

Friday, May 14, 2021

GLOBAL

How can humanity get back on a track to peaceful and sustainable development? Question looms large as G7 leaders prepare for crucial summit in U.K.

By DOUGLAS ROCHE MAY 13, 2021

As economic leaders in a world in turmoil, the G7 have a special responsibility to espouse an agenda that benefits all humanity, and Canada, when it attends the G7 Summit, should be a leader in promoting this new ethic.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured March 5, 2021, on the Hill. How can humanity get back on a track to peaceful and sustainable development? That question looms large as the G7 leaders prepare for a crucial summit June 11-13 in the U.K. The stated goal of these economically powerful nations is to help the world build back better from the pandemic and create a greener, more prosperous future.

The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade



EDMONTON—By now, the list of world crises is engraved on the minds of thinking people everywhere: global warming, skyrocketing inequalities, endless regional wars, famines, nuclear weapons standoff and, of course, the ravages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic reaching around the globe. How can humanity get back on a track to peaceful and sustainable development?

That question looms large as the G7 leaders prepare for a crucial summit June 11-13 in the U.K. The stated goal of these economically powerful nations is to help the world build back better from the pandemic and create a greener, more prosperous future.

Yes, but prosperity for whom? For the people already at the top of the economic ladder? For those who have grabbed the available vaccines? For those who have the strongest militaries?

The coronavirus has driven home a searing lesson: nobody is secure in the world until everyone is secure. We are all vulnerable to a virus whose variants rage out of control, just as we are all vulnerable to the catastrophic effects of climate change and nuclear warfare. We have reached a point in the development of humanity where the age-old idea of loving our neighbour has morphed into the practical need of an agenda for common security.

Today, all nations, rich and poor, peaceful and bellicose, socialist, and capitalist have to deal with the problems that sweep across borders and threaten humanity in every corner of the globe. As economic leaders in a world in turmoil, the G7 have a special responsibility to espouse an agenda that benefits all humanity.

What would a common security agenda look like? It would ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals, a 17-point UN program to cure the worst forms of poverty by 2030, would receive the trillions of dollars it needs from a consortium of governments and private business. It would dramatically widen the investment in green energy to drive down carbon emissions and keep the increase in global average temperatures well below 2 degrees C. It would establish a path to comprehensive negotiations for the irreversible and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons. It would shore up the political and civil rights of peoples everywhere in developing the core idea of the right to peace.

The agenda I have listed here is not out of reach. It is built on the progress the world has made since World War II ended and the United Nations came into

existence. But the high ideals of the UN Charter, expressed in 1945, have gone out of fashion, the victim of a witches' brew of cynicism, corruption, greed and a general lack of political fortitude.

I see the devastation of the coronavirus as a wake-up call to turn corrosive nationalism into a global uplift. But how? How to animate governments? This is a problem I have wrestled with for years. The only way forward that I can see is to adopt a global ethic to promote fairness and justice throughout the world.

When ethics is mentioned, many people think this involves religion, and the debate in the public square gets sidetracked into denominational activities. It is true that religion has a distinct role to play in advancing a social justice agenda, and this has been fortuitously taken up by the Parliament of the World's Religions, which many years ago charted a global ethic built around a striving for peace, justice, partnerships and truth. Pope Francis's outreach to humanity shows what religion is capable of.

But a global ethic is by no means the province of religion alone. The challenges to life on our planet demand public policies that are human-centred, not policies built on confrontation, the chief beneficiaries of which are the arms merchants. The issues affecting our planet demand a moral accounting expressed by all persons of good will, for we all stand on common ground and breathe the same air. This global ethic can lead to dialogue and reconciliation.

A former secretary-general of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, caught the wide scope of a global ethic perfectly when he said: "Over and above the moral contract with God, over and above the social contract concluded with men, we must now conclude an ethical and political contract with nature, with this Earth to which we owe our very existence and which gives us life."

We need a global ethic of cooperation to produce a common security agenda. And Canada, when it attends the G7 Summit, should be a leader in promoting this new ethic.

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