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Speaking Notes

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It is said that we live in the Information Age. That with this information we are fast becoming Knowledge Societies. This, for me, is all relative.

At each stage of man's evolution into settled societies, urban, industrial and mechanized, information has been central to his survival and progress.

What is different today is the quantum leap in the technology of science, its tools, its processing capacity and its application to linking disparate societies, compressing time and distance. We are now in the instant phase of this information age. No wonder that for some, it is information overload. There is the need for reliable filters, valves, governors, in mechanical terms. The means for control and escape are, at one and the same time, ever greater.

In short hand, while the earlier periods of linking and inter-relatedness were described as 'internationalisation', the contemporary situation goes under the rubric of 'globalisation'.

Now, we have information that has been 'commodified' ('commoditized', if you prefer, with reference to digitized information). Data, symbols, formulae, words are now commodities to be collected, processed, stored and traded on 'markets'. Accompanying this shift has been the increased monopoly/oligopoly power exerted by government-sanctioned rights and market concentration, over this new discrete property, information.

In this setting, 'markets' while neither new nor novel, have become the centerpiece for integrating economies and societies. Cultural practices occupy the same territorial space, competing for legitimacy. Information economics has morphed into a distinct field of economics (Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, Globalization and its Discontents), and the combined audio-visual transmission of ideas through sound and imagery have acculturated societies to the dominant and domineering economy and culture of our times. Here, Hollywood has reigned unchallenged until recent times. As Howard Suber, *The Power of Film* recounts the success of the film as the dominant art form of the 20th century, and its power over the lives of people in many parts of the world. He writes, "the dominant norm for films is defined by the dominant audience and its culture".

So technology from being the tool treated at arms length to man's creative capacities now has become entwined. So much so, that the 'scientific mind' is fast becoming the new god of creation, with DNA and other microbiological breakthroughs as the instruments. Moreover, the 'market' has usurped the power of the supernatural (Lewis Lapham, *The Agony of Mammon*, the media man's sardonic wit, who floats the notion that those who question its omniscience belong to weird religious sects). He was reporting on the World Economic Forum of Winter 1998, convened in the alpine 'magic mountain' of Davos.

This sets the stage for one hurried version of the man-made 'challenges/threats/crises' so often analysed by policy intellectuals. These may be grouped under the headings - political (contrapuntal national forces of privilege and poverty), geo-strategic (superpower hubris and extraterritorial overstretch), or geo-physical (global warming and its demographic impacts).

For the successful, it is the need for more democracy, for markets to be unfettered so that invisible hands may work their magic.

At this 7th Doha Forum, the terms, Democracy, Development and Free Trade have been distinguished one from the other, Democracy, intrinsic to man's nature and his human rights; Development guaranteed as civil rights in societal settings; and Free Trade, the rallying cry for special interests seeking markets.

It was here in Doha in 2001, that the Director General Paschal Lamy is famously reported as rallying Ministers to launch an ambitious opening of markets, with the cry, '(Free) trade is an instrument of peace'. Five years later the negotiations on the Agenda for development through trade are becalmed. Peace prevails.

These terms mask important and significant complexities. No society connected and interdependent as they are today has the luxury of ignoring either of the three as organizing frameworks for domestic, regional and international stability. Stable relationships are more likely to sooth the free-floating anxieties that float unhindered across boundaries. Security, with its many 'insecurities', for the safety of life, limb and property, is one of these public goods that are in great demand and short supply.

Democracy and open markets can play catalytic functions, but the terms on which they are effected must be on ironclad principles and rooted in universal values of justice that balances rights with responsibilities, with due regard to truth.

What then can be said amidst the welter of words and images that contend for our attention, the attention of the 'opinions' of publics as much as the networked politicians/policy intellectuals, transnational business, media and newly-arrived academic and other non-governmental actors.

I suggest the following for consideration:

1. There seems to be a paucity of coherent political ideas with which to mobilize public opinion. From the 'End of Ideology' and the exhaustion of political ideas in the 1960s (the American political scientist Daniel Bell), to the 'End of History' and the supremacy of liberal capitalist politico-economy (the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama), we are now stranded on the gales of 'endism', blown hither and thither with no safe harbour in sight. Lapham reports Klaus Schwab of the Davos as considering 'the corporate oligarchy marooned in a vacuum'. Hence the meretricious war on an abstraction, 'war on terror', or the mystical explanation of economic configurations by the catch-all term, 'globalisation'. Politics and economics fuse. We are now into the early stages of an 'ideology of information' as distinct from the 'philosophy of information'. Rich and powerful governments thus spend billions in spreading the 'word', by public diplomacy and via the traditional and electronic media. What is the 'word'? In the political sphere, 'democracy'. In the economic sphere, 'market'. Hence the apt *descriptif*, 'developed market economies'. These are by definition democracies, with functioning national and regional market-based institutions for inter-mediating economic exchange (so-called 'Free Trade'), including in developing the latest in military technologies.
2. The central question that so-called 'developing countries' have been posing for decades is this. **How is the economy to be organized so that it too can be described as developed?** More often than not the question omitted, until more recently, to include a place for 'democratic' and 'market'. In explicitly including these in the question, it should not be misunderstood to mean that the developing country is about to fashion itself to become a copy of any one or the other developed market economy country

(DMEC). Some developing countries are at the stage if reluctant to run up the flag. Economic industrialization and high consumption patterns do not a developed country make. Thus, some highly industrialized economies are not yet at the stage. This brings us then to the region represented by the countries grouped together in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). As an outside observer, the following is what one understands in the rapidly unfolding drama of democracy, development and market integration:

- The starting point is an enlightened leadership open to the rest of the world, the building of institutions and networks to leverage its comparative advantages of a small and homogeneous population. On the political front, the project democracy is underway, eschewing the big-bang to the gradual and incremental approach, and consolidating gains from experience. Building bridges of familiarity are in the very early stages with respect to those countries beyond the historical connections of developed country political Mandates, energy extraction, financial intermediation and international trade. The purchase of foreign expertise and their facilitating networks is a large part of the processes at work. Their value no doubt will be multiplied when indigenous institutions develop the sinews to take the countries to the next levels with the optimum use of its enhanced national social capital. There are several such leading institutions in the region and in Doha, the innovative concept and reality of its Education City and the *in situ* academies of higher learning from the English-speaking world are some illustrations of the strategies at play.
- Perhaps the most noteworthy is the intuitive recognition of the need for an audio-visual medium to capture and transmit the political information from a national and cultural perspective. Ten years of Al Jazeera has placed it in the forefront as a professional and respected international newsgathering and disseminating medium, complementing the other long-established vehicles aimed at influencing opinion around the world. The media, especially national media is an indispensable institution for democratic discourse. Its power is multiplied when it gives access to the voices of the majority, those at the margins of the market or power, and is not an instrument largely at the convenience of purchasing power and privilege. Competition in the marketplace of ideas and their expression serves not only the national interest but also the interest of an evolving democratic international community.
- Regional integration and its institutions for cooperation compound national endowments through economies of scale and division of labour. As an important part of a larger religious and cultural group, which has been central to the civilisation of today, the GCC's strategic endowments calls them to be more proactive in responding to the challenges/crises confronting the wider region and the international community. This approach of open regionalism with its neighbours and the wider trading community allows for expanding global welfare and comity. The past decades have seen a strengthening the region's institutional capacities for managing social and economic capital. There would seem to be some emphasis on creative industries and cultural goods; developing its historical research capacity, its archival base, and most importantly extending its diplomatic outreach programmes in these areas, beyond the present limited range of countries. This will enable them to share and shape perceptions and take joint action of mutual interest to the parties not traditionally considered power brokers

in multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations Security Council. The not so subtle and rapidly expanding role of the Security Council without democratic sanction threatens to undermine further customary international law and practice. In that forum, with little check and balance, regional and even national security issues are being appropriated and sanctioned under the writ of international law by a self-referentially ascribed 'international community' that is lacking robust democratic and accountable norms and practices. Impunity and immunity flourish and put to shame the claims of democracy. Thus is recklessness rewarded, fundamental values evolved over millennia flouted, and decency is put to the rack. If not braked now, the world community of nations and its citizens run the risk of a certain kind of tyranny and a populist reaction.

3. The term 'reform' is the familiar companion to 'democratic, macro-economic, market and trade' concepts. These reforms usually are sold as 'painful' but necessary. Suffer today, tomorrow will be better. The problem is, however, that tomorrow always seems to be the day after, never today. Moreover, the pain seems to bear disproportionately on the least able to adjust. Hence, 'reform' is now a term of ill repute or a cliché stripped of meaning and context. Part of the answer to the question of how to transition to the status of developed, is to put back meaning to words used, and especially to the term 'reform'. The concepts require compatible national and regional contexts within which to convey meaning, and temper the ideological trappings of policy-making soothsayers. The building of networks of academies and non-governmental groups, especially Foundations in the developing countries would be a constructive addition to the tens of thousands of such institutions and staff in the developed countries. Originating there, their perspectives now gird the communities of global policy-making, set the agenda, allocate resources of time and capital, and unfortunately crowd out the legitimate voices and perspectives of the majority. This is a priority in helping shape another kind of international community. The endeavour is urgent.
4. The government of Qatar has demonstrated its recognition of the importance of practical autochthonous reform at the national and regional levels, and has embarked on the challenging path of an inclusive regional and international community. One that seeks cooperation instead of confrontation and reaches out across continental and geo-political divides to create order through justice and security through peace. Its role in launching the WTO Development Agenda, the venue for the review of the Monterrey Consensus in 2008, the hosting of the South Summit of Developing Countries, and its many international Conferences on Democracy, Politics and Religion are evidence of this commitment. To the extent that these are not discrete and unrelated events, they may serve to keep the theme, the dignity of man, as the central theme in the narrative of civilization of reason and faith.

Closing remarks: Thank the organizers for the opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

[End of Notes]