A TALE OF THREE CITIES*

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I consider it a great honour and a rare privilege to be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University to the ancient office created by Sir Robert Rede's executors by a deed of 10 December 1524. I join the distinguished galaxy of my illustrious predecessors with utmost hesitation but at the same time with the greatest pleasure.

I recall the story of two bishops, one of whom introduced the other to an audience freely using the hyperbole in praising him. When the other bishop rose to speak, he said he had two apologies to make. One apology, on behalf of his friend, the bishop who introduced him with a profusion of superlatives, because the friendly bishop had exceeded the bounds of truth. The other apology, he said, was on his own behalf – for enjoying what the other bishop had said in his praise. I think I might also make two apologies, one on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor for his error of choice and the other on my own behalf for enjoying it so much.

Lord Denning told me once that as a lawyer, he derived particular pleasure (as a judge, he called it "wicked pleasure") when he undeservedly won a case which lacked merit. As to the merit of the present speaker, I shall say nothing, but I am in a position to testify that Lord Denning was quite right about a certain pleasure in undeserved gain. I might add the postscript *nota bene* that there is no wickedness whatever in my own delight in receiving this much valued academic distinction. The fault evidently is attributable to an error of judgment and the blame for it can be laid squarely at the doors of the distinguished Vice-Chancellor. I reckon I need no other alibi for making bold to come to you this evening, armed as I am with my appointment by the Vice-Chancellor which gives me my credentials to claim the audience of this august assembly.

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* Edited version of the 1993 Rede Lecture, 30 November 1993, Senate House, University of Cambridge.

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In fairness to the Vice-Chancellor, I must tell you that I have been treated far better by him than was Sir Robert Rede by King Henry VII who appointed him as the Chief Justice of Common Pleas in the year 1506. I have learnt on good authority that the avaricious King Henry VII asked for and obtained from his appointee, namely Sir Robert Rede, a sum of 400 marks, equivalent to about 3,200 ounces of silver. Sir David Williams, who appointed me, not only did not ask me for any marks, sterling or precious metal, but true to the justly acclaimed traditions of Welsh warmth, offered me his hospitality. Lest the Vice-Chancellor should feel that he missed an opportunity, I should remind him that unlike him, King Henry VII did not ask Sir Robert Rede to give lectures as prescribed in *Statuta Antiqua* on Humanity, Logic and Philosophy or on Physics and Metaphysics of Aristotle. Nor am I holding the Master and Fellows of Jesus College responsible under the ancient endowment for the payment of the stipulated sum of £4 to me from the common chest. Suffice it to remind ourselves in that context that Sir Robert Rede, may his soul rest in peace, was the first to give a fixed stipend to the lecturers and thus pioneered the concept of solicitous concern for the lecturing academics who might otherwise have to share their predicament with the proverbial church mice whose exact function and warrant of authority for their presence in the churches I have never been able to understand. I might add, *en passant* and by way of comparison, that the temple mice in India lead a comparatively more rewarding and prosperous life.

Venturing to lecture to those who live by lecturing or whose staple diet consists of listening to appetising lectures day after day is the most daunting task one can undertake. My plea for what may appear to be either indiscretion or zealous valour is simply that the temptation was irresistible and sometimes the best way to overcome a temptation is to yield to it. I confess I have done it before and given the opportunity I shall perhaps do it again. I do not mind revealing to you what I think may be the hidden reason for this streak of recklessness in me. The reason I suspect is that a little less than four decades ago I abandoned an academic career which was my first love and opted for the more lucrative profession of a practising lawyer, although not entirely because it was more lucrative. Ever since, I have suffered from frequent bouts of nostalgia and occasional pangs of conscience. Returning to the academic profession, howsoever temporarily, is for me at once an excursion and an expiation. Perhaps, going to one's first love by stealth in the sanctuary of a great university, away from

diplomacy, a jealous mistress like my lifelong profession of law, has its own romance. Romance, after all, is always where you were, and not where you are. But Sir Robert Rede would have had none of it. I hear the solemn and far-reaching voice of his executors that these lectures "shall be for ever read franc and free to all manner of schollers of the said Vniversitie hearing or bounde to hear the same". I do not know if anyone ever was or is "bounde to hear" the Rede lectures except those who are present of their own volition. As to the requirement of giving a frank and free lecture, I can only promise to do my best even if I have to betray what are assumed to be the rules of the diplomatic game which is commonly and somewhat erroneously taken to be wholly devious rather than frank. In any event, by natural disposition, I prefer to be frank and free and being a lawyer by training and profession and a rank outsider in the realm of diplomacy, I have no difficulty in following the injunction of Sir Robert Rede's executors to be frank and free.

My difficulty was not with the directions stipulated by Sir Robert Rede's executors but with those who had been chosen in previous years to carry out the mandate. To deliver the Rede Lecture in succession to the great philosopher-poet John Ruskin (1867), Professor Max Mueller (1868), Professor Frederick W Maitland (1901), Sir Francis Younghusband, Mathew Arnold (1882), The Earl Curzon (1913), HRH Prince Philip, the Chancellor of Cambridge University (1979), and Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, the Chancellor of Oxford University (1988), to name only a few of my predecessors after 1859, appeared to me to be palpably presumptuous. Indeed, they were all so distinguished that I experienced considerable discomfiture in accepting the appointment and was in awe even while basking in their reflected glory. Reading the list of names and some of the Rede lectures which were so kindly made available to me by kind friends in Cambridge, the realisation of what I had undertaken to do finally dawned upon me. By then it was too late for me to backtrack. On the other hand, the more I thought about it, the more difficult the task appeared to me.

What seemed most difficult to me was the choice of the subject. First, I thought of delivering a lecture on East and West in the hope that I could do "poetic" justice to Rudyard Kipling and also make the twain meet. Numerous alternatives and several months later, when I finally decided to caption my lecture as "A Tale of Three Cities", my wife thought I was about to lapse into spinning a yarn beginning with the city of my birth,

Jodhpur, and indulge in autobiographical or ancestral anecdotage which she associates with dotage. Of course, she came to that conclusion without giving me an opportunity of explaining to her what I had in mind for, as we all know, it is the wont and prerogative of spouses, particularly wives, not to be bothered about observing the elementary rules of fairplay and natural justice so admirably and elaborately expounded by Professor Sir William Wade in his *magnum opus* on Administrative Law.

Rio, Vienna and Chicago are the three cities for this article entirely because during about 15 months, from June 1992 to September 1993, three major world conferences were held in those cities. They became symbolic of global concerns and aspirations, firstly in respect of environment and sustainable development, secondly, human rights, and lastly inter-faith dialogue and harmony. This article unfolds itself in those three cities but it is also inter-twined by a continuity of shared contemporary challenges and responses.

The title of this article, A Tale of Three Cities, is quite explicitly an unrepentant and plagiarised adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens which was published in 1859. The Dickensian tale of two cities (about London and Paris) begins in the year 1775. It portrays the upheaval of the French Revolution and the epic of the life of the ordinary struggling people in Houndsditch, the old Bailey, St Antoine and Versailles during the terribly turbulent time of the early 1790s. As Charles Dickens put it:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...

Charles Dickens was one of the greatest storytellers of all times. I have none of that creativity and shall not attempt to emulate or imitate him. My tale of three cities which belongs to our own time is quite simply told, although in its plot and theme the elemental force of an epic story is not lacking. It is not a tale of the times gone by, not a fictional tale told in the past tense. It is in fact a tale of the tension of tenses and bridges between past, present and future. It contains fragments from dreams and nightmares of humankind in the last decade of the twentieth century. It is not what the male chauvinists of yesteryears, I hope there are no more left, would have called an old

wives' tale. It is not a tale of a tub or a tabloid tale. It does not qualify to be called a rigmarole. Nor is it a Robin Hood or Canterbury tale. I confess it is somewhat longwinded, but it is an honest tale, and if it is grim in parts, it is also promising and cheering in parts. Shakespeare thought that an honest tale speeds best being plainly told, although I should warn you that it takes a Shakespeare to achieve that result. I should try to speed my tale by telling it as plainly, simply and truthfully as possible. That will make my product quite academic and exclusive though not quite marketable because plain workaday truths relating to the human condition, without salacious intrusions into someone's privacy, are not in vogue, perhaps never have been. I may tell you what a journalist said a few years ago in an erstwhile iron curtain country. He said with disarming candour: "Well, our newspapers like newspapers in the rest of the world, contain truths, half-truths and lies. The truths are in the sports pages, the half-truths in the weather forecasts, and lies everywhere else". Under that classification, my tale of three cities would, I hope, belong to the sports pages.

The first city in my tale is Rio de Janeiro, the venue of the Earth Summit in June 1992.[1] The Earth Summit was concerned with human survival and the protection of Planet Earth. It was concerned with designing a development process for the world as a whole which would not imperil its ecological balance. The second city in my tale is Vienna which hosted the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993.[2] It was concerned with human dignity without which human survival and development would be devoid of their *raison d'être*. The third city in my tale is Chicago, where the centennial of the First Parliament of World's Religions of 1893 was commemorated in late August and early September 1993, and a declaration "Towards a Global Ethic" was adopted and proclaimed. The Chicago Parliament of World's Religions was meant to put the issues of human survival, sustainable development, and human dignity as well as the civilisational responses to the aberrations of intolerance, fanaticism and violence in a shared ethical and spiritual perspective. This article is a tale of

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1 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, June 1992. The Conference resulted in the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development, Convention UNCED Agenda 21; UN Doc DP1/1299, May 1993-5M.

2 World Conference on Human Rights, The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, June 1993; UN Doc DP1/1394-39399, August 1993-20M.

the three cities where the world community had gathered to address those issues and themes in June 1992, June 1993 and August-September 1993.

RIO DE JANEIRO

The tale of the first of the three cities did not really begin in Rio. Nor did it begin with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, namely, the Earth Summit in June 1992. It had begun ever since and each time human beings perceived their shared tenancy of Planet Earth, their membership of the human family and their common future. And it is an endless tale. In a sense, it began in 1972 in Stockholm which was quite unlike Rio. The seeds for the harvest in Rio were sown in Stockholm. In twenty years, a propitious and somewhat modest beginning made in Stockholm had become a mighty movement enlivened by a new found sense of the oneness of our world and its common future.

There are those who believe that the perception of the oneness of our world had dawned upon us in the middle of the twentieth century when we saw our planet from space for the first time with the eyes and cameras of our astronauts. Seeing Planet Earth from space was certainly more revolutionary than the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century, but the idea of one world and the whole world as one family was certainly much older. Indian and Greek thought was, for instance, suffused with a strikingly refreshing sense of universality.

Trackless centuries ago, Indian philosophers had declared in words the meaning of which was as modern as the day after tomorrow. That declaration, freely rendered from Sanskrit verse, was as follows:

> It is the small-minded who trivialise this world by their pre-occupation with many kinds of divisions and demarcations which separate the peoples of the world. Those who are generous of spirit and have a larger vision regard the whole world as one family.

Obviously, the divisions and demarcations which separate the peoples of the world as well as their sense of shared heritage which unites them are both equally real. Tragically, what is more compelling and real today is that in the age of the greatest affluence and advancement in the history of human civilisation, the world, our one and only world, may be on the brink of

disaster, devastation and destruction. That was the alarm signal on the agenda of the Earth Summit at Rio.

The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled "Our Common Future", had pointed out in 1987 the lapses of environmental neglect and degradation and the perils of developmental failures. It pointed out that in terms of absolute numbers there were more hungry people in the world than ever before. Their numbers were increasing even though global food production had increased faster than the population growth. It pointed out that the numbers of those who could not read or write, of those without safe water or safe and sound homes, and of those who lacked fuel to cook and warm themselves, were increasing, and the gap between the rich and poor nations was widening. It also pointed out that each year some six million hectares of productive dryland was turning into worthless desert and more than eleven million hectares of forests were destroyed.

During the 1970s, twice as many people suffered each year from natural disasters as during the 1960s. In the 1960s, some 18.5 million people were affected annually by drought and 5.2 million by floods; in the 1970s, correspondingly, 24.4 million and 15.4 million people were affected annually. The number of victims of cyclones and earthquakes also increased considerably. Worse still, we have persisted in a profligate use of Planet Earth's finite resources and have continued to precipitate global warming and climate change by excessive burning of fossil fuels, denuding the forest cover of the earth, causing desertification and extreme scarcity of water, shifting agricultural areas, raising sea levels, flooding coastal cities, submerging low-lying islands and disrupting national economies.

Pollution is rampant. There is a criminal dumping of industrial waste. The planet's protective ozone shield is on the brink of depletion. Toxic substances poison the human food chain and the underground water tables. The world's bio-diversity is being progressively destroyed.

We have transgressed the tolerance limits of benign Nature and the dangers are clear and present. As the United Nations Commission had concluded, the environmental crisis, the development crisis and the energy crisis are all one and the crisis is global. The crisis can no longer be contained in national compartments or labelled leisurely under neat traditional classifications.

The United Nations Commission proposed a strategy of sustainable development which aimed "to promote harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature." In the blueprint presented to the Earth Summit at Rio, sustainable development emerged as the new composite creed of environment and development, a new creative discipline for survival, growth, adjustments, equity, flexibility, innovation, togetherness and sharing. This was the approach of common sense to our common future at the Earth Summit. The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 adopted at Rio sought to embody that approach.

The Rio Declaration boldly established two basic principles. First, human beings were at the centre of concerns for sustainable development and were entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature, not merely as objects, recipients and beneficiaries, but as participants in the process. Secondly, peace, development and environmental protection are inter-dependent and indivisible. The Rio Declaration emphasised cooperation "in a spirit of partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem". Significantly, the philosophical principle underlying the Rio Declaration was the principle of harmony and not adversarial confrontation with or forcible conquest of Nature. It seemed to me that this was a fundamental cultural concession by the West in its interaction with the East, or perhaps the West has rediscovered St Francis of Assisi after a long and tortuous journey.

The Rio Declaration accepted the sovereign right of states to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own policies. But clearly limited that right by reiterating their responsibility to ensure that their activities did not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. The clear enunciation of the principle of international responsibility in the twin-field of Environment and Development was a valuable conceptual contribution which underpinned the emerging juris-prudence of international accountability.

Two other major dimensions of accountability were embodied in the Declaration: (1) the principle of inter-generational equity; and (2) the principle of responsibility of all states and all people "to cooperate in the task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and

better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world". A third cognate equitable principle was to accord special priority to "the special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable." Finally, the most vital equitable aspect of the Rio Declaration was the unqualified acknowledgment by developed countries of the responsibility they bore in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies placed on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they commanded.

If I wanted to parade a whole battalion of principles, precepts and programs on Environment and Development, I could go on to elaborate and annotate all the 27 Principles embodied in the Rio Declaration and to summarise all the overlapping 40 Chapters under Agenda 21. That would only demonstrate that the Earth Summit in Rio was long on words but short on allocation of resources and shorter still on the means of actual implementation. We thought we had come a long way from Stockholm in June 1972 to Rio in June 1992, but I had a disconcerting feeling that in the deafening rhetoric of Rio, the dialogue itself was lost or submerged.

The principal achievement of Rio, no doubt, was an enormous increase in public awareness of the issues and of the stakes involved in sustainable development. It also secured a set of agreements between governments and won a measure of political commitment to the Principles and the Agenda. It was, however, disappointing in operational terms, particularly in the context of the urgency and the magnitude of the problems of survival and the hopes and expectations it had aroused. Rio gave us guiding norms and a sense of direction but it failed to give us an effective and comprehensive international legal framework and a functional knitting together of the environment and development, ecology and economics, equity and empowerment.

One might draw some comfort from Richard Sandbrook's observation that "this is itself a mammoth step forward as politicians come to understand that the issues do not just concern plants and animals but life itself." But that sense of comfort is not durable when we find that the world, predominantly the industrially advanced countries of the world, continues to push more than seven billion metric tons per year of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The Rio Principles and Agenda 21 do represent a way forward and therefore offer a measure of hope but you cannot for long stroke people

with mere words and console them with hope, not when the threat to life and civilisation looms large upon the world.

Rio was no doubt a spectacular mega event, by far the largest United Nations Conference ever held. There were close to 10,000 official delegates from 150 or more countries and perhaps 15,000 concerned citizens and activists participating in a parallel Global Forum. About 7,000 journalists were accredited to the Conference. As many as 116 national political leaders attended the Rio Summit. For all that fanfare, it failed to achieve a real, comprehensive and credible Action Plan fully backed by resources, legal mechanisms and political will. What Rio failed to accomplish was to secure compliance with the Rio Principles and for translating Agenda 21 into a living reality. In that sense, Rio was a missed opportunity and the danger, therefore, is that the Rio Principles may remain in the glasscase and Agenda 21 in the cupboard!

The real problem at Rio was the North-South divide which often seemed to obscure, even eclipse, the immediate and practical objectives of the Earth Summit. Both the North and the South failed to rise above the divide. They haggled but failed to strike a bargain. The affluent North failed to rise to the occasion. The great discourse which had begun at Stockholm had perhaps lost its inspiration and momentum somewhere along the line. The summiteers played their armchair game of chess. They did not band together to climb and scale the heights as one team. With all the concentration of political power, economic and financial resources, scientific knowledge and skills in the North, the moral vision of the North flagged and faltered. At the end of the day, the world got its Rio Declaration, its Agenda 21, two conventions and a set of guidelines, but they were woefully inadequate to save the Planet Earth from imminent perils. The North acknowledged what it owed but it was not prepared to pay. It accepted what it must do to change its life style and consumption levels but was not prepared to make a commitment or even the beginning of a credible attempt. A level playing field was not yet ready.

Environment and Development were practising separately as players but their working partnership, which was the name of the game and which was at the heart of the agenda of the Earth Summit, had not yet begun.

VIENNA

Exactly a year after Rio, nearly 180 nations went to Vienna for the United Nations World Human Rights Conference in June 1993. The preparatory process for the Vienna Conference which started in December 1990 included the United Nations Conferences which were held in Tunis, San Jose and Bangkok. A Conference was also held in Strasbourg to preview the issues on the agenda of the Vienna Conference.

At Vienna, we were not really breaking new ground. In that respect, Vienna was quite different from Rio. As compared to Rio, we had many more options and many more building blocks to work with in Vienna. A quarter century after the Teheran Conference on Human Rights in 1968 and some 45 years after the Universal Declaration was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, there was already a functioning human rights framework within the United Nations system. The perceived role and prescribed purpose of the Conference at Vienna were less ambitious than those of the Earth Summit at Rio. The task of the Vienna Conference was mainly to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the international human rights system and of the machinery for the protection of human rights in order to enhance and thus promote a fuller observance of those rights in a just and balanced manner.

Throughout the preparatory process preceding Vienna, one could hear dire prophecies of fatal ideological, political and cultural cleavages which were bound to lead to the collapse of the Conference. It was predicted that the Conference could not produce an agreed document because no agreement could be reached between the North and the South and the East and the West on most of the vital issues relating to human rights. Why did we need a World Conference, asked some. Why did we need an agreed document at the end of the Conference, asked many in exasperation.

The sledgehammer warnings and the bleak and gloomy predictions were misconceived. In fact, the media took little notice of the vital bridging role many countries in the East and the West were playing to achieve consensus at the successive stages of the preparatory process. I am proud to say that India was in the forefront of that constructive endeavour. Media, however, picked up only the more negative aspects in the consultative process leading to Vienna. We were told by the media chorus that the Asians challenged the

very concept of human rights and that the West could not accept the right to development as a human right and denied the indivisibility of economic, civil, political, social and cultural human rights. We were also informed that the non-western states of the United Nations wanted to abrogate the idea of the universality of human rights and make them wholly culture-specific. I am glad to say that Vienna successfully belied the prophets of doom and doubt.

Let me for a moment transport you to the Conference Centre. In the main hall on the top floor, we met in the plenary sessions where each national delegation delivered its prepared text. A wag said that in the plenary we were playing either to the global gallery or to the gallery at home. Largely true, but one need not be too apologetic about playing to the gallery in our democratic age. It was at the ground level, in the conference hall, in lunch rooms, in corridors and in the lounges, which escaped or eluded close media attention, that the diplomatic dialectics of the drafting exercise took place in which we negotiated the texts. That process was too complex, perhaps too monotonous and too hair-splitting or head-splitting to interest the media and the casual observers.

In the basement of the Conference Centre, there were countless non-governmental organisations, most of them constructive, well-intentioned and reasonable, a few raucous, agitated and strident, and all of them saying different things at the same time. Most of them had friendly sympathisers and spokespersons on the ground floor.

The channels of communication between the basement floor and the ground floor were quite good. To the outside visitor at the Conference Centre, we did seem often enough to have outdone the Tower of Babel. No wonder we had such a bad press, but even that had its positive, chastening and salutary effect on the chemistry of the Conference. Midway through the Conference, we began working late nights, sometimes until the early hours of the morning, and discovered that Conference fatigue and exhaustion were a great catalyst of proven efficacy to bring about a meeting of minds.

Perhaps the media pundits had not reckoned with such imponderable providential inputs. Nor had they made allowances for the ubiquitous principle that every conference worth the name had to have one or more problematic areas, and a global conference with some 180 countries

participating had to have, at least, 180 problems. In the event, we solved most of them without any major mishap and produced a Declaration and Program of Action which was adopted unanimously on the concluding day.

The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action was no doubt a document of certain compromises, but it did not compromise on the essentials. It was not as inspiring and evocative as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It was not as precise and terse as the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other treaty documents. It was a document which in its elaborate Preamble, 39 declaratory paragraphs in Part I, followed by another 100 paragraphs of norms and recommendations, consolidated human rights jurisprudence, contained a welcome re-statement of the law and practice on the widest possible range of human rights issues, and reflected a remarkable balance and objectivity on human rights issues.

The document did not solve all the conceptual and operational human rights dilemmas the world faces today. The document had the Fabian virtue of perseverance and occasionally employed the Fabian tactics of avoiding direct engagements and confrontations. Admittedly, it had nothing meaningful to offer on Bosnia, geographically almost next door to Vienna. Nor was it the purpose and mandate of the Vienna Conference to address and resolve specific country issues. The Vienna Conference has to be judged on the touchstone of what it was called upon to do and on that basis it was a reasonable, if not a resounding, success. To borrow from a preambular paragraph of the Vienna Declaration which I was privileged to draft, the Vienna Conference did seek to invoke the human rights spirit of our age and did endeavour to reflect the realities of our time.

The fundamental postulate and the starting point of the Vienna Declaration were that all human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person and that the human person was the central subject of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration established a clear conceptual concordance between democracy, development and human rights and called upon the international community to support, strengthen, and promote democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the entire world. It declared those concepts to be universal and unconditional.

The principle was further elaborated in paragraph 8 of the Declaration which clearly declared the following:

> Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The Declaration reaffirmed the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and as an integral part of fundamental human rights. It sought to strike a balance by stating in the same breath that development facilitated the enjoyment of all human rights but the lack of development should not be invoked to justify the abridgment of internationally recognised human rights. One can see a lurking contradiction in that formulation. If development facilitates the enjoyment of human rights, lack of it necessarily denies enjoyment of human rights. Poverty and privation inexorably corrode and erode human rights and become an objective explanation, if not a justification, for the neglect of human rights and human dignity in a given society.

The Declaration provided that the right to development should be fulfilled so as to meet the equitable developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. It emphasised effective development policies at the national level as well as equitable economic relations and favourable economic environment at the international level. It called upon the international community to make all efforts to help alleviate the external debt burden of developing countries. It affirmed that extreme poverty and social exclusion constituted a violation of human dignity and stressed the need to promote the human rights of the poor and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion. Great emphasis was placed by the Declaration on the protection and promotion of the human rights of all vulnerable sections in society. The Declaration provided in unambiguous terms that all human rights, civil, political, social, economic and cultural, were universal, indivisible and inter-related.

Yet another conundrum controversy accentuating the theoretical North-South East-West controversy was thus quietly laid to rest by that simple Declaration, which also called upon the international community to treat all human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis, although in practical terms such equality is seldom feasible. In addition, the Declaration wisely and discreetly recognised the

significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds, without accepting that states may pick and choose certain rights and disregard others.

The World Conference pointedly declared that the speedy and comprehensive elimination of all forms of racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was a priority task and called upon governments and the international community to take effective measures to prevent and combat them. It also declared that the acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as well as linkage in some countries with drug trafficking, were activities aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, threatening territorial integrity, security of states and destabilising legitimately constituted governments.

The Declaration reiterated the human rights of women and of the girl child and welcomed the early ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recognition of the human rights of children in the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The Declaration emphasised the importance of the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities and reaffirmed the obligation of states to ensure the observance of those rights without any discrimination and in full equality before the law, in accordance with the Declaration of the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The World Conference was dismayed at massive violations of human rights, especially in the form of genocide, ethnic cleansing and systematic rape of women in war situations, creating mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons; it also expressed its dismay and condemnation of torture and cruel, inhuman treatment or punishment, summary and arbitrary executions, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, all forms of apartheid, racism and racial discrimination, foreign occupation and alien domination, xenophobia, poverty, hunger and other denials of economic, social and cultural rights, religious intolerance, terrorism, discrimination against women, and lack of the rule of law.

The Vienna Conference reaffirmed the important and constructive role played by national institutions for the promotion and protection of human

rights and recognised that it was the right of each state to choose the framework which was best suited to its particular needs at the national level. It also recognised the important role of non-governmental organisations in the promotion of all human rights and in humanitarian activities at national, regional and international levels.

The Vienna Conference represented a periodic audit of human rights norms and mechanisms. It involved a rough and ready stocktaking and to that extent it was useful. Perhaps a more intensive and indepth analysis and evaluation would have been not only a scholar's delight but would also have served the processes of human rights standard-setting and policy-making in future. The Conference and the preparatory process helped to highlight the central importance of human needs, human rights and human obligations and the deep inter-relationship between moral perceptions, legal norms, economic conditions, cultural contexts and political configurations.

At the Conference, we often felt hamstrung by the politics of human rights but often enough it was through the politics of human rights that we managed to resolve deadlocks and come out of our blues and blind alleys. There was a curious mixture of the politics of hope and despair, of poverty and affluence, of pride and prejudice, of national sovereignty and international accountability, of hegemony and autonomy, and of regional, religious and secular interests and combinations. The end of the Cold War was amply in evidence but so were the new uncertainties. The nation state was not about to become extinct. We could see new cooperative adjustments in the concept of sovereignty internationally and in regional groupings. The West or the North acted much more as a block than did Asia, Africa or Latin America, but it was not as if Alice had arrived in the Wonderland of a unipolar world under the United States banner. At the same time, we were conscious that in the global animal farm, some nations were more equal than others. Nevertheless, numbers did count. So did persuasion, background knowledge, sincerity of purpose, drafting and negotiating skills.

There was a certain diplomatic *esprit de corps* and a certain intellectual openness at Vienna which made the Conference much more of a diplomatic conference and because of which some of the sharpest edges of political angularities could be rubbed off and rounded. There was an awareness that in actuality, a great deal had been achieved in the field of human rights in

pursuance of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and enormous and exponential progress had been made in setting standards and in extending and broadening the frontiers of international accountability. At the same time, the world community was chastened by the thought that we had only made a modest beginning, that we had many promises to keep. We therefore put forward at Vienna a solid phalanx of concrete suggestions to secure progressively better implementation of human rights. None of us at Vienna thought that the human rights millennium was around the corner. Each one of us knew that there were many remaining areas of darkness at noon around the world. But there was hope and confidence.

CHICAGO

Let us now travel on the last leg of our transcontinental journey from Vienna to Chicago where a Parliament of the World's Religions was convened from 28 August to 5 September 1993. The 1993 Parliament of World's Religions was a centennial commemoration of the first Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893,[3] which was a unique event.

During the 100 years after the historic event in 1893, the world continued to be afflicted by religious intolerance, hatred and disharmony. The question we asked ourselves at Chicago was: did the world's religions have a healing role to play? We were compelled to reflect with CC Colton who said:

> Men will wrangle for religion; write for it; fight for it; anything but live for it.

The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions was not a world conference of the nations of the world. It was not a conference representing state power. It was a conference of different faith communities at which were represented all the major religions of the world, many of them at the highest level. Religious and spiritual leaders from all over the world came to it to make common cause in securing peace, harmony and understanding. More than 7,000 delegates from all parts of the world congregated and

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[3] See Broadman, GD, The Parliament of Religions (2nd ed, 1893, National Baptist Print, USA).

proclaimed the essential unity of all religions. For nine days, the Parliament discussed innumerable issues relating principally to inter-faith dialogue in hundreds of meetings and finally the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders proclaimed an inter-faith Declaration. The Declaration was based on a two-year consultation among several hundred scholars and theologians representing the world's communities of faith.

The title of the Declaration was "Towards a Global Ethic" which opened with the cry of the heart, "The world is in agony". The Declaration laments, "Peace eludes us...the planet is being destroyed...neighbours live in fear...women and men are estranged from each other...children die!" The Declaration condemned the abuse of Earth's ecosystems. It condemned "poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin." It condemned "the social disarray of the nations; the disregard of justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence." In particular, it condemned aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions declared that there already existed the basis for a global ethic which offered the possibility of better individual and global order, and led individuals away from despair and society away from chaos. It affirmed that a common set of core values is found in the teaching of the religions and that these formed the basis of a global ethic. It declared that the ancient guidelines for human behaviour found in the teachings of the religions of the world were the condition for a "sustainable world order". It declared, "We are interdependent! Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals and plants and for the preservation of earth, air, water and soil." It counselled a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person was treated humanely, without exception. It stated: "Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness".

It emphasised that Earth could not change for the better unless the consciousness of individuals was changed first, unless we strove for a just social and economic order, in which everyone had an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. It declared:

> We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

The Declaration towards a Global Ethic proclaimed certain simple, seminal ideas which could not be dismissed as mere pious platitudes or starry-eyed Utopian day-dreaming. Those ideas were basic and elemental. Without them, without a new global ethic, no new global order was possible. The message of Chicago was that our different religions and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humaneness; that humanity needed a vision of peoples living peacefully together, of ethnic and ethical groupings and of religions sharing responsibility for the care of Earth; that the fundamental unity of human family on Earth must be the root conviction; that action in favour of rights and freedom presumed a consciousness of responsibility and duty and that therefore both the minds and hearts of women and men must be addressed; that the realisation of peace, justice and the protection of Earth depended on the insight and readiness of men and women to act justly; and that rights without morality could not long endure.

The first fundamental demand of Global Ethic was that every human being must be treated humanely because every human being possessed inalienable dignity. Among its irrevocable directives, the first and foremost was the commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life. It declared that no people, no state, no race, no religion had the right to hate, to discriminate against, to "cleanse", to exile, much less to liquidate a "foreign" minority which was different in behaviour or held different beliefs. It laid down that all human conflicts should be resolved without violence within a framework of justice. It called for universal disarmament. It recommended that young people must learn the culture of non-violence both at home and at school. It stated that a human person was infinitely precious and must be unconditionally protected and likewise, lives of animals and plants which inhabited this planet with us deserved protection, preservation and care.

First, it declared that we were all inter-dependent together in this cosmos and each one of us depended on the welfare of all. Secondly, it called for a culture of solidarity and just economic order. Thirdly, it called for a commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness. And

fourthly, it called for a commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. The premise of the Declaration was that on the foundations of these commitments, a new consciousness of ethical responsibility could be mobilised for the creation of a new and humane global community of peoples of different nationalities, origins, ideologies and faiths living together in harmony.

The 1993 Parliament of World's Religions has a significance far beyond the commemoration of a momentous event which happened a hundred years ago. It represents the compelling relevance of an ecumenical approach to life in our global village, in our age and time, and which is marked by emerging patterns of multicultural pluralism. Its significance also lies in the readiness of the World's Religions to dialogue and work together in creating a common ethical framework, and to declare themselves against isolation, exclusivism, fanaticism and intolerance.

A hundred years ago, on 11 September 1893, Charles Carol Bonney had said in the opening address to the Parliament of World's Religions, "The very basis of our convocation is the idea that the representatives of each religion sincerely believe it is the truest and the best of all." In 1993, delegations of different religious persuasions would have had no difficulty in agreeing with Mahatma Gandhi who said that various religions were as leaves of a tree which might seem different but at the trunk they were one. Perhaps, the most significant contribution of the Parliament of World's Religions is in the emphasis on the moral and spiritual roots of human civilisation.

CONCLUSION

I would conclude my tale of three cities with the thought that although the three cities are far-flung, they belong together in the contemporary blueprint of a new world order. There is a remarkable coherence of concentricity in the concerns represented by the three cities. All three of them have a common core. That common core is the cluster of basic values of humanity which is manifested in the human instinct for survival, in the human need for growth and development, in the human aspiration for dignity, in human rights and obligations, and in ethical responsibility and spiritual fulfilment. The tale of each city is therefore a tale of all three cities as well.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Boutros Boutros Ghali, pointed out in his 1992 Report on the Work of the United Nations Organisation that, "Human Rights are an essential component of sustainable development; sustainable development is not possible without respect for Human Rights." One might add that a global universal human ethic, proclaimed in Chicago, encompasses both sustainable development and human rights. The tale of Rio is thus repeated in Vienna and both of them are re-told in Chicago. In the ultimate analysis, each one of the cities of humankind is cast in the image of the City of God with people living and striving together in harmony and in unflinching quest of peace and justice, or as the great Indian poet Tagore put it:

> Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
> Where words come out from the depth of truth;
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
> Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action –
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.[4]

Will this dream ever come true? Will my tale have a happy ending? Yes, if men and women grow in moral stature. If not, as Edwin Markham put it:

> Why build these cities glorious
> If man unbuilded goes?
> In vain we build the world, unless
> The builder also grows.[5]

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4 Tagore R, Gitanjali, XXXV.

5 Markham E, Man-Making (1920).