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**Reclaiming Multiculturalism
Reflections on the Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in
Today's Diverse World**

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It's a great honour to be here today. I am particularly happy that the third global forum on human development is being held here in France. Over the last 15 years, Human Development Reports have argued that development is about people, expanding human freedoms, and societies that are equitable and socially just. These reports aimed to build an alternative paradigm and policy agenda for international development. France has been a natural ally as her intellectual traditions deeply rooted in the principles of human rights and the values of freedom, equality and solidarity are at the core of human development. Journalists, academics and activists in France have received the Human Development Reports each year with more enthusiasm, deeper understanding of the complex issues, and endorsement of policy proposals than in almost any other country. The French delegation has been among the first in the UN to defend the independence of the Human Development Reports when some governments objected to the data and analysis they did not conform to their policies.

Globalization, democratization and the demands for cultural freedom

Over the years, the agenda for promoting human development has focused on three pillars: making economic growth benefit the poor, expanding social opportunities such as schooling; and deepening democracy. This year's human development report adds a fourth pillar, addressing cultural exclusions by adopting multicultural policies.

This fourth pillar is essential for three reasons. The first is that cultural identity is a source of exclusion and deep inequalities between individuals. The life expectancy gap between the indigenous people and the national average is 20 years in Australia, 13 years in Guatemala. The second is that restrictions on ways of life – religion, language and other practices continue to be widespread. Together these two kinds of exclusions affect 900 million people – one in seven in the world.

The third reason is that the first two pillars are not enough to address cultural exclusion. Many economists and politicians take the position that cultural exclusion would end as long as all people were guaranteed basic civil and political rights, and minorities are given equal access to economic and social opportunities.

We disagree. Well established democracies have failed to give adequate voice to minorities nor enough space to indigenous people. A one language policy is an obstacle to minorities for jobs, schools, political debates. A judicial system that is blind to authority structures and values of an indigenous group can not expect to be effective in securing justice. Rapid expansion of schooling and healthcare left behind ethnic minorities in poverty in Malaysia, Viet Nam, and social welfare is leaving behind second generation immigrants here in France as elsewhere in Europe. The sense of humiliation they feel when their religion is not given respect is leading to social violence. And the market forces of global trade can mean that Hollywood can wipe out the once thriving film industries of Italy and Mexico.

The Report's core message is that culturally diverse societies need multicultural policies to promote human development – to expand cultural choices along with other choices to promote inclusion, equity and human rights. Multiculturalism is an awkward term that expresses a radical idea—that governments should adopt policies that explicitly recognize, and then accommodate, cultural differences. This is radical because for centuries, in all regions of the world most states – even democracies – have done the opposite. They have suppressed identities of minority ethnic groups and indigenous people, and humiliated immigrants for their cultural roots. State policies have ranged from brutal repression to those that were simply blind to special needs – such as language policy that leave minorities out of opportunities in jobs or access to justice, or not celebrating heroes that signal lack of respect. Today, some 900 million people—one in seven—belong to ethnic, linguistic or religious groups who face cultural exclusion in one way or another.

This fourth pillar in the human development agenda is not just essential for human development but an urgent challenge for peace and development in the world of the 21st century. Separatist movements in Aceh and Sri Lanka are threatening relief efforts even in the face of the worst natural disasters of history. The rivalry between Shiites and Sunnis threatening peace and democracy in Iraq. The murder of a film maker in the Netherlands over the treatment of women in Muslim communities has shocked the society that prided itself in tolerance.

These events are leading to xenophobic and isolationist reactions. They are leading to a dangerous view that attachment to cultural identity is a cause of violence, and thus something to be repressed or wished away. As Amartya Sen writes in the chapter he contributed to the Report, 'Rather than glorify

unreasoned endorsement of inherited traditions, or warn the world about the alleged inevitability of the clash of civilizations, the human development perspective demands that attention go to the importance of freedom in cultural spheres and to ways of defending and expanding the cultural freedoms that people can enjoy'. Attachment to cultural identity is a freedom that people value.

Why is cultural identity driving divisive politics today? Surely it is the consequence of globalization and democratization. While cultural exclusion is nothing new – and in many countries, many restrictions have been lifted - what is new today is the growing assertiveness of groups in claiming cultural recognition. In vastly different contexts and in different ways—from indigenous people in Latin America and Australia to religious minorities in South Asia to ethnic minorities in Africa to immigrants in Western Europe—people are mobilizing anew around old grievances along ethnic, religious, lines. The spread of democracy has enlarged the political space for such action, and global networks have strengthened the movements. And, in this era of globalization, a new class of political claims and demands has emerged - indigenous people protest investments in mining and logging undermine their livelihoods; local communities fear loss of national cultures with the unprecedented increase in immigration while immigrants want to keep much stronger ties with their countries of origin and reject choiceless assimilation.

Whatever the context, states today face an urgent challenge to respond to these claims. No state escapes the challenge in a world where some 5,000 ethnic groups live in just under 200 states. Most major capital cities of the world have at least a quarter of its population born abroad; in Toronto, it is nearly 50%. Responding by repressing identities is not the solution, not only because it violates the rights of people, but because this approach is no longer feasible, likely to fuel rather than tame violent conflict. The list of multi-ethnic states that have descended into violence and instability when a single group tried to dominate the whole is depressingly long – the former Yugoslavia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi... The attempts to suppress identities did not make them go away but merely sowed the seeds of conflict. The multicultural alternative – of inclusion and recognition of difference is the only sustainable approach.

That is the theory. Does it work? Yes. The report gives many examples of the multicultural alternative that have delivered more inclusion and equity: asymmetric federalism in democratic Spain brought greater stability. Bilingual education in Burkina Faso increased completion rates. Affirmative action in Malaysia reduced sharp disparities in income between Malays as against Chinese and Indians, reducing ethnic tensions and laying the ground for spectacular economic growth. We will hear more from Will Kymlicka, Al Stepan and Jody Kollapen about the complexities of these policies and how they can work or fail.

Debunking the myths about trade offs between multiculturalism and development

In spite of these experiences, multiculturalism is viewed with suspicion. Critics are not just those trying to justify authoritarianism, but those committed to democracy and human rights. They say that multiculturalism is a recipe for fragmentation and divided loyalties, poor economic performance, and an obstacle to democracy and human rights. Why? Because the fact that many multiethnic states are marred by state failure, ethnic strife, poverty, and authoritarianism leads people to blame culture and cultural diversity as the cause of these ills. But there is no empirical evidence to support these causal relationships, and the explanations are based on faulty notions of identity and culture. These are myths, however widely held.

Myth 1. People's ethnic identities compete with their attachment to the state, so there is a trade-off between recognizing diversity and unifying the state.

Not so. A sense of identity and belonging to a group with shared values and other bonds of culture is important for individuals. But each individual can identify with many different groups. Identity is not a zero sum game. You can be a loyal Flemish, Belgian, European and committed to human solidarity across the world all at the same time without suffering schizophrenia.

Myth 2. Ethnic groups are prone to violent conflict with each other in clashes of values, so there is a trade-off between diversity and sustaining peace.

No. There is little empirical evidence that cultural differences and clashes over values are in themselves a cause of violent conflict. There is wide agreement in recent research by scholars that cultural differences by themselves are not the relevant factor causing ethnic wars. Studies offer several other explanations for these wars: grievance over economic and social oppression and as struggles over political power, land and other economic assets. Fijians initiated a coup against the Indian-dominated government because they feared that land might be confiscated. In Sri Lanka the Sinhalese majority gained political power, but the Tamil minority had access to more economic resources, triggering decades of civil conflict

Cultural identity does have a role in these conflicts—not as a cause but as a driver for political mobilization. Leaders invoke a single identity, its symbols and its history of grievances, to “rally the troops”. Cultural suppression can trigger violent mobilization.

There is no trade-off between peace and respect for diversity, but identity politics need to be managed so that they do not turn violent.

Myth 3. Multiculturalism requires defending traditional practices, so there could be a trade-off between recognizing cultural diversity and other human

development priorities such as progress in development, democracy and human rights.

No. Multiculturalism is about defending cultural liberty or expanding individual choices in matters of culture and identity, not about a blind allegiance to traditional values and practices. Culture is not static but is a set of values and practices that are constantly evolving to new challenges of the world around them, and as individuals challenge old ways. The equal rights of women were not part of the cultural values of any society a century ago, but women have challenged tradition to change that in Europe. Erin Shibadee's eloquent statement in the Human Development Report reminds us that women are challenging the tradition in Iran today.

There does not need to be any trade-off between respect for cultural difference and human rights and development. But the process of development involves active participation of people in fighting for human rights and shifts in values.

Myth 4. Ethnically diverse countries are less able to develop, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and promoting development.

No. There is no evidence of a clear relationship, good or bad, between cultural diversity and development.

While it is undeniably true that many diverse societies have low levels of income and human development, there is no evidence that this is related to cultural diversity itself. Just as there are multiethnic countries that have stagnated, there are others that were spectacularly successful. Malaysia, with 62% of its people Malays and other indigenous groups, 30% Chinese and 8% Indian, was the world's 10th fastest growing economy during 1970–90, years when it also implemented affirmative action policies. Mauritius ranks 64 in the Human Development Index, the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. It has a diverse population of African, Indian, Chinese and European origin—with 50% Hindu, 30% Christian and 17% Muslim.

Myth 5: Some cultures are more likely to make developmental progress than others, and some cultures have democratic values while others do not.

Cultural determinism has enormous intuitive appeal. But there is no evidence of statistical analysis or historical studies. This view ignores two important aspects of culture. One that it is dynamic, and two that the core values of democracy are universal. All people want to be free, value human dignity and human rights. The West does not have a monopoly in valuing virtues of democratic forms of government.

Conclusion

There are no trade offs between cultural liberty, democracy, peace and development. Multiculturalism does not compromise these other important goals. But multiculturalism can only achieve these goals if it is one pillar of the four-pillar human development strategy. Without the other three pillars - equitable growth, expansion of social opportunities, democratic participation – multiculturalism would lead to communitarianism, regressive traditionalism, and violation of human rights.

'Multiculturalism' today in many countries has been hijacked by political leaders who defend tradition rather than freedom - leaders of immigrant groups who pressure young women to deny their rights to free choice, indigenous peoples leaders who want to retreat away from economic and social progress.

'Multiculturalism' needs to be reclaimed by political leaders who defend liberalism – tolerant politicians in Europe who show solidarity with beleaguered communities and respect their rights; immigrant leaders who defend human rights including women's rights, indigenous leaders who promote education and better health. In the increasingly diverse societies of the 21st century, states can only forge unity in diversity by recognizing multiple identities and loyalties. Multiculturalism needs to be redefined, not as communitarianism but an essential aspect of an inclusive and egalitarian society.

Cultural liberty will not just happen, any more than health, education or women's rights do. It takes active measures by state and society, and should therefore be a core concern of governments. Civilizations will not clash when state policies allow people to be who they are. The purpose of this report is to show how it can be done.