for public private partnerships

We recognized that actions must be guided by policies that are grounded in a broad political consensus that involves all stakeholders, nationally, regionally and internationally.

The gathering storm

My friends,

This has been an especially important meeting. For we meet in the shadow of a great crisis, greater than any we have known in a whole generation...

An explosion in the prices of energy and food has given us stratospheric and rising prices that threaten the very foundations of our societies, just as they expose the folly of our past policies .. and looming above that brewing maelstrom, is the specter of climate change, which is advancing upon us with frightening speed...

These images of impending apocalypse are not hyperbole. They are grounded in scientific observations and rational analysis, even if I choose to express them here in the more colorful language of the concerned citizen rather than the detached discourse of the scientific observer and rational analyst. For today I issue a clarion call for us to indeed stop pining for the promises of tomorrow and start changing the practices of today.

A call to fight:

And with that clarion call, I thank the distinguished speakers, the great scientists, the experienced statesmen and the dedicated men and women who have graced our panels and our meeting rooms these last few days.. I thank them for the knowledge they have brought, the experiences they have reported, the insights they have shared and the commitment and compassion they have shown.

With that clarion call, I now turn to the youth, those whose hard work has created the new library of Alexandria, and are well on the way to making it a worthy heir to the great ancient library of Alexandria. I turn to the youth who have come in large numbers to attend this BioVision conference.. I turn to them with a passion and a promise: Rest assured that I and many other committed citizens of the world will be with you in facing this great looming crisis that threatens the planet today.

We will be with you as we push back that new set of threats and open the doors to new possibilities... Where the poor, the weak and the marginalized will become the producers of their own bounty and welfare rather than the recipients of charity or the beneficiaries of aid.

But that will require that we fight.

Fight to reject dogma, and to adopt rationality and the scientific method

Fight to include all the members of the human family

Fight to change priorities

Fight to change policies

Fight against the entrenched forces of the status quo

Fight to create awareness of the consequences of inaction

The New Abolitionists:

To this fight, this new generation, whose vanguard you represent, must bring its abilities and a sense of moral outrage. Yes, moral outrage.

It is inconceivable that the significant improvements that have been achieved over a generation in food production per capita should be rolled back, and that the promise of longer, healthier and more productive lives should remain tantalizingly out of reach for a large part of the human family. Due to a confluence of forces and events, food as well as energy, is once more becoming scarce and expensive. And already there are some 800 million persons going hungry in a world that can provide for that most basic of all human needs.

In the 19th century, some people looked at the condition of slavery and said that it was monstrous and unconscionable. That it must be abolished. They were known as the abolitionists. They did not argue from economic self interest, but from moral outrage.

Today the condition of hunger in a world of plenty is equally monstrous and unconscionable and must be abolished. We must become the "new abolitionists".

We must, with the same zeal and moral outrage, attack the complacency that would turn a blind eye to this silent holocaust which claims some 40,000 hunger-related deaths every day.

I have looked into the eyes of those who are hungry, and in the depths of hopelessness, I saw the spark of the indomitable human spirit, that rises above the challenge with a will to live and that invites us to extend a helping hand... It is a moral outrage to turn our backs on these marginalized members of the human family.

And it is a moral outrage .. as Richard Ernst said, that we should be burning the food of the poor to drive the cars of the rich..

It is also a moral outrage to be continuing to release massive amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as we continue to debate targets and mechanisms in diplomatic rituals that increasingly resemble rearranging the deck chairs on the titanic.

It is a moral outrage that we are not looking to the welfare of the ecosystems on which we all depend, that we are not acting as true stewards of the earth, this earth that we did not inherit from our fathers abut which we borrowed from our children... A theme we shall return to many times in many events this coming year at the Library of Alexandria, and to those many events you are cordially invited.

Youth will shape a better world

These themes of justice, human dignity, peace and security, environment and sustainable development, are the staples of my talks with young people like yourselves, because

- in the nobility of your spirit,
- in the exuberance of your youth,
- in the quality of the education you have received,
- in the unsullied idealism that you possess,

- in the dedication to our common humanity that you bring ...

... I find the hope of mastering the great scientific revolution of our times and of building better tomorrows.

The secret of success will be more in the bedrock of your values, inherited and learned, than in the specific knowledge you have gained today. You have learned to learn, but more importantly, you have grown to care.

So, harness your skill, your imagination and your determination to create a better world for all, not just for yourselves...

The challenge is great, but it must be met

The costs of inaction: There is a tide...

Consider for a moment the alternative for Egypt and the world if we continue with business as usual ...

For There is a tide ...

There is a tide of humanity,

Millions of young people demanding the right to a decent life,

a life without fear or despair,

a chance to break free of the misery of poverty...

That tide, that unstoppable tide of human ambition will not be denied...

And if it is denied, then it will be a tide of anger, of hate, of violence, that will engulf all before it and consume us all in its fiery embrace of rejected present and foregone tomorrows..

There is a tide ...

A Tide of suffering,

A tide of people wracked by disease, robbed of livelihoods

A tide of children malnourished, stunted, deprived,

They haunt our television screens and our dreams..

In Sudan, in Somalia, in Burma, in Korea... Our brothers and sisters, our children, fellow human beings ..

Left to their fate...

While a new class of rich consumers discuss the prices of everything and the value of nothing...

There is a tide of pollution.. from our cities, our cars and our factories..

A tide of destructive chemicals in the water we drink, the food we eat and the air we breathe...

There is a tide of ignorance and greed

A tide of advertising images that invade our living rooms, dull our senses and shape our consciousness all at the same time

A tide of news, that washes out yesterday's stories of pith and moment with today's latest gossip or trivia

A tide of information, blurring meaning in countless billions of bits and bytes...

There is a tide of intolerance, fanaticism and obscurantism,

That wants to stop the march of time and freeze our minds

That teaches hatred and fear

And against that tide we must harness another tide...

The tide of new awareness...

For there is a tide of understanding, of caring

A tide of awareness that the rights of all: women, minorities, the weak and the poor are indivisible from our own...

There is a tide of awareness that we cannot let the world drift into inequality, misery and environmental degradation,

There is a tide of knowledge, science and new technologies, that can be harnessed for the benefit of all...

Yes...there is a tide in the affairs of Men

which taken at the flood leads on to fortune ...

Fortune, not just in terms of more economic growth,

Fortune in terms of true well being.

Fortune in terms of leaving a better world for our children

Yes ...

There is a tide that leads on to fortune.

Omitted, all the voyage of their lives

is bound in shallows and in miseries ...

If we fail to change the way people think about themselves and the world...

If we fail to engage the streets of our cities and the fields of our countryside...

Then the poor will indeed suffer, the world will indeed be harmed, and our future will indeed be bound in shallows and in miseries ..

On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures

The sea is indeed full, it is full of threats, and full of promise.

We have the opportunity not just to navigate this sea, but in fact to show how we can create a new society, a better tomorrow ...

For there is a tide out there ...

There is a tide in the Affairs of Men...

Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.

Omitted, all the voyage of their lives

is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat

and we must take the current when it serves

or lose our ventures.

But we will Not lose our ventures. We will create a new world, guided by a vision...

A vision of the future:

A vision of the future:

A vision of a caring society where (in keeping with Gandhi) there would be

- NO Politics without principle
- NO Wealth without work
- NO Commerce without morality
- NO Pleasure without conscience
- NO Education without character

- NO Science without humanity
- NO Worship without sacrifice

A vision where a people's greatness is measured by the quality of the lives of their poorest citizens not by the size of their armies or the scale of their buildings..

A vision where the future is for all, as open-ended as knowledge, as random as play, as surprising as human imagination and ingenuity ...

Yes! We must change the world... We must ensure that the new millennium is indeed the millennium for all the wretched of the earth.

It can be done, it must be done, and by your work ... it will be done.

Envoi:

My friends,

To the many among you who are young at heart, thank you and may you keep the spark of inventiveness fanned into flames of passion by a strong commitment to better the state of the human family, and of our environment...

To the young I say, you are the vanguard of the new generation of the third millennium, the heirs and artisans of the amazing global revolution in science and technology. So, go forth into the journey of your lives, and create a better world for yourselves and for others. Think of the unborn, remember the forgotten, give hope to the forlorn, include the excluded, reach out to the unreached, and by your actions from this day onwards lay the foundation for better tomorrows.

Thank you all.