I will be only able to present to you some ideas about the impact of September 11 on the relations between Germany and the Islamic World. We all agree remembering September 11 a year ago that these terrible events in New York and Washington came as a shock to all of us. These terrorist attacks, which have caused the loss of so many lives, were worldwide condemned, also by the overwhelming majority of the Islamic world. At the same time, a coalition in solidarity with the United States of America has been formed and it was absolutely clear for everybody that we have to combat terrorism and extremists’ violence with all possible determination and means. This fight against international terrorism as represented by al-Qaeda and other movements is not over and will probably continue for many years. But I do not want to speak about this specific topic and its implications on the relations between Germany and the Middle East. The terrible events of September 11 also showed us that apparently most of us were blind to see the development of dangerous trends and reactions especially in the Muslim
communities and it was shocking for us in Germany to find out that the terrorist leaders prepared their attacks living and studying here in our country. Many people ask themselves, as Bernard Lewis put the questions what went wrong? And still we are searching for answers and explanations. We are trying to find in our analysis the underlying reasons for these developments. In the aftermath of these events, the interest in the Islamic world and in Islam as a religion and a political system has grown considerably. Many books have been written, many discussions, workshops and seminars dealt with the issue; one thing became clear: we have to engage ourselves more in the process of analysis and dialogue with the Islamic world but also with the Muslim communities existing within our societies in Europe.

The German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer decided that parallel to new structures, which have been established to combat terrorism, a task force “Islam and Dialogue with Islam” should be established within the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and appointed me as Commissioner for Dialogue with the Islamic world. Dialogue of civilisations. Furthermore, a number of specialists have been recruited to be attached to our Embassies abroad. We all are focusing on improving the dialogue with the Islamic world.

From my ample and long standing experience, especially with the Arab World, I am convinced that we have to do more in order to breach the growing gap between the western civilization and the Islamic world. We have to analyse the reasons for growing hatred and violence and animosity among the civilizations of the world. Why is it that radical fundamentalists or Islamic groups are winning more adherences especially among the frustrated young population of the Islamic world? Why is it that the values of the western world
are loosing ground and fading away in the eyes of many Muslim citizens?

In the Arab World especially the ongoing violence in the Palestinian territory and the very dramatic clashes between the Israeli defence forces and the Palestinians, the growing number of suicide bombers definitely has left deep negative impact in the public opinion. The war in Afghanistan against the Taleban and al-Qaeda and the many civilian casualties caused by it and the emerging conflict with Iraq have further deepened the gap between the West under the leadership of the USA and the Islamic World. Both sides feel threatened and being victimized. In the media, negative images are omnipresent. The important point is not whether the impressions created by the coverage of CNN or Arab satellite TV-channels are correct. It is important what has been projected into the view and the minds of many millions or hundred of millions of Muslims worldwide. For many Muslims, maybe for a majority in the Muslim world, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the US policies against Iraq, have become a proof that a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West is in the process.

The impression that the United States has more sympathy with the Israeli standpoint has deeply embittered and disappointed many Arabs and other Muslims around the world. Many times I have been sarcastically or ironically asked whether the life of a Palestinian Arab is so much less worth than the life of an Israeli, whether Human Rights are only valid for members for the western societies and are only used as an instrument of diplomacy against other nations and not in favour for them. Many students in the Arab world who have been very open to the values of the western world, who were
dreaming of democracy and freedom and human rights have finally changed their minds and in an act of solidarity taken the side of the Palestinian cause.

Our response to this development must be an intensive dialogue among civilizations on all levels, commitment to the peaceful resolution of differences and to mutual tolerance and mutual respect. Here I have the feeling that there is a big difference between the American and the European perceptions. Europe is turning away from power and moving to a world of perpetual peace in which the rule of law and justice are the highest values. The United States is less patient with diplomacy. Americans generally see the world divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies while we in Europe see a more complex picture and believe in transnational negotiations and cooperation as well as peaceful resolution of conflicts on the basis of law. I personally think if we would give the rule of law and the principle of justice a more prominent role in international relations, this would help tremendously in the preservation of peace and stability.

I am sure that we can agree on the necessity of a serious dialogue between the Western and the Islamic World in order to reduce the negative images existing on both sides and create a basis of confidence out of which we could find a peaceful solution of the many existing conflicts. Yes, we have to fight terrorism in all its structures with outmost determination but also we have to intensify the dialogue among civilizations in order to avoid a fundamental clash. Our response will decide whether we will live in a world of escalating cultural and ethnic conflict or in a world in which different civilizations will coexist and cooperate peacefully. The frightening
scenario of escalating conflict in the world of almost 7 billion people should be strong and sensitive enough for all of us to foster understanding and cooperation. As Minister Fischer put it: We need a culture of tolerance. This tolerance requires that we acquire more knowledge and understanding of the other. We have to agree on a common understanding of those values that will guide us through the 21st century. I know that this is a very ambitious goal indeed. We have to start work at home in our own societies and try to develop and practice tolerance vis-à-vis other communities in our countries. Only on a solid basis of mutually respected values and legal norms, we will have real interactions. And we should be clear that this requires respect of the religion, the culture and the civilization of all sides. We don’t want to preach and teach our values and philosophy as the only way to success and peaceful coexistence and cooperation. But there must be a clear will to listen and to discuss all options. Otherwise only monologue will be possible. Within the dialogue we have to find out whether we really share the same understanding of the importance of individual liberty and other fundamental rights, which includes the rights and role of the woman and whether the right of freedom of expression of opinion is accepted. In Europe, Muslims certainly suffer from isolation and social exclusion but they are free to exert their faith. In many Islamic countries, however, the freedom of Christians to practice their religion is still severely limited. Tolerance is not a one-way traffic but must be a valid principal for both sides.

In many societies of the Islamic world, which unfortunately do not have democratically legitimised governments or positive human
rights records, there are groups of people who are longing for an improvement of their situation.

One thing has also become clear over the last years: we can only succeed in this dialogue with partners who have adopted the principle of dialogue in their own society. So whatever we can do to encourage ways of developing dialogue and pluralism within Muslim societies should be done. We should support the development of vibrant civil societies, help non-governmental organizations to improve their work and give support to all groups who struggle for the freedom of expression.

My impression from many years in the Islamic World is that the young people in these countries basically have the same dreams, which young people in our countries have. They would like to lead a life of freedom, dignity and economic prosperity, free of depression and violence. So it is the interest of the great majority of the population in the Islamic World if we start a dialogue not only with the ruling elites but with those groups and elites who engage in the very idea of dialogue and peaceful development. If we want to succeed in overcoming some of the frustrations existing in the Islamic world and which in many ways contribute to violence, then we have to assist those societies and countries to combat poverty, raise the standard of education and economic welfare and provide more freedom.

Let us not forget that in the Arab world, pride and the sense of personal honour play a much more important role than in our societies of today, something which we should be able to understand easily by looking to the situation we had in the early 19th century.
There is also a strong longing for justice and at the same time a widespread sentiment of being wronged, of suffering injustice from the hands of the West. We should try to be honest and work hard not to give cause for accusing us of applying double standards in our dealings with the Islamic world. It is only by dialogue among equal partners, by showing respect for cultural differences that we will be able to overcome gradually the very negative feelings, which have had an enormous boost during the last 12 months.

I also agree that there are many question marks that remain. Is the Islamic world prepared to contribute to this joint effort? Is there a readiness to seriously discuss the tensions and contradictions that arise from a strict interpretation of the Shariah, on the one hand, and universal human rights, as we understand them, on the other? How can we bring about a broad consensus to condemn unambiguously any religious or pseudo-religious justification of terror against innocent civilians? Are our partners in dialogue ready to acknowledge that there are manifold reasons for the frustration running high among Islamic peoples that cannot be attributed to the Palestinian problem or Western imperialism.

We Europeans are direct neighbours to the Middle East and have many links to the Islamic World. We see that our neighbours' complicated problems and they are often directly linked to our security and relations with them. Therefore, we have to engage in political cooperation with the Muslim World. Europe's strategic culture today places less value in power and military strength and believes more in the value of soft power tools such as economics, trade, cultural relations, education, cooperation and dialogue.
The lessons to be drawn from the tragic events of September 11 are manifold: The globalised world of the 21st century is facing many challenges and problems, which we can only master together in a non-violent way. We are offering to intensify dialogue and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance. We have to be frank, open and self-critical on all sides and put our relations on a more honest basis and define our respective interests. There may be different ways to achieve the common goal: to live in peace with the people of the Muslim World and our Muslim neighbours in our own countries. But we have to try to move forward!
THE ROLE OF INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR GLOBAL PEACE

I. Introduction

Dialogue is now being universally accepted as an instrument of peace. For, it is being felt that dialogue promotes understanding and understanding promotes peace. However, for the purposes of conflict resolution, dialogue must be done with an open and unbiased mind. At this point, I am reminded of an Arab story, which runs thus:

An Arab judge was resting in his home when a Muslim came to him and complained against a Jew who apparently insulted him. The judge listened carefully to him and said "yes, you are right; he should not have done it to you". After the Arab Muslim had left, the Jew against whom the complaint had been made appeared in the home of the judge and sought his interview. The Jew narrated his version of the story and pleaded to the judge that it is the Muslim who had insulted him. The judge again listened patiently to the Jew and said "you are right; he should not have done it to you". After the Jew had left, the wife of the judge who had been listening to all the dialogues from behind the curtain appeared before the judge and said "my dear husband, I hear that you are a wise judge; but I don't understand how can two people who are complaining against each other be right at the same time." The judge paused for a while and said, "My dear
wife, I think you are also right”. In the present day world, mankind is
torn by a number of conflicts; all the parties in the conflicts think
they are right. In order that these conflicts are resolved through
dialogues, the parties must have a faith in dialogues, which must,
however, be based on the understanding of the core problems.

2. Faith in Dialogues

The faith in dialogues is basically an expression of the
conviction that there is hardly a problem in the world, which cannot
be resolved by dialogues. It is true that dialogues can fail and have,
in fact, failed on many occasions. But these must continue with the
hope that hearts can change with the change of generations. In order
that faith in dialogues is bolstered, the latter must be based on a
number of factors, which can be enumerated for illustrative purposes.

(a) Cessation of Hostilities and the Understanding of the
Root Cause of the Problem: My personal faith in this factor of
dialogue has increased manifold as I have discussed some global
problems with citizens of many countries. I feel tempted here to
recount a personal interaction with a Jewish scientist who sat by me
at a dinner at Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the Conference of the
Third World Academy of Sciences. We started chatting and
eventually the issue of Palestine came up. I said to him that it is
indeed a great irony that two peoples whose Faiths are so close
should be fighting with each other and squandering valuable
resources. He agreed with me. I further told him that a wrong notion
exists in the minds of many who believe that the Arabs opposed the
settling of the Jews in Israel from the very beginning. The truth is,
however, different and in this connection I narrated to him a true
story which I heard from the late Lord Noel Becker, the first Secretary General of the League of Nations: Lord Noel Becker went to Arabia and asked King Abdul Aziz "what is your opinion about having the Jews close to you". The reply was "what are you saying? The Jews are so advanced in knowledge that if they live close to us, we are bound to benefit from them". The benefit, however, did not come. Instead, a Palestinian refugee problem of an unprecedented dimension appeared. This problem should have been solved long ago, much to the benefits of the peoples of the same Abrahamic Faiths. After this long dialogue, the Jewish gentleman replied "if there were more understanding people like you and me, the problem would have been solved by now". I prayed to my Lord that this understanding increases.

(b) Avoidance of Double Standard: In order that dialogues succeed, double standard must be avoided at all costs. The painful observation is that a superpower calls something wrong when it happens to the superpower itself but do not call it wrong, when it happens to other peoples of the world. Such behaviors, which have been rampant during many current world affairs, must be avoided in order to increase the credibility of the parties involved in a dialogue.

(c) Highlighting Commonalities rather than Differences: In proceeding towards an inter-cultural dialogue, it must be assumed that under identical conditions, members of the human family behave in identical fashions. It is, therefore, rather artificial to differentiate between "us" and "them" in terms of behavioral patterns. Even in the issue of violence and reprisal, the religious stands of the present Muslim and Christian Faiths are supportive of each other. The Islamic Faith demands that people who are terrorists cannot be
Muslims and people who are Muslims cannot be terrorists. Islam and terrorism are incompatible; in fact, there is no place for terrorism in Islam. In the words of the Holy Quran "that any one kills a person...it would be as if he killed all the people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the lives of all people" (5:32). This is the true spirit of Islam. This is also the spirit of other religions including Christianity. The political dimension of combat against terrorism cannot ignore this point. In fact, a strategy against terrorism must build on this incontrovertible fact that unite us than other unimportant issues that divide nations. The most reverend George Augustus Stallings, Jr., D. D., in his speech delivered at the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace (October 21, 2001), remarked while referring to the 9/11 tragic events, "The solution to our current predicament is not by responding with swift and unmeasured military prowess anchored in imprudent retaliation. The solution lies within the moral resolve of nations and their people willing to rise above demonic influences and partisan agenda. In times like these, few of us seek solace or find consolation in the Biblical admonition: "Beloved do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath for it is written,’ Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" Romans 12:19.

(d) Taking Stock of the Situation: While a dialogue is initiated amongst civilizations aimed at promoting harmony, a stock must be taken of the situation. For example, the tragedy of 9/11 which has been most strongly denounced by people all over the people has given people of all Faiths a new political challenge to look inside themselves and answer the questions: Who are the terrorists? Where are the terrorists? How do we root out the terrorists in such a way
that we do not stop to the level of becoming the fanatics we deplore? In order that anti-terrorism activities do not assume the character of terrorism itself, mankind today faces a great challenge of defining what is terrorism or more importantly what is not terrorism. Today, three fourths of all humanity live in a state of degradation and are known as "Les Miserables". If these hopeless and hapless people want to have a dialogue with their more fortunate brethren in order to live in freedom and in dignity, and clamour for basic human rights as envisaged in UN charter or if they raise their voices for a change of their destiny, will that be termed as terrorism or will the dialogue be untenable?

(e) Use of the Media in Strengthening the Dialogues between Different Cultures: The Media should play the role of uniting different sections of mankind as part of one single universal brotherhood (as emphasised in the Holy Quran: Wa Kananasu Ummataao Wahida meaning Oh mankind! you are but one single nation) in so far as the establishment of peace is concerned. Unfortunately, the role of the Media in conflict resolution has not yet been fully exploited.

3. Conclusion

The list of factors responsible for a successful dialogue between different cultures as highlighted above is only indicative and is, by no means, exhaustive. In conclusion, it must be remarked that while we make a dialogue for the promotion of peace in the world, this dialogue is meant not merely for the generations of today but for the unborn children of tomorrow as well. The least we can do for them is to leave behind us a culture of unity and fraternity.
1. INTRODUCTION

Inter-cultural cooperation is not a new phenomenon in world history: in the Middle East and the Mediterranean World, in the regions of South and South East Asia including China, a multiplicity of cultures coexisted in cities and rural areas since Antiquity. From the time of Alexander the Great, Greek speaking urban elites lived with a wide variety of languages, religions and cultural traditions from Egypt to Central Asia to Northern India. The Roman conquest did not modify substantially this pattern. With the advent of Islam, the cultural mosaic was not rubbed. The multicultural situation was tolerated by the ruling group in many civilizations, the enlightened Moghul Emperor Akbar went to the extent of evolving ‘a new religion’ in order to avoid religious conflicts and divisions in his empire.

Contemporary multicultural situations, however, differ by many features from their antecedents because of the process by which people asserted their rights for independence against colonialism, economic equality, democratisation, and, recently, globalisation. In fact, this new globalisation dramatically speeded up the improvement
of technologies of rapid communication, transportation, and flow of money and people across borders. Because of the increased mobility of people and new styles of life, international migrations developed tremendously, and a growing number of people settle and work in the cities of developed and developing countries. Inter-cultural cooperation and dialogue are new dynamics of modern civilization. Although dialogue may have reached a conceptual climax, in recent years, in some ways a more substantial dialogue had already been taking place within the world metropolitan centres.

The proclamation of a dialogue among civilizations in 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, did not mark a radical departure from the abrasions of urban life, but rather connoted a new approach to international relations at the global level. This approach was spurred as a response to some highly misleading but powerful studies and models produced by some notable American scholars like Francis Fukuyama (The End of History), Samuel P. Huntington (The Clash of Civilizations), and Barber et. al. (Jihad vs. MacWorld), Kaplan (The Coming Anarchy in the World). All of these provocative theses of civilisational clash between “us” and ‘them’ were ideologically suspect and socially and politically divisive. They came out immediately after the end of cold war period when the world was preparing for a new global order based on greater democratisation, peace, environmental security, gainful economic cooperation and understanding among nations and cultures.

The intellectual and media leadership of the West, in fact, did a great disservice to the world which was in transition by diverting the attention of the people to rather distorted and orthodox interpretation
of history on cultural lines. As Huntington stated sweepingly, 
"Peoples and countries with similar cultures are coming together. 
Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart. 
Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving 
way to alignments defined by culture and civilization". Drawing on 
limited experiences of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet 
Union that took identities on ethnic and religious lines, he made 
sweeping generalizations for the entire world as "we" and "them", 
"the West against the Rest". In the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist 
attacks, the intellectual and political chaos ensued further – the 
debate reached its climax and was quickly transformed into a 
struggle between the Western culture and Islamic culture. Some have 
sought to resurrect the vacuous and discredited thesis of the clash of 
civilizations. American "unyielding anger" as expressed by President 
Bush in his first broadcast to the nation was not unexceptional 
human emotion. But the fury and vengeance cannot contain 
terrorism. Just as there coexist many ways of thinking and many 
different value systems within the West, so there are many who 
honour Islam against the tiny minority who sometimes dishonour it 
or any other religion. It is in this context, the need for dialogue 
among cultures assumed more significance today than ever before. 
Those whose vision rises above the obvious differences between 
ethnic, religious, cultural and social groups, and embraces so much 
that we all have in common, will not judge a human being simply on 
a persons’ look, language and faith.
2. THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

Culture and civilization are intertwined. The noted historian Will Durant gave a formal definition encompassing the two: “Civilization is a social order promoting cultural creation. Four elements constitute it: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuits of knowledge and the arts”. Arnold Toynbee examined the rise and fall of 26 civilizations in his 12-volume study of history, and contended that a civilization is a totality: language, belief, and ethnicity are important elements but it cannot fully comprehended purely through these elements. A civilization is not also delineated by clear-cut boundaries. Japan is an exception – often termed as ‘a civilisational state’; but China despite its appearance as an empire or a state, originally contained more than one state representing diverse cultures. Indian civilization never evolved within state structures. Western civilization witnessed the urge of strong nation-state formations in a particular period in history, but it did not stay within the confines of state boundaries. In fact, nation-states, empires and regions often interact and coexist within the cluster of a civilization.

Civilization owns a broader meaning and larger scale than culture. As one recent author has aptly pointed out, “Civilizations, in essence are great. They are embracing cultures, often distributed over large and almost fixed areas, with a universal vocation. People speak of Western civilization: it includes Western Europe and North America. People speak of Amerindian civilization, of the Islamic of Indian civilization. Each of these civilizations includes a variable number of cultures and cultural systems”. In fact, the cultural features of a group of societies flow like tributaries into a single
powerful civilization. In a broadest sense, it can be argued that civilization is a cultural identity.

Many German and Indian scholars differentiate civilization from culture – maintaining that civilization emphasizes more on the “mechanics” i.e., technology and material factors – while culture connotes values, ideals, artistic and aesthetic elements of organizing life. Indeed, different cultures of people coexist, interact and overlap in a particular civilization reflecting various traditions based on diverse aesthetic, religious and philosophical currents. It is the overwhelmingly ‘political’ use of cultural identities by certain scholars that has recently led to the perception of ‘clash of civilizations’. But civilizations and cultures did coexist harmoniously – during the Ming and Qing dynasties in China, there was no clash of civilizations. The Moghul dynasty in India, spanning almost four centuries witnessed no significant clashes in civilisational or cultural terms. The Persian civilization subsumed enormous varieties of groupings and identities of people. Life, craft, culture and trade all mingled in a unique way in these civilizations. In fact, civilization is a progressive history of humans in a particular habitat, and it seemed difficult for any civilization to survive at a high level of achievement except in contact with others. The civilization of various societies – Egyptian, Indus, Persian, Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian, Chinese, and even Japanese – all had, in varying degrees, cross-cultural interaction in the form of trade, conquest, pilgrimage, migration, social movements, and transfer of ideas and technology.

The key elements that comprehend civilizations include both material structures and cultural characteristics. Every civilization has its uniqueness characterized by universal as well as particular values.
The major civilizations in human history have not been so closely identified with religion as it is assumed by a number of writers flourished in the 1990s. Economic and political factors – in terms of unequal exchange, deprivations and domination among major civilizations reinforced the rise of religion and ethnicity as assertive identities in the organization of social life in this interconnected world. It is, therefore, preferred to adopt a more inclusive approach and perceive all societies as constituting a seamless web of interaction, reflecting some integral part of human civilizations and cultures. In this perception, every human alive on this planet is an inheritor of one or more of civilizations – benefactor of the vast tapestry of cultural interaction that makes up the human drama through time.

This inclusive approach identifies ‘civilisational groupings’ comprised of a number of civilizations, each of which has a ‘lineal thread’ often cross spatial as well as cross temporal, that encompasses societies which share the same, or a similar history and value base. This approach approximates more closely to a society’s culture. For example, if we take ten major civilisational groupings: Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, Greco-Roman, Judeo-Western, Islamic, African, Indic, Semitic, Malay and Meso-American, each reflects a complex set of factors based on ethnic, linguistic, religious and geographical patterns. To what extent have these civilisational groupings engaged in any kind of dialogue through history, and to what extent are they undertaking such a dialogue today?
3. LEADERSHIP AND THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

It is not easy to determine the extent of dialogue that existed between civilizations throughout history, or indeed even whether such a dialogue has occurred at all. If "dialogue" is taken to mean a conversation between two persons or two societies based on perceived equality, respect, and a genuine interest in mutual enlightenment, then history is by no means replete with examples of this kind. Rather, the tendency has been towards inter-civilisational monologues. The early Egyptians perceived themselves to be the sole bearers of civilization. The Chinese called their country Tien hua (under the Heavens) or Chung-Kuo (Middle Kingdom). In Moscow there is a plaque on the street-surface outside Red Square, which depicts the centre of the earth. Britain at its imperial zenith designated London as the centre of the planet in both latitudinal space and time. Even in today's 'modern' world, our contemporary civilizations are confined within cultural boundaries through political thought processes and educational systems that glorify one's own and often demonise the 'other'. An example in this case was identified by a Western historian when he pointed out "Avicenna was the greatest writer in medicine, al-Razi the greatest physician, al-Beruni the greatest geographer, al-Haitham the greatest optician, Jabir probably the greatest chemist, of the Middle Ages, these five names, so little known in present day Christendom, are one of our provincialism in viewing medieval history".

A similar perception of the relative importance of our history and their history can be seen in the apportionment of space and attention in some kinds of European historiography. If we look, for
example, in one of the major historiographies of the 19th century, *Histoire générale*, we find there is a fairly good coverage of the ancient Middle East seen as our own background, in volume 1, after which there is one chapter on the Medieval Arabs, three on the Ottoman Empire, two on India, six on the Far East getting as much space as Holland and Scandinavia. There is only one chapter on North Africa, and one on rest of Africa devoted mainly to the partition of the continent by the European powers. In fact, it is only recently a western writer resented the "falsification" of the record of the past and to make history "a tool of propaganda; when governments, religious movements political parties, and sectional groups of every kind are busy rewriting history as they would wish it to have been, as they would like their followers to believe that it was. All this is very dangerous to ourselves and to others, however we may define otherness – dangerous to our common humanity”.

History, however, does reveal some degree of genuine dialogue despite abundance of experiences of domination of one civilization by another. It is possible to discern the dialogue as being undertaken in two major eras, namely: the 'historic past' and the 'very modern age'. In the past dialogue may be seen as having been generated and maintained in at least three ways- involving both citizens and leaders. These are: (a) individual wanderers – 'transmitted through space'; (b) individual philosophers – 'transmitting over time'; and (c) intra-polity strategy. In the very modern age – that is to say over the past decade, a fourth type of dialogue may be seen as underway. It can best be described as 'global tectonic'.
i. Individual Wanderers

Some monks reached out across civilizations with a view to bringing esoteric knowledge back home for domestic consumption. Those individuals may have had important patrons, but their endeavours reflected individual courage, fortitude and often diplomatic tact. Fa Xian travelled to India and Sri Lanka returning to China with a large collection of early Buddhist Sanskrit texts. His translation of these and his account of the journey provide important documentation of the beginning of relations between China and India. Marco Polo is the most celebrated wanderer known to the West, and his dialogue at the court of Kublai Khan is an example of early contact between Chinese and Western civilizations. Throughout history, there are many examples of sages and scholars transmitting knowledge and ideas between societies. Western explorers of the 15th and 18th centuries, such as Magellan, Columbus, Tasman and Cook also provided valuable information and served as communication links among civilizations.

ii. Individual Philosophers

Of huge potential for inter-civilisational dialogue over successive centuries was the work of Neo-Platonic philosopher, Hypatia, in the 5th century B.C. The potential she had for bridging paganism and Christianity was unlimited, for the Library of Alexandria, which she headed, contained the greatest collection of human knowledge before the time and until, perhaps, the modern age of Internet. Perhaps, more than any other civilization, Islam has acted as the fulcrum of history in the transmission of knowledge from the ancient to the modern world. The most notable figures in this respect were Ibn Sina
(known to the West as Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averros). Ibn Sina, Persian philosopher of the 11 Century B.C, completed an encyclopaedia that encompassed logic, psychology, metaphysics and natural science parts of which were translated into Latin for the Western world. Ibn Rushd, Muslim philosopher of the 12th century Spain, produced commentaries on Aristotle, which greatly influenced the philosophy of medieval Christianity and helped Western civilization to reach back to classical Greece.

iii. Intra-Polity Strategy

There seemed to exist some isolated cases where individual rulers in the past reached out with a conscious initiative to engage in peaceful dialogue with leaders of other societies or cultures. But such dialogues had been initiated as part of a conscious statecraft to keep a polity together – as a mixture of philosophical enlightenment and realpolitik. In these cases, a large political state – empire, perhaps – had been afflicted with inter-civilisational strife; and the emperor had seen an opportunity to keep the polity together through inter-civilisational dialogue. The most notable cases were Ashoka and Akbar in the Indian empires. To some extent, Constantine also extended religious toleration to Christians after centuries of persecution.

Ashoka, following his conversion to Buddhism after a career of military conquests, tried to ensure religious tolerance to both Hindus and the Buddhists. Over a millennium later, Akbar underwent a similar change of heart in the 17th century Moghul Empire that affected history. After forcefully expanded his rule over the whole of modern India, and beyond, he came to rely less and less on force for
his legitimacy. In fact, Akbar strove to promulgate a new religion containing in simple form the essentials of two warring faiths – Hindu and Muslims. The drama provided an astonishing glimpse of the vision, yet hubris, of one of the greatest and most enlightened rulers in history.

Several Chinese emperors also underwent similar transformations. The Ming dynasty (1661-1722) gave China the most prosperous, peaceful and enlightened reign in the nation’s history. It was without doubt the largest, richest and most populous empire of its time. It was ruled with wisdom, justice, and tolerance of all religious and linguistic diversities. While the West European ships were plying the seas of South Asia and East Africa with ‘men-o-war’, Chinese were calling into ports and discharging ‘cargoes of peace’ as tokens of friendship from the ‘Middle Kingdom’.

iv. ‘Global Tectonics’

The above examples, however, are all historical experiences. Until recently, the world, with its full panoply of civilizational rise and fall, was undergoing a process of political maturation. Civilizations lived sufficiently far apart that dialogue, while being a moral prescription, was not a categorical imperative. In the past those leaders who did initiate a ‘dialogue’ did so within the confines of their own civilization, and essential for their own civilization. However bold and visionary their actions may have been, the implications of what they were doing were constrained in terms of geographical and political import.

Over the past half century, the world has become a ‘global village’; for the first time humanity is living in a closed global
system where technology is tectonically forcing people together, to interact from a backdrop of cultures that, by and large, had hitherto been allowed to remain separate. In such a brave new world, a proper understanding of, and respect for, other cultures and civilizations is a prerequisite to global harmony and stability. Today’s world is qualitatively different from the ‘historic past’. The new ‘village’ requires global cooperation and a cultural and civilisational empathy not only between two adjacent civilizations but also between all civilizations on a multilateral scale. The dialogue, accordingly, is multilateral as well as being an imperative, and as such it is ultimately challenging.

The times call for a dialogue initiated by contemporary leaders who show an acute appreciation of this. The initiative taken in the late-1990s by Iran’s President Mohammad Khatami through the United Nations of a dialogue among civilizations is such an example. Such statecraft reflects all that is enlightened in the policies and initiatives of the rulers of previous ages. In the past years, Pope John Paul II’s forays across the theological divide between Christian Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and across faiths from Christianity to Judaism and Islam, rank among the very finest and boldest of initiatives. His apology for past misdeeds of the Christian Inquisition, and his visit to Judaic temples and Islamic Mosques, are without precedent in the annals of religious discourse and action. This is not to postulate that all deeds and actions by such leaders are beyond critique. Both leaders have been criticized, often from perspectives reflecting cultural and religious subjectivity. But it is to say that the overall effects of the courageous initiatives they have taken are positive steps for inter-civilisational empathy and
understanding. Echoes of intra-polity strategies to those identified earlier may be found in the calls for toleration of immigrants by modern European statesmen such as Germany’s Rickard von Weisaecker and Czech Republic’s Vaclav Havel. But they focus more on intra-national unity rather than the ‘global vision’ that Khatami and Jon Paul are aspiring to offer.

4. ROOTS OF CONFLICTS AND ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN DIALOGUE: SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

There is hardly any doubt that the post-Cold War period witnessed increased ‘fragmentation’ of politics and societies along cultural, religious and ethnic lines in many countries of the world. This happened in the absence of clear ideological struggle, and spurred by democratisation and globalisation processes. The case of South Asia is, however, different. The major challenges facing the states of South Asia since their independence had been how to evolve nations out of a vast heterogeneity of social, cultural and regional entities. Since the region represents extreme diversity in terms of religious, linguistic and ethnic configuration, the roots of conflicts often lie in it. For example, India, which occupies the two-third population of the region, has a unique demographic and ethnic make-up – Hindus constitute more than 82 percent of its population, Muslims almost 14, and the rest is divided among the Sikhs, Christians, Parsis etc. The linguistic division is more pronounced – there are twelve major languages. Most states of India have been facing colossal problems arising out of diverse linguistic, religious and ethnic identities. As Nehru once remarked in dismay how he had to confront “face to face with centuries-old narrow loyalties, petty
jealousies and ignorant prejudices engaged in moral combat” and he was “simply horrified to see how thin was the ice upon which we are skating”.

Building on the articulation of national aspirations in the post-independence period, the urbanized leadership headed by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, wanted to shift the anti-colonial movement from class to nation. But Gandhi whose ideal for peace transcended national boundaries, wanted to legitimise social hierarchy, but at the same time exhorted people to enhance the community related deeds for the salvation of individual soul. The basic thrust of Mahatma Gandhi was to shift the Indian psyche from relativistic to universalistic and collectivist orientation in order to integrate the vast plurality of Indian society and to build a communitarian non-violent ethic. Nehru, on the other hand, believed in secularism and his resolute nationalism and commitment to ‘scientific temper’ in effect denied the relevance of religion to a national political identity.

The bonds of religion and language led to a variety of militant insurgency movements in India posing severe strains on democratic governance. Punjab was mired in violent ethnic-religious conflicts involving Sikh militants in confrontation with New Delhi as they sought greater political autonomy. In Gujrat, the backward castes and the Muslims are engaged intermittently in violent clashes on issues of affirmative actions and rights. In South India, regional nationalism still persists on linguistic identities. In the hilly areas of Northeast India, the Nagas, Ahoms and other native people fought bloody wars for may years. The current insurgency in Kashmir along religious lines is the most explosive with serious cross border implications. In
fact, Kashmir problem poses a serious threat to regional peace in South Asia as the two major states of the region – India and Pakistan – have acquired nuclear capability.

The plurality of South Asian societies poses serious constraints on the creative potential of the large section of its populace. It encourages leadership along primordial loyalties of caste, language, religion, and ethnicity. In fact, the partition of British India and the creation of Pakistan saw the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the disintegration of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh witnessed the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Similarly, many social movements in the states of the region continued to be waged on the basis of social plurality demanding political and policy concessions. Sometimes, these movements take extreme forms as separatist movements or struggle for independence creating their own heroes, leaders and legends. These loom large across Asia, and particularly in South Asia. The struggle for independence in Kashmir, Sikh movement in Punjab, separatist movements in Northeastern India, Sind’s Mohajir movement and Baluch agitation in Pakistan, and Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka are some of the major cultural conflicts that continue to test the endurance of South Asian leadership calling for meaningful dialogue.

These conflicts create recurrent “crises of governance” in the region and seriously affect the prospects of development. These conflicts usually occur when economically or socially deprived groups do not find easy way to satisfy their needs and hence search for power irrespective of their economic status. Under the circumstances, it is easy for the ambitious individuals to become
leaders advocating those grievances, and pursuing them through
different phases, sometimes manipulating antagonism between
communities. In the absence of effective institutions to cater to the
demands of the aggrieved groups, political leaders often take the
benefit of a desperate mass psychology to escalate the conflict and
assert their leadership. The traits of South Asian political culture, in
varying forms, therefore, are detrimental to the idea of dialogue or
consociation where different groups and parties sharing different
values and goals live together in relative harmony, guarantee certain
kinds of toleration and ensure stability of the political system. There
is an agonizing realization in most countries of South Asia that
democracy as a mode of social interactions and governance has
accentuated conflicts in the region’s social mosaic.

As one author has aptly remarked that the electoral politics of
democracy “in an open and competitive society like India not only
consolidates the existing divisions in the society, but political parties
and political elites in their quest for power and vote tend to exploit
and aggravate inter-communal divisions”.

The growth of Hindu fundamentalism in India and Islamic
fundamentalism in Pakistan can, to a large extent, be explained by
the mobilization of people by political leaders on the basis of
religious, linguistic and ethnic identities. The uneven process of
globalisation further exacerbated the situation. The rise of Hindutva
in India, for example was fuelled by a section of middle class Hindus
who mobilized the poorer sections of their community by invoking
religion and displaying extremism. While Hinduism as a religion is
liberal and has universal outlook, Hindutva is rigid, extreme and
narrow. It is basically a political ideology and has nothing to do with
spiritual, moral or philosophical aspects of Hindu religion. Hindutva seeks to mobilize upper caste Hindus for capturing political power and establishing economic hegemony. The upper caste Hindus especially those from Gujrat, settled abroad send money to Vishaw Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) for promoting fundamentalist version of Hinduism. A leading Indian Magazine *Outlook* in its issue of July 8, 2002 says in its cover story “The Crisis in Hinduism” that “One of the World’s most liberal religions is in danger of being perverted. The seize is from within, a way of life has been seized upon as a means to political power and a religion held hostage”. In fact, the recent Hindu- Muslim communal violence in Gujrat in which several thousands of people were killed was a direct consequence of fear of losing coming elections. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, with the help of ruling BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi, planned and executed most horrified communal carnage in Gujrat.

In Pakistan, it is Islamic extremism, which plays a similar role. The Jihadi have a clear political agenda. In fact, these Jihadi groups are products of struggle for political power in the region. The successive regimes in Pakistan promoted narrow and sectarian Islam to seek legitimacy for their power. Though President Pervez Mosharraf is not currently interested to promote militant Islam, it would not be easy to reverse the past trend. The need for meaningful dialogue between political leadership of India and Pakistan is, therefore, imperative to resist the use of religions for intra-state and inter-state conflicts in South Asia. Only an enlightened leadership can clear the breeding ground for religious extremism. Asian leadership styles historically are constructed around certain key
qualities that place precedence on harmony over confrontation and unity over fragmentation. The Asian values are also noteworthy for their humanistic thinking – moral authority, tradition, family, trust and wisdom. These values could, indeed, make a significant contribution to civilisational dialogue, as they could make the cornerstone of the dialogue for the future.

The leadership for all communities in South Asian mosaic should be sensitised to the consequences of “exclusion” from mainstream society. Tolerance and empathy should form the link between leadership of different communities living within one society or state, and this can be achieved through dialogue. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela played a historic role in cultural coexistence of diverse races and religions by promoting multicultural society and respecting differences. It is in this context, South Asian leadership should recognize and define cultural transformation to its constituency. It should realize that cultural transformation is an on-going process, and it is one that cannot be avoided. It is the duty of the leadership to promote the positive outcome of cultural coexistence, and the contribution that can be derived from the cultural diversity. The leadership of each community should therefore work together to build an infrastructure that supports cultural diversity and civic education is one key element. In fact, civic-cultural education can provide the key to unlocking the challenges of cultural transformation, and that leadership should ensure that curricula reflect the transformations taking place in society. As part of that process, leadership should also recognize the multiplicity of links that exist between global and local issues. Because, contemporary
living has been framed through the process of globalisation; global and local now interact instantly via the global economy, telecommunications, climate change, religion, and migration.

5. FUTURE OF INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

Since the controversial publication of Samuel P. Huntington in 1993, the debates and discourse have continued to find resonance within academics and high political offices. And with President Khatami's proposal to the United Nations for a dialogue in the late 1990s, the intellectual exchange among the world's academics and practitioners have escalated. The UNESCO has been working in the cultural field for many years and its leadership role is particularly marked in recent years in initiating programs for creative potential of cultural diversity in many countries of the world. The UNESCO published a monumental work on 'Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development' in 1995. The Report underscored the need for cultural dialogue as important as that of economic cooperation. The World Bank has recently entered the cultural field recognizing that culture is an essential dimension of development and can provide a 'lens for development'. As the World Bank Chief James D. Wolfensohn has maintained, "The self-awareness and pride that comes from cultural identity is an essential part of empowering communities to take charge of their own destinies. It is for these reasons that we at the World Bank believe that respect for culture and identity of peoples is an important element in any viable approach to people-centred development". The Year 2001 was the UN year on the Dialogue of Civilizations. In fact, "the establishment and continued functioning of the United Nations
is a testimony to the progressive path of the world and of human society...Let us hope, in the coming century, resort to force and violence shall not be glorified, and that the essence of political power shall be compassion and justice, essentially manifested in the dialogue among civilizations". (President Mohammad Khatami, UN General Assembly September 1998).

The conduct of dialogue among cultures or civilizations, however, requires a distinct set of leadership qualities and skills. The ability to guide one’s constituency through the process of change such as peace-building, for example, requires leadership qualities different to those needed when struggling for independence. In the case of dialogue, the task of leadership is to satisfy the broadest interests of the community while recognizing that their interests are better served by dialogue with the perceived enemy or competitor. In fact, the leadership skills and qualities required for modern dialogue among cultures and civilizations might include the following:

- Promoting understanding of culture and civilization as a human construct, encouraging coexistence and diversity and motivating tolerance for differences between, and empathy for, people through cooperation and human solidarity

- Developing universal human values, at the same time respecting particular values or traditions of other cultures or civilizations

- Accruing no political dividend by global or national leaders from playing on the differences among people in terms of their roots, language, religion or modes of production; and
Addressing deprivation and social marginalisation – in terms of poverty and non-sharing of the benefits of globalisation – recognizing the crucial role of ethics and fairness in global economic distribution as part of a future dialogue of civilization.

6. COMMON VALUES AND ETHICS FOR THE 'GLOBAL MELTING POT'

The world has changed in some important ways after the 9/11. The 'very modern' world is witnessing paradoxically both perceptual 'clashes' as well as myriad of efforts at promoting empathy and understanding among cultures. The notion of 'global human values' and a 'global ethics' has been brought on to the international community's agenda over the past decade or so. In 1993, the Second Conference of the World Religions was called, devoting its efforts to developing a 'global ethics' for all humanity. It failed to produce an agreed text but accomplished something substantive nonetheless. The World Commission of Culture and Development provided some valuable insights on the question. Other leading authorities have also been working in the 1990s on the closely related questions of global values, most notably the Commission on Global Governance.

The collision and convergence between universal and particular values taking place within and between or among civilizations can be addressed and embraced both by global and local leaders. Their tasks have been connected through the prevalence of globalisation. Contemporary leadership needs to work towards ensuring that globalisation does not only serve one key institution – the backlash of which could be witnessed on the streets of Seattle, Prague,
Washington and elsewhere anti-globalisation protesters making their views strongly known. Furthermore, in the wake of 9/11 episode, globalisation and security should not reflect the triumph of one ideology, or one particular cultural, economic or political system over others. It is the responsibility of the leadership to ensure that the cultural dynamics of globalisation preserve and promote diversity, and convergence does not amount to homogenisation of world’s cultures.

The fluctuation between universal and particular values should be undertaken on a step-by-step approach. The convergence of values, a process of ebb and flow, need not preclude key values, but rather signify the relevance of particular values to each community. Leadership would need to play a crucial role in preserving those particular values, whilst recognizing the fluidity of common values and incorporating them into the broader society. In fact, leadership can play a crucial role in inspiring, motivating people to change, preserve, and adapt in the ‘converging’ process of civilisational dialogue to cope with the forces of globalisation. It is evident from the history that the rise and fall of civilizations are closely related to the quality and role of leadership who embody it.

7. CONCLUSION

We are in a very crucial turning point in world history – the debate of the past decades between the East and the West, North and the South, Asian Values and Western values has been replaced by, at least temporarily, with the struggle between Islamic values and Western values. The challenge of learning to live together and fashion a global political system that can manage conflict and defuse
tensions has attained high stakes. For our common survival and prosperity, we need to get it right. The events of the recent past made it clear that the dialogue is essential for mankind, and must continue as long as it takes for humanity to attain a mutual enlightenment for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In fact, dialogue is no longer a prescription but rather a categorical imperative – moving from incidental to conscious dialogue. Civilization and culture mark the apogee of human endeavour and aspiration. They exhibit, in shining colours, what is best in human existence. But, like shadows flickering across the cave wall, the darker features of life have also been played out in their name. Whether future dialogue among civilizations will lighten our modern cave walls sufficiently for the tectonic cultural forces at play to be guided along harmonious lines, avoiding clashes and conflict, will depend principally on the quality of leadership – under the flag of the United Nations, the United States, in the corridors of our capitals, and on the streets of our metropolitan cities.

References


