

Caux Round Table – Statement of Concern: The Continuing Crisis

Natural disasters can bring out the best in us as concern for the victims and a humble and moral sense of “There, but for the grace of God, go I” takes over our inclination for positive action.

To date, some \$US 3 billion has been quickly raised to help care for the stunned victims of the Tsunami waves that crashed against low-lying shores of the Indian Ocean just the other week. Governments rushed to be of assistance. Moved by criticism over his initial response to the tragedy, United States President George Bush has now asked his two predecessors as President to lead major fundraising efforts in support of the Tsunami victims. This is an unprecedented action by a US chief executive.

While we applaud this outpouring of charity and principled concern for others injured far away from the familiar daily circuits of our lives, our compassion for those less fortunate and far away must be sustained into the future. Stepping up to meet the crisis at hand is only the first step in a needed long-term program of action and assistance.

Long after these Tsunami victims have been buried and mourned and others restored to health and productivity, still others will continue to die around the world from poverty and in poverty – a non-natural disaster.

They will suffer and die from malnutrition, bad water, lack of medicine, poor shelter, disease, and lack of opportunity. They and their families will experience higher levels of infant mortality and will live, in general, shorter lives than do those who live in wealth. This much is certain for several billion people for the foreseeable future.

When sudden shocks of natural disasters move our hearts and open our wallets, why are we less moved to act in the face of continuous, pervasive conditions of poverty? Is it that rescue and relief from natural disasters seem practical achievements while aspirations to address systemic poverty are more likely to engender a sense of futility and resignation only?

For the first time in human history, there is money enough in the world – liquid assets even – to capitalize every man, woman and child with private investment to start a small business. McKinsey & Co. strategists estimated that in 2000 some \$US 79 trillion was available in the private capital markets of the world for investment in new enterprise.

But fundamentally all of this money sits in islands of finance like New York, London, Tokyo, Geneva, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc., for use in the major industrial nations of the world.

The rich do get richer and the poor still stay poor.

UK Chancellor Gordon Brown is trying to persuade wealthy governments to give more in official aid to poor countries – a new global Marshall Plan of \$US 50 billion annually. He deserves our support.

Since we responded so effectively to this disaster, some \$US 3 billion has been raised within two weeks – at a donation rate of \$50 billion a year.

Continuing delay by humanity’s great institutions of government and finance to cooperate in directing private capital to poor countries is a test of leadership on the part of those of us who participate in the governance of those institutions. Brown’s initiative is to be considered by the G8 during the UK’s presidency between now and July. These governments must rise to the challenge and by their actions match the concern and solidarity shown by the people of the world these last two weeks.

The Caux Round Table has provided the necessary guidelines for institutional outreach to people living in poverty in its ethical Principles for Business and Principles for Governments. (See Caux Round Table website at: www.cauxroundtable.org)

The highest and best use of our compassion after the Tsunami disaster in South and Southeast Asia is to make a commitment to moving resources through responsible institutional change from the wealthy to the poor.

Raising the world’s living standards will improve the environment for all, reduce disease, increase productivity, settle political conflicts, and improve the moral fabric of humanity – no small accomplishments.

We of the CRT will give our strong support to all sensible plans to combat poverty in the developing world.