

Rethink governance of globalisation

CAN there be a fair globalisation? A new report by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation points the way forward. The Commission was established by the International Labour Organisation two years ago. Its report *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for all* (ILO, Geneva, 2004) makes clear that we stand today at a historic crossroads. Do we follow the path to a safer, fair, ethical, inclusive and prosperous world for the majority of the people, or do we take the path that risks a slide into further spirals of political turbulence, conflicts and wars?

The 26 members of the Commission, of which I was one, were drawn from a cross-section of interests, persuasions and nationalities. The Commission itself was a microcosm of the very wide diversity of opinion, concerns and perspectives of the real world. We come from some of the wealthiest and poorest countries. We comprise trade unionists and corporate leaders, parliamentarians and presidents, ministers and policy makers, scholars and social activists.

Today, globalisation is a divisive issue. The global debate, from the World Social Forum in the teeming streets of Mumbai to the World Economic Forum in the idyllic Swiss mountain village of Davos, has reached what the report calls "a dialogue of the deaf."

In our Report, the commissioners have examined globalisation both in terms of facts as well as through the eyes of people. What we heard during more than two dozen dialogues in more than 20 countries — in both North and South — were a divergence of views and a convergence of voices. We neither condemn nor condone globalisation. Nor did many of the people we spoke to. The potential for globalisation is enormous. But so is the distance between rich and poor, the dissonance between the voices of the haves and the vulnerabilities of the have-nots. Too many people are being left behind. We believe their hopes must be realised, but only if globalisation is subjected to better govern-

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nance at all levels.

As the Commission's co-chairs, Presidents Tarja Halonen of Finland and Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania, write in their introduction to the report, "We see an increasing convergence of opinion throughout the world on the need for a fair and more inclusive globalisation." Too few share in its benefits. Too many have no voice in its design and no influence on its course.

The path of globalisation must shift from a focus on the bottom line to a greater focus on the poverty line. We need a new emphasis on the "social dimension of globalisation," that is, what people experience in their daily life and work, their aspirations, democratic participation, cultural identity, personal choice and material prosperity. We seek a process which is fair, and which gives all women and men the rights, opportunities and capabilities they need to exercise their

own choices for a decent life. And we are certain that a better world is possible.

We believe there must be an urgent move to more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation. We need to harness the potential of technology, markets, global knowledge and creativity of the human spirit and share it equally across all levels of society. We believe that our future and the future of our countries and our societies, requires a rethink of the governance of globalisation. Now is the time for leadership, to end the sterile debate and break the deadlock. Strong local and national institutions are essential if the state is to provide the social protection needed in an era of rapid change.

We believe in reinforcing the multilateral system. Global institutions must re-establish their focus on the interests of the people of the world. This means changes in goals, structures and power balances in international organisations, as well as fair rules in trade and finance. It means more democracy, transparency and accountability to people in the institutions of global governance.

We must all get involved. This will require follow-up by a wide range of people, in government, politics, business, labour and civil society. At the international level, we believe the report should be addressed in existing institutions that have the mandate to do so. Other issues will require new forums for dialogues, not only between people but among global institutions, to develop a common, coherent approach to policymaking. This is the key. In our diversity we found unity. From distant points and views, we have come to the conclusion that globalisation can and must change. As the report states: "Our experience has demonstrated the value and power of dialogue as an instrument for change. We are convinced that our experience can and should be replicated on a larger and wider scale." How large and how wide? The choice is ours.

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