Waseda University

“Peacebuilding and Democratic Governance in an Era of Uncertainty”

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on

“The Role of the ‘g7+’ for Peacebuilding”

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Ladies and Gentlemen
Excellencies
Dear Students,

I am humbled to be here again, in this prestigious University that, 5 years ago, on the 4th October 2016, had bestowed upon me with an Honorary Award.

I would like to start by thanking you for inviting me to talk about ‘Peacebuilding and Democratic Governance in an Era of Uncertainty’ and about the Role of the ‘g7+’, an intergovernmental Organization, established by fragile, in-conflict and post-conflict countries.

The ‘g7+’ was established in 2010, initially by 7 countries and now this intergovernmental Organization has 20 members States, from the Pacific to the Caribbean and from Africa to Middle East.

When we say ‘fragility’, we are meaning about the absence or weakness of the State Institutions and the lack of democratic environment and, on the situation of ‘post-conflict’, where is vital a good process of reconciliation in order to achieve peace.

Not less, there is also a situation of ‘in-conflict’, when the opposite sides must try a better approach and do everything to stop the violence and suffering of civilians, by choosing the right path to put an end to the conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Students,

While democratisation and peacebuilding are core aspects of a State, that wants to govern itself by the principles of transparency, freedom, justice, human rights and solidarity, it is no less true that upholding these ideals is an ongoing challenge for any society, particularly in times of crisis.

This challenge has never been greater than in today’s multipolar and ever-changing world. So complex and uncertain is this 21st century, that the polarisation of opinions, interests and power entails substantial new threats against the survival of
democracy and even humankind itself.

If Western societies are having difficulty finding solutions to the challenges of today’s changing world, in which the economy has become globalised and where economic and political decisions have an increasing international impact, leading to destabilisation or even loss of trust in democracy, then one might wonder about the situation of fragile and transitioning democracies, in which democratic agencies and procedures are still young.

Trends that were lingering in some societies in the world, such as xenophobia, nationalism and populism, the temptation to curb individual freedoms, and even ethnical and religious rivalries, are now being fuelled by the global pandemic crisis.

The only certainty we can have is that no nation, no matter how powerful, is able to understand and to respond by itself to the changes affecting our planet. If a threat can cross a border, then it can also dilute that border. Such a threat requires a collective response.

The recent pandemic highlighted, even more, the need for the International Community to act as one – in order to overcome not just the global public health crisis, but also its consequences and negative impacts on the social and economic structures of every country in the world, particularly developing countries.

The pandemic contributed to the weakening of democracies around the globe. This virus, which has already killed over 5 million people, is an enemy of freedom and a strong ally of inequality.

Despite the optimistic vaccination rates in many parts of the world, the virus continues to be active. We are still far from being able to claim victory over COVID-19, particularly if we take the time to look at the bottom of the global vaccination tables.

As long as the vaccination rates in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, South Sudan, Yemen and Haiti – just to mention a few from the ‘g7+’ group – remain below 1%, these countries continue to be helpless.

In fact, we all continue to be helpless, since it is possible that the virus might change into new, more resistant variants. This, in turn, may render useless the high vaccination rates achieved in more fortunate countries.

Vaccines in South Sudan must be dropped by parachute, as there is no road infrastructure enabling the distribution of vaccines in time. Yemen is still dealing with one of the worst humanitarian crises ever. Haiti is facing instability, hunger and the dramatic fury of nature.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has to fight Covid-19, while worrying about
the resurgence of Ebola and an outbreak of meningitis.

Inequality in the world is a historical and structural problem that is everyone’s responsibility.

Ensuring that vaccines are distributed and administered equitably all over the world is everyone’s problem. And yet we are watching the International Community fail, as the unquenchable thirst for resources and power is prevailing over moral solidarity that could otherwise lead to public health, justice and peace in the world.

Inequality is something that the ‘g7+’ faces every day. Frailty and poverty are the backbone of the ‘g7+’.

This intergovernmental Organisation was established on the principles of mutual understanding and respect. These were countries that wanted to take the wheel of their own fate and break free from the traps of poverty and conflict.

While our situations are due in part to inefficient national policies, we also suffer from mismanaged and even irresponsible foreign interventions – of which Afghanistan is but the most recent example.

People in these countries want to stop having to take up weapons. They want to use their voices to advocate for a change to the paradigms of engagement, so that they make an effective contribution towards peace. This requires improving both international assistance and prevention.

And evidently, we tend to look to the supposedly consolidated democracies to walk the safe path towards peacebuilding, stability and prosperity.

Geopolitics took a turn for the worse since the attacks of 9/11, back in 2001. The world has become destabilised by fear, insecurity and mistrust. We were caught off-guard by the sovereign debt crisis of 2008, which confirmed that corruption and mismanagement are not only endemic to fragile and unstable democracies. We were stunned by the refugee and migrant crisis of 2015, which left millions of people adrift, including children who were left to drown in the Mediterranean.

As for the pandemic, we first saw the richest countries hoarding Covid-19 vaccines and now we witness the silence of the International Community concerning the “white elephant” that no one wants to see in Africa.

As such, it is not easy for us to accept “civilising missions” that seek to take the wheel in our countries or to free us from the dark ages of pre-development by using one-size-fits-all processes, particularly when their own examples are not always that
commendable.

Few ‘g7+’ countries or LDCs (Least Developed Countries) have not been the recipients of “nation-building”, “state-building” or “capacity-building” operations, have not taken part in workshops on democracy and human rights, or have not been assessed at donor conferences. However, the PowerPoint and Excel spreadsheets, drafted by the experts, on the best practices for managing public accounts and long-term sustainable investments hide their own weaknesses and fail to correct ours.

One could also ask whether the reason for deploying these “experts” has to do with moral principles or rather the “humanitarian rhetoric” that masks the voracious appetite for power and geostrategic resources. In many places and even right now, the so called ‘donor-countries’ take advantage of the weakness of the States where they intervene and literally dominate the system in order to impose their economic and geo-strategic interest.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Students,

As I have said, the purpose of establishing the ‘g7+’ was to achieve lasting peace through processes of reconciliation and dialogue.

Our countries are very different. This difference goes well beyond our placement on the world map. We have different historical, cultural, political and ideological backgrounds. Nevertheless, after enduring the trauma of conflict for too long, we have now united around the common goal of achieving peace and progress for our people.

We represent a combined population of around 260 million people who:

- Having lived through conflict, have learned the hard way that peace can only come by having the courage to forgive and the determination to reconcile.

- Know that peace can only be maintained by drafting a roadmap that enables a culture of acceptance, tolerance and mutual respect.

- Understand that there are no formulas that can be imported, nor quick fixes that can heal deep wounds. The only way is a long and difficult process that is likely to involve more setbacks than successes.

- Understand that it is vital to get everyone involved. The same individuals who destabilise peace must be the ones that contribute to peacebuilding. There can be no peace and development without inclusive processes.
Furthermore:

- Development and peace must be made by, rather than for, the people of a country. This requires an alignment of wills and a true understanding of the reality in which the people live. In other words, when discussing an international partnership for our development, we say: "nothing about us, without us!"

- Even now, our experience with “donor” countries is that they would impose their own agendas on our countries. We insist that development processes “are owned by the recipient countries and must be led by them”. Each reality requires its own paradigm. It is urgent to eradicate one-size-fits-all templates. As I will discuss later on, this could not be any more true in the cases of Afghanistan and Myanmar.

- Interventions cost millions and millions of dollars. In Afghanistan, for example, an engagement of around 20 years resulted in little to no improvement. We must resist the temptation to act quickly, rather than intelligently. Indeed, it is pressing that we use our intelligence to address the root causes of problems.

- While we fail to address the root causes of problems, it will simply be impossible to overcome the weaknesses of States. An example of this, albeit in a different context, is when the global leaders decide to declare war on terrorism. In my opinion, this is a grave error! Terrorism is not a conventional army. It is more akin to a guerrilla army that adapts to circumstances and reinvents itself. As such, we will not defeat terrorism until we take a serious look at its genesis.

- These millions of dollars could have made an actual difference, had they been invested in education, health and welfare, with a long-term perspective! Investing in the development of children and young people is akin to building a world of peace. This investment must also reach women and the most vulnerable citizens, not just in the cities but also in rural areas.

In 2015, the approval of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals marked an ambitious agenda for eradicating poverty. Its pillars included the economy, wellbeing, the environment, cooperation, peace, building strong institutions and the fight against corruption. Sustainability became the new “trendy word”, promising that “no one would be left behind”.

Really? It has been six years... Can we ever turn words into action?

The ‘g7+’ had an important role in advocating for SDG 16, which seeks the promotion of peaceful, fair and inclusive societies. We know from experience that there can be no sustainable development without peace. This means that the other SDGs cannot be achieved lest we are able to fight fragility and to build peaceful societies.
Timor-Leste and the ‘g7+’ urged the international community to pay more attention to fragile and conflict-affected nations, as well as to foster dialogue, so that all people can have a better future. However, it does not seem clear that the lesson has been learned... meaning that humankind’s Achilles’ heel persists.

The ‘g7+’ succeeded in obtaining Permanent Observer status at the UN. This will enable the ‘g7+’ to be more effective in its work.

We believe that there are two key aspects when moving from frailty to resilience:

The first is Statebuilding – to guide our actions and to capacity-build the institutions of our States.

The second, which is interconnected, is nation-building. This means that we should develop every sector: from civil society to the media, from academia to the private sector, from youth to women, from culture and traditions to our religions – having the dignity of the human person at the centre of every action.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Students,

In the ‘g7+’ we promote peace, reconciliation and prosperity through the “Fragile to Fragile Cooperation” (F2F) program. We also contribute to preventive diplomacy, which is a mission of the UN.

Timor-Leste used its experience as a nation that was built out of the ashes, without State agencies, human or financial resources or democratic governance experience.

The reconciliation, openness and dialogue template is the one I would like to see replicated in every place where there is conflict.

It is urgent to find peaceful solutions to the serious human rights violations going on in Afghanistan, which is a member of the ‘g7+’, and in Myanmar, our Southeast Asian neighbour and a member of ASEAN.

The suffering of civilians cannot be confined by the latitude or longitude of the people in question. We all share responsibility.

Conflict is even more unjust, whenever it pits an armed force against unarmed civilians. It is a fight between good and evil. And yet, the world has never been so rich,
technology has never been so advanced and human intelligence has never been so extraordinary.

What, then, can the International Community do?

**First**, “do no harm”! Every action by government agencies, the private sector and development partners must seek to boost Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. At the very least, it cannot do any harm or any further harm. Dialogue, sustained pressure and diplomacy will be much more likely to succeed than any belligerent threat and will avoid the loss of countless lives. We must make every effort to protect these countries from the possibility of even direr consequences.

**Second**, democracy and peace cannot be attained by people who are not willing to earn them and to take responsibility for their own fate. Still, although the International Community cannot do everything for a country, it should take care not to harm it, due to lack of unity and consistency!

**Third**, democratic transition processes are complex. Still, these processes need to be respected. Diplomatic efforts must be made to achieve resolutions that safeguard the peaceful popular will of the people. Every permanent member of the UN Security Council must be more active in the international arena, so as to find a peaceful common resolution.

We need to learn from the errors of the past, such as the ones made during the Arab Spring.

We need to rethink Peacekeeping Forces, in order to make them more adapted to the current challenges and realities. It is passive and often minimalistic presences that have not enabled change for the better. On the contrary, it often leads to further tension and divisionism.

Through ‘g7+’ activities, on 26 February to 3 March 2015, the first time I went to the Central African Republic, I met with rebels from different groups to seek an end to the conflict. On my second visit, on 28th August to 3rd September 2016, I met with different groups, who had just been surrendering their weapons, and it became clear the armed groups were supported by the RCA and foreigners. I appealed for collaboration to end the conflict, because the armed groups were supported by the same Western countries that took advantage of conflict to exploit minerals, including diamonds.

Regrettably, it has also become important and necessary to re-think and reform United Nations peacekeeping missions. So often failures, the latest scandal involves Portuguese soldiers with the United Nations using military equipment as part of a network to smuggle diamonds, gold and drugs.
Fourth, it is imperative to make every effort to have dialogue between national leaders. The United Nations’ approach should be more directed to social and economic development and to changing society’s attitudes and behaviours, by encouraging dialogue between the conflicting parties and all those that may contribute to a solution, both inside and outside countries.

No matter how deep a divide may be, the power of dialogue and reconciliation may offer some hope.

Fifth, ASEAN should be the main channel through which the international community provides assistance to Myanmar. ASEAN has a key role and greater legitimacy when mediating the current crisis.

This is surely a test of its capacity to overcome regional problems, but I believe that constructive and inclusive dialogue can put Myanmar on the path to stability, which in turn will boost the wellbeing of the people.

Sixth, whether or not one wants to negotiate with the new Afghan Government, the population of Afghanistan is suffering. It is estimated that around 23 million people will face food insecurity, together with unemployment and overall fear.

Seventhly, the lengthy adversities in Afghanistan and Myanmar lead people to flee. They flee from hunger, disease, political persecution and extreme living conditions. The International Community, however, has grown increasingly selfish and less empathetic to the plight of refugees.

It forgets that violence in those countries is often enabled by arms deals backed by the global decision-makers, who are more interested in defending their economic interests than in defending peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Students,

Before I conclude I would like to say a few words on the major Climate Summit that ended last week in Glasgow. According to the United Nations, the imminent climate crisis may be humanity’s biggest challenge since World War Two.

I hope that the negotiations, held over two weeks, will bear fruit and that the roadmap that has been drafted will not be a new set of “good intentions”, that is not reflected in genuine actions and commitments. The subjects are complex, the costs are high and the relations between the key world powers are intricate.

Still, once again it is the poorest countries, which have contributed the least to
climate change, that now suffer the most. And this price is much higher!

For some ‘g7+’ countries, such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Haiti and even Timor-Leste, the sea level rise, torrential rains, catastrophic cyclones and drought-related hunger are not mere scientific data in pessimistic reports. They result in fatalities that are occurring now. There are islands in the Pacific in risk of disappearing.

This is no longer about running a marathon; it is about sprinting to the finish line. We must all do our part to overcome this planetary emergency.

Peace and safety are up to all of us!

We must, not for one moment, let the victims of conflict and violence fall into oblivion. We must not stop reflecting on our individual and/or collective responsibilities.

Most of all, we cannot allow those who can make a difference to remain passive.

At a time of uncertainty, I look to the words of Nelson Mandela: “We must support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair.”

If we continue as we are - if the UN continues as it does - to sidestep around humanitarian, human rights and democratic crises, without addressing the root causes of problems, there will be no long-term solutions to the causes that afflict our world.

Indeed, nothing is truly impossible if we put our collective intelligence at the service of humankind.

I want to remind again that your founder Shigenobu Okuma said that the ‘development of people’ will transform societies to a better world, when we can see there are mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão