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PARA LAS RELACIONES INTERNACIONALES
Y EL DIÁLOGO EXTERIOR

Lecture – February 13th, 2003

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THE ROLE OF MULTILATERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of the Club of Madrid

On February 13th, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil and actual President of the Club of Madrid, gave a lecture titled “The Role of Multilateralism in Contemporary International Relations” within the framework of the Democratic Forum 2003, organized by FRIDE.

During the presentation, Diego Hidalgo, President of FRIDE, mentioned the important support given by the then President of Brazil to the Conference on Democratic Transition and Consolidation (Madrid, October, 2001) when he confirmed his participation only a few days after September 11. FRIDE’s President also thanked Fernando Henrique Cardoso for his commitment with the Club of Madrid, an organization born from the Conference on Democratic Transition and Consolidation with the aim of strengthening democracy in the world.

FERNANDO HENRIQUE CARDOSO started his talk regretting that as a consequence of the September 11 attacks, concerns over security had replaced “peace and well-being of peoples” as the main priority. The former President of Brazil discussed how this current situation of crisis could be transformed into an opportunity to improve the models of coexistence of international society, even though he did not deny the relevance of security.

“CONCERN
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The President of the Club of Madrid recalled how the Government of Brazil condemned the September 11 attacks and admitted the U.S. right to self-defense, but at the same time stressed the

need for any reaction to abide by international law. Thus, Cardoso, President of Brazil at the time, defended the central role of the UN and specially its Security Council, and rescued the Interamerican Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 1947 from oblivion, as a still valid legal instrument to respond to crises through regional cooperation. Despite his admitting the lack of practical results from his initiative, he did not consider it a wasted effort.

The False Clash of Civilizations

Fernando Henrique Cardoso expressed his reluctance to accept that the fight against terrorism will become a war between cultures. In his opinion, the clash of civilizations is based on a wrong idea, that considers one of the civilizations barbaric and exempts the other. According to Cardoso,

every civilization has known violence and terror in their midst, and all of them have rejected it. For this reason,

“TOLERANCE
IS COMMON
TO EVERY CULTURE
AND
CIVILIZATION”

the President of the Club of Madrid thought it was paradoxical that, after having overcome the contradiction put forward by class conflicts, the clash between civilizations is considered as a fact. That is why, in Cardoso’s view, it is necessary to create a global consensus around the basic values of tolerance and the adoption of a set of rules that will make coexistence possible.

This coexistence, in his opinion, is not only desirable, but also possible. The former President of Brazil used his country as an example of

coexistence of communities that some believe are doomed to clash with each other. Cardoso stressed the fact that there are large groups of population of Arab and Jewish origin, including some members of his own government, without any tensions or conflicts. President Cardoso did not wish to present the case of Brazil as an example, but he wanted nonetheless to convey the idea that coexistence is possible and that the Arab - Jewish conflict must not be accepted as inevitable.

The Need for Multilateralism

Once it is accepted that multiculturalism is not in contradiction with peace or democracy, Cardoso said that it is absolutely necessary to favor multilateralism as a mechanism to create a true international order based not on force but on the law. Unilateralism, even when motivated by morally acceptable values, entails inevitably long-term damages that only undermine the capability of solving conflicts peacefully. In order to achieve the objective of ensuring peace and promoting development, the President of the Club of Madrid stated that democratization must not only be

**“DEMOCRATIZATION
MUST ALSO
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THE INTERNATIONAL
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limited to countries, but should also involve the international order. For this reason, he thinks that the United Nations should be reformed urgently in such a way that the prestige of the General Assembly is increased and its actions reinforced, and the Security Council becomes a more representative body. Cardoso expressed his conviction that a better adaptation of the United Nations to the current



Diego Hidalgo, President of FRIDE

international situation, giving greater representation to Asian, African and Latin American countries, will be decisive not only to grant higher legitimacy to the UN, but also to adapt its agenda to the true priority of mankind: development.

The reforms proposed by Fernando Henrique Cardoso were not only limited to the United Nations. He also proposed a profound transformation of the mechanisms used in making decisions of an economic or financial nature, “if such decisions are made at all”, to quote him. In his opinion, the G-8 is not as effective as one would think, mainly because it is the very nature of the countries that make it up that separates it from the debate on affairs that directly affect development and economic welfare of most of the world population. The institutions that stemmed from Bretton Woods are ill adapted to the new challenges brought about by globalization. It would be necessary to provide more resources, and better defined guidelines, to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Also, a financial system less exposed to crisis situations needs to be secured.

Despite his understanding of the pessimism created by the current international situation, the President of the Club of Madrid declared his optimism for the future. In his opinion, developments such as the establishment of the International Criminal Court of Justice,

the Summits of Rio, Kyoto or Johannesburg, the inclusion of a democratic clause in MERCOSUR or the adoption of the *Inter-American Democratic Charter*, all point towards the cause of human rights, the protection of individuals against abuses of the State; in summary, toward the creation of an international order that guarantees peace and progress against the status quo and poverty. In this respect, Fernando Henrique Cardoso valued especially the gradual formation of an international civil society, of organizations such as the Club of Madrid, actors who can complement the action of the States on issues where their actions are limited by the logic of sovereignty.

Iraq

Fernando Henrique Cardoso concluded his lecture by expressing the need to solve the crisis in Iraq in accordance with international law and not through unilateral actions that will inevitably be harmful for the stability and development of the region and for the credibility of the UN.

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