

MULTILATERALISM: THE BASIS OF A NEW WORLD ORDER

Aram I
Catholicos of Cilicia

The events of September 11th brought into question the conventional understanding of power. They demonstrated to the world that arrogance of power and vulnerability of power are intertwined. September 11th happened against the background of a world characterized by terrorism, religious extremism, ethnic conflict, neo-racism and neo-militarism, and it remains a tangible and painful reminder of a world that is in a state of disorientation, and disintegration.

After September 11th the world changed. Peoples, nations and governments felt and continue to feel insecure, threatened. This prevailing situation and war on Iraq point to the crucial need for a new way of conflict resolution. Unilateralism does not lead to security and peace. Unilateralism imposes its own agenda, pursues its own interests and leads to confrontation. The new way of conflict resolving and peace-making must be built on a code of conduct based on multilateralism. In fact, multilateralism redefines power relations and security. It creates a new model of relationships between countries and within a country, and among the actors of civil society. It affirms democracy and democratic processes, and sets the foundations for a more secure world. It does so for the following reasons:

1. **Multilateralism promotes democratic processes.** Any society that is not built on democratic values becomes a source of injustice and oppression. Real democracy ensures the active participation of all its constituent members and bodies. It also respects and encourages diversity. Democratic principles should respond to concrete realities and situations, the people of a given country should appropriate them, and the system must be transparent. Imposed democracy becomes a dictatorship.
2. **Multilateralism aims at consensus.** Multilateralism respects plurality and diversity, and aims at mutual understanding through consensus. Consensus building is neither a process of “giving in” or “giving up” of one’s vies or conviction. It is a responsible and open process of reaching a mutually agreed strategy. Hence, consensus is not a passive attitude, but an active engagement that does not create stagnation but dynamic interaction for the sake of peace and security.
3. **Multilateralism promotes common peace with justice for all.** Security is inseparable from justice and justice sustains real peace. This is no mere concept, but a lesson of history and a fact of life. Peace-building requires justice-generating policies. Any dichotomy or separation between justice and peace is unacceptable. Peace is not the absence of war; it is a state of being where the rights of all for security, freedom and dignified life are fully respected. Therefore, any threat to

the establishing of justice to all is a threat to peace for all. In unilateral relations, justice and peace are always conditioned and determined by narrow strategic interests. It is not hard to identify concrete examples. Multilateralism will, on the contrary, endeavor for a peace that is built on justice: a peace that embraces a broader political or geographical scope.

4. **Multilateralism enhances people's power.** In many societies the people's power is often sacrificed for state power, people's economy for national economy, people's security for national security. Multilateralism empowers the actors of civil society to protect people's interests. True democracy is based on people's interests, on people's participation. We cannot ignore the people in decision-making processes. In fact, recent popular demonstrations and different forms of protests were living indicators of people's rejection of unilateralism. Indeed, by saying "No" to war, the civil society and many nations and states said "No" to unilateralism. It is vitally important that the civil society become a proactive force.
5. **Multilateralism provides the tools for conflict resolution and nation-building.** When nations act unilaterally in a conflict situation, they often rely on force to attempt to resolve the conflict. But as we have seen again and again, force does not resolve conflict; it deepens the conflict and often causes religious and ethnic turmoil particularly in fragile regions. Multilateralism on the other hand, discourages the use of force; it provides tools for conflict resolution: public awareness, education, monitoring, mediation and diplomacy. It encourages nonviolent means of conflict resolution grounded in international law.
6. **Multilateralism strives for common security.** A common and comprehensive concept of security is based on the legitimate interests and concerns of all nations, and opposes national security doctrines. In a globalized world, no nation can pretend to be secure so long as the rights of others for security are neglected. Security for all must become the strategy of the new world. Common security cannot be achieved through military means, or by economic might. It can only be achieved by protecting the rights of all people and respecting their dignity. Multilateralism can ensure a more secure future to humanity.
7. **Multilateralism builds mutual trust.** Lack of trust is at the root of many conflicts. Trust-building is a crucial factor in conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence. Multilateralism generates trust and dialogue, and leads to mutual understanding. Unilateralism cannot build trust; rather, it causes mistrust and fear.

Multilateralism should become the cornerstone of a new world order. Multilateralism carries with it shared human values that are grounded in religious values and moral principles. These values and principles should transcend the narrow interpretation of religious beliefs and should challenge narrow definitions of national and strategic interests. Multilateralism by definition means listening to all actors in civil society, and acting on the basis of consensus. The new world order should uphold the judgments

passed by civil society, because the people are the holders of real power. Multilateralism means common responsibility and accountability by all. Multilateralism means reconciled nations and communities.

The United Nations is the multilateral instrument by which we secure world order and peace through global governance. It provides the global forum and the context where nations meet, talk, debate and decide. There can be no other alternative to the UN. It is a painful reality to recognize that the role of the UN is being questioned, its resolutions not being implemented and its recommendations not being taken seriously by its member states. The integrity of the UN must be protected, its credibility must be safeguarded, and its authority must be strengthened.

With the fall of Soviet communism, a new model of world governance based on international law would emerge, a model that would make an impact on the way decisions are made within such multilateral instruments like the United Nations. The politics of power relations of the past months has shown that this is not happening. The debate on Iraq in the UN was not a debate on war versus peace. It was essentially a debate on multilateralism versus unilateralism. I pray and hope that multilateralism will prevail as the new world order of power sharing and decision-making.

24-3-2003

Antelias, Lebanon

His Holiness Aram I is the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia and the Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.