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Trust, Integrity and Positive Change

Good morning and peace be with all of you. At the very outset let me add my word of welcome to our guests from Australia, the United Kingdom, Members of the Action for Life leadership programme, all the participants from the Corporate Sector, Education, Civil Society Organisations. A very warm welcome also to the Trainers who are conducting the afternoon sessions.

I would also like to express my special tribute and appreciation to Mr. Terry Netto who heads PICCSO- Performance Improvement Centre for Civil Society Organizations and his committee for all the work they have put in (to organize this conference) and for inviting me to share some ideas with all of you this morning.

Over the next twenty minutes or so I hope to touch on the following points:

Firstly to consider some of the current issues,
then to look at the relationship between global issues and the role of the individual;
consider issues relating to Trust and Integrity;
the 'how' and 'what can I do' - the process and the application
and finally the outcomes or positive change that results there from.

I am not a saint with flapping wings to come and speak on Trust, Integrity and Positive Change. I can assure you that my feet are squarely on the ground... I am a very ordinary person and like many of you as I sit and watch news over TV, get disturbed and at times even agitated. Let us consider some recent events -- the world as it is now reported, from a Mega/Macro perspective.

Firstly the carnage in Gaza. You have one of the world's most armed nations, Israel, attacking a barricaded people – 1.5m in the most densely populated place in the world. Three died in Israel following the tin-pot missiles fired at them while about 1350 Palestinians died and over 2500 injured not to mention the damage to infrastructure. What do we witness? A super power, the United States, exercising its veto on a ceasefire resolution and then abstaining again at the next vote in the UN. A listless Europe scream despite all the outrage expressed by people the world over.

Then we see bush fires in Victoria where over 200 people have died. Temperatures in the region of 40C. Floods in northern Australia and China. Heaviest snow falls over the last 30 years in London. Global environmental and climate issues. Earlier to this we had the global food crisis.

Then we have the ongoing financial meltdown, economic crisis and its domino effect across the world. One country Iceland has become bankrupt. Big Corporate names like AIG, Lehman Bros, Citibank, Bank of America, UBS Switzerland, Bank of Scotland, ING -- all in dire trouble and queuing up for bailouts.

We now have nations all over the world coming out with stimulus plans, spending packages amidst a fall in world trade, corporate closures, and unemployment on the rise. The spreading

of fear, insecurity, lack of trust and confidence in the system, in the establishment and even with Governments.

It was Albert Einstein who so rightly said, ‘The problems of today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking at which they were created. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if human kind is to survive.’

This is why I believe that the problems we face today cannot be solved by doing more and more of what we have been doing: spending more and more when the global debt level is already so high. What is it that we are aiming to stimulate? More greed without accountability!? Will Smith’s critiques of the modern consumer society comes to mind when he says, ‘You borrow money you do not have to buy things that you do not need to impress people whom you do not like.’ Are we going to be caught in this web?

I am reminded of a simple story I heard many years ago. A father was busy getting ready for office and his 10 year old daughter was seeking his attention. He saw a magazine on his table which had on its back cover the picture of the world. Hoping this will keep her occupied he tore the picture of the world map into a few pieces and asked her to put this together again. She returned very quickly with the map put together. How did you do this so quickly? She replied that behind the picture of the World Map was the picture of a human being. ‘I put that right and the world became all right.’

Simple but profound, for what this informs us in is that we can no more think in terms only of national interests or even regional interests. Only global responses will be adequate to meet the challenges we face be it climate change, the economic crisis, food crisis, AIDS or the environment. It is in this context that Albert Einstein was a far-sighted scientist.

We need to lift our hearts and minds and do some real soul searching if we are going to address the root causes of our present dilemma.

Yes the human being is significant and at the individual level there is much we can do to contribute to the development of this new thinking. Trust, Integrity, confidence, hope -- these cannot be legislated. These are qualities born from the heart of men and women and are integral to any move to find an answer.

Today a large number of multinational companies have economies bigger than nation states. But, what does the Corporate World hold for us and what do they inform us?

Ethics, morality, honesty, integrity are good topics for a sermon but rarely talked about in the Board Room and Stock Exchange floors. It is about Quarterly Company Reports – the movement of share prices.

Honesty, fairness, right and wrong – regarded as half-baked terms. How about competition, deceit, exploitation, expediency, self interest, bottom line priorities, pragmatism. Now you are being real!

When push comes to shove in the market place – Greed is the nature of the song, for with it you acquire power, status, and recognition. You have to play it that way and always be on the make, exploiting, using the system and getting the most from it because this is the way to the top of the corporate ladder. Expedient morality is how this is described.

Such mindsets form and inform many. Soon our lifestyle and belief system evolve along cynical lines. This unconsciously imprisons us mentally. Have you heard the parable about the boiled frog? Peter Senge in his book, 'The Fifth Discipline' says that if you place a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately try to scramble out. However, if you place the frog in room temperature and do not scare him the frog will remain. Now if you slowly heat the water something interesting happens. Even if the temperature rises to 70 or 80 degrees F the frog will do nothing. In fact he will show signs of even enjoying himself. As the temperature gradually increases the frog will become groggier and groggier until he is caught in the pot.

This is akin to the conditioning that imprisons our mindsets. Values that give vitality to our lives and meaning to our endeavours become numbed by reality.

Having said this, I do believe that Trust, Integrity and Positive Change could provide us with deeper thinking, insights and responses that may be critical for this time and age. This is where you and I can make a difference.

What do we mean by Trust? Fundamentally trust is about personal relationships: between parents, siblings, wife, children, colleagues and contemporaries. The spine of trust is honesty and this is what breeds greater trust. Through our conduct and behavior -- our walking the talk trust gets capitalized. We can all appreciate what we mean when we say someone is trustworthy. Trusting people and the system and trust building becomes more critical if we are going to deal with the fear and insecurity that is increasingly prevalent globally today.

Integrity, on the other hand, provides the environment where trust flourishes. It is about principles and practices about both my character and my competence. It is about being a congruent person in word and deed in the home, the office and with everyone whom I interact on a daily basis. Integrity is the spine of character.

The problems of today are not caused by the illiterate and the poor, the uneducated and the hungry. Enron was headed by a Harvard Business School Graduate. We have well-informed and learned minds who know how to exploit the system, people with high levels of knowledge -- but they go home and beat up their wives. These are individuals whose learning has had little effect on their overall education. Perhaps good with results, achievements and even skills but poor on conduct, behaviour and relationships.

Perhaps we are also learning mindlessly like the Mullah Nasruddin in this Sufi story. Mullah Nasruddin used to visit a saint everyday to seek knowledge, though the saint was silent and did not say anything. One day Nasruddin asked him, 'I have been coming to you again and again, expecting that you will say something, and you have said nothing. And unless you say I cannot understand. So just give me a message for my life, a direction along which I can move.'

So the Sufi said, '*Neki kar, Kuyen may dal*: Do good and throw it in the well.' This is one of the oldest Sufi sayings. It means, 'Do good and forget it immediately; don't think that you have done good.' So the next day Mullah Nasruddin helped old women cross the road and then pushed her into a well!

This begs the question, ‘What has our learning done to do our education?’ It is only when we learn to learn that we continue our exploration and appreciate the finer elements of life.

We have all read about Madoff the Jewish American Investment Banker who made off with US\$ 50 Billion. Then we read about Satyam, one of India’s leading computer firms, where the Chairman has overstated US\$ 10 billion in assets. The latest is Stanford who has been caught for massive fraud. We have our local versions (in Malaysia): Transmile, the annual Auditors Report, the cronyism that has been so much part of our Corporate and Political Culture epitomized by the nexus between money and politics. We see this all over the world – in China, the milk scandal.

The Corporate reality that we described earlier highlights standards we use to measure others and thus even unconsciously live by ourselves – all relating to the worldly index namely possessions, social status, titles, money, and intellect. Some describe these are the values of expedient morality.

Character and conduct they say is a make or break ingredient that either provides wholeness and uniqueness to life or otherwise. Lack of character is a deficiency disease. Character Immune Deficiency.

The late Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia’s first Prime Minister when welcoming in 1970 an IofC group then known as MRA said, ‘MRA puts into practice the universal truths expressed in the Holy Koran, “God changes what is in a nation when the people themselves begin to change”.’

When we let reality and the market place form us, influence our thinking, box us in and shape our values than we loose clarity. The power of our inner sense and the dictates of our conscience are then rationalised at the altar of money, power and status. ‘It is OK, Everybody does it’, then becomes the bar at which choices and decisions are made.

It is all very well to talk about trust and integrity. The challenge lies in how do we discover greater depth and understanding and become more committed to these values beyond mere holding these as beliefs. ‘How do I do this’, and ‘what can I do’ are two very significant questions that are relevant to all of us.

‘How’ talks about the process and ‘what I can do’ seeks to appreciate the application of this process to our thinking and living. Both are important and necessary. Positive change is the final outcome.

This is where Social Science intersects with Management. The objective measurement of subjective issues like performance, attitudes, vision, mission, aptitude, motivation etc have helped individuals and organizations because management realizes that only that which can be measured can be improved. So a lot of subjective issues are objectively measured. What can be measured can be improved. Performance audits and the Balance Scorecard approach attempts to do this with specific management evaluation objectives in mind.

In a similar way, IofC has long pioneered an objective approach to discovery, clarification and the ownership of values at the personal level. Personal change outlines such a process of discovery and ownership. Let me stress the following salient points in the process.

- It means starting with oneself – self discovery.
- It means relating one's life to Absolute Moral Standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love – a measureable process. Absolute in the sense of the highest that you understand.
- Accepting silence and reflection, popularly referred to as a Quiet Time, as the basis of the process where the assessor is one's conscience and the assessed is you yourself.
- The process involves capturing in writing one's realizations and discoveries, acting on these realizations provides the basis for action and change. This links values with behaviour and as this develops seamlessly we develop character. As a result one develops convictions and a sense of commitment. Experiencing these new realizations forms us, informs us and transforms us

It is said we learn 10% from what we read, 15% from what we hear and 80% from what we experience. Countless people the world over of different faiths, classes, colour, communities and nationalities have engaged in this objective process. It is their experience that has given them hope in their lives for the future.

Islamic scholar and human rights campaigner Dr Chandra Muzaffar addressing an IofC Consultations said: 'We have to find new ways of bringing values into the mainstream. How can we convince the captains of industry that ethics have to be central? How can we convince the politician that principles count? How can culture obsessed with immediate gratification show the importance of values? This is the strength of Initiatives of Change. You link the transcendent with values in a very universal way without going through the mediation of a particular religious tradition or culture.'

What have been some of the outcomes the positive change as a result of this objective discovery with values?

Broken relationships have been healed,
 Taxes hidden have been paid,
 Money borrowed permanently has been returned,
 Library books have been returned,
 Individuals have got honest with their parents, spouses, siblings,
 Forgiveness has been sought and an answer to corruption has been forged.
 Improved Industrial Relations

These have then led to social action resulting in
 Clean election campaigns,
 Reconciliation and justice,
 Bridging of the divide between communities
 Family unity
 Corporate accountability

Speaking for myself this experiment of objectively evaluating my life in relation to these absolute moral standards helped me. I decided to return money to the Railways in Mumbai for travelling on the trains without tickets, getting honest with my parents, with the officials for changing money in the black market, of reconciling with a relative I hated. These

experiences injected a deeper understanding of values. These were no more mere beliefs but providing meaning and empowering me in all that I have since undertaken.

Great thinkers inspired by the great traditions of humankind have over time always stressed that to find what is good in life and what is real and true we must turn our attention within. It was Tao Te Ching way back in 600 BC who said, 'He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.'

The Prophet Mohamed said, 'Whoever knows himself knows the Lord.'

St Augustine who said, 'Go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man.'

Socrates who held that, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' The examined life, on the other hand, promises greater option and possibilities.

The Delphic Oracle: 'Know thyself and thou shall know God and the Universe.'

The world will need to agree on a new global financial architecture and basis if we are going to consider long term economic stability just as the antiquated United Nations has to be reformed to meet the challenges of today's reality. A greater sense of democracy and equity in the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO are other imperatives.

How are we going to create a global economy that recognises interdependency and interconnectedness as guiding principles? For this to be realized we have to structure a global system that is very different from the present one. In order to grow ourselves we must help other countries also to enjoy the fruits of growth. Reciprocity and restraint, the balance between greed and need, will be the needed motivation that will add new dimensions to the sense of free enterprise.

The Human Genome Project has confirmed that 99.9% of all human genes are the same. The human species has now to grow mentally and accept that humanity is one and that if we work in the best interest of humanity as a whole we will be on the right side. It is thinking at such levels and context that hold the promise for the future. Let me end with a quote from Jalaluddin Rumi, a universal mystic and philosopher who said, 'The lamps are different, but the light is the same: it comes from beyond.'

I pray that we will all get a glimpse of this light in the next days and those who opt for growth in their own lives and faith will allow this light to shine brighter in all their undertakings.

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