

Agriculture and Intercultural Dialogue

Keynote address
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Your Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
Her Excellency Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan
Privy Councillors
Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished guests and colleagues
Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege for me to be asked to make the Regional Address for Asia-Pacific on the occasion of this year's World Food Day.

I hail from the small but fiercely proud Pacific Island nation of Samoa. We have achieved 5.6 percent economic growth this last financial year, and are expecting that trend to continue into 2005-2006. Our culture is an integral part of our lives, central to our psyches. We have focused our economic strategies on the lower echelon of society, and are pushing our small enterprises projects and our cash crops – coconuts and nonu in particular. Our push into rural tourism prevents the urban drift, and provides a lucrative market for our agricultural products.

Samoa is also very proud to be the home of the FAO Pacific Regional Office, based in Apia. We are the hub from which Dr. Vili Fuavao and his team successfully serve the needs of fourteen Pacific Island Nations.

I was present as Samoa's Agriculture Minister in Quebec City on 16 October 1995, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of FAO.

FAO and the World Health Organization now face another enormous challenge. They must jointly ensure the world avoids an avian flu pandemic that could decimate the world's population. It is an ominous sign we are closing in on the third 50 years cycle after the devastating avian flu pandemics in 1918 and 1958.

FAO has also had to adapt its role and focus in a world living with the reality of globalization. In this regard, it was welcome news just this past week, to hear the United States announce its intention to lift most if not all farm subsidies. This announcement required similar action by the EU and other OECD nations, and the EU confirmed a similar move shortly after. Finally, the playing field is leveling in global agriculture.

In a speech to the World Bank General Meetings in Dubai in 2003, President James Wolfensohn lamented that Japan and the United States subsidized their cattle farmers at rates exceeding US\$3 per animal per day, when over 2 billion people in the world lived on less than US\$2 per day. We have much to accomplish, if not overcome, in a world where cattle receive more resources a day than the vast majority of the world's poor have to live on!

I made a public statement in my 2002 Budget, that while Samoa accepts the reality and inevitability of globalization, Samoa is not prepared to sacrifice our culture at the altar of globalization. This bears repeating: *Samoa is not prepared to sacrifice our culture at the altar of globalization.*

Our Asia Pacific Region of FAO, we should all categorically state: *"We will not sacrifice our cultures at the altar of globalization."*

Yes, even democracy – it is democracy with a Samoan flavour. Otherwise, how could it succeed.

Our cultures define our “psyche”, or what define us as human beings. We give up not only an integral part of our lives, but also our livelihoods, when we sacrifice our cultures. I will develop and illustrate this important point more fully below.

Why are our cultures so important? The poet T.S. Eliot has described culture, “*simply as that which makes life worth living*”.

The 2005 UNDP Human Development Report brought the focus back to culture’s vital role in economic development. That report articulates three main features of this very important relationship:

1. Cultural freedom is an essential ingredient of human freedom. In terms of food, the freedom to grow foods of choice – either for consumption, sale, trade or barter. Any dialogue and efforts by FAO, that expands any of these functions – consumption, sale, trade or barter – expands the production quotient of farmers. This in turn enhances food security, and ensures economic growth.
2. Cultural freedoms belong to the people – they must be free to express and expound, but most importantly, to enjoy their culture. This is the vital, all-important happiness quotient of economic development. The planting and consumption of crops that reflect peoples’ tastes and culture, is essential to achieving this happiness quotient.

This happiness quotient is much more important than GDP per capita and is best described by the late Robert Kennedy: “*Gross National Product measures neither the health of our children, the quality of their education, nor the joy of their play. It measures neither the beauty of our poetry, nor the strength of our*

marriages. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories, and the safety of our streets. It measures neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our wit nor our courage, neither our compassion, nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worth living, and it can tell us everything about our country, except those things that make us proud to be a part of it!”

This joy in our unique cultures includes the rights of our farmers to enjoy their traditional forms of farming their own crops of choice. The dialogue this World Food Day advocates ensures that this happiness quotient is expanded and not nullified.

3. The third and final significance of culture in development is the important link, recognized as long ago as Adam Smith, between cultural deprivation and economic poverty.

In his landmark book “End of Poverty”, Professor Jeffrey Sachs describes a household that produces two tons of maize per hectare of land. They can expand productivity in four significant ways – saving, trade, technology, or a resource boom. These, he tells us, are the four main ways any economy grows.

The constraints are the opposites – a lack of saving, absence of trade, a technological reversal and natural resource decline, and adverse productivity shocks.

Cultural deprivation means that the vicious cycle that is the self-perpetrating poverty trap will continue unabated.

Undermine a man's culture and you suffocate his determination. Worse still, you begin to kill his spirit. The entrepreneurial drive must be encouraged, let loose, and set free. A happy man begins to soar like an eagle. Such a man will not only produce, but become the economic catalyst that all growth is founded on. This is as true of agriculture as any other form of economic activity.

Your Royal Highness
Honourable Ministers
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

We live in a world where the 200 biggest corporations control 30 percent of the world's economic activity, and yet employ a mere 0.2 percent of the world's work force. The world's wealthiest 100 people control more wealth than the GDP of China with over 2 billion people. Nike pays more each year to one man – Tiger Woods, than to all its thousands of casual labourers throughout Asia.

FAO's Changchui He said in his opening remarks "*Our reflection of the intercultural dialogue will not only lead to the rediscovering of the fundamental ethical value of the UN organizations, like FAO, but may well emerge as the human face of globalization*".

I always tell our business community back home in Samoa: a hungry man will violently rob you in order to feed his family. That is the reality that marks the human face of economic under-development.

We cannot keep shouting from the roof tops, as FAO does, that hunger is a violation of human dignity, and then not expect the poor to violently rob the

rich in order to feed their families. If food is a basic human right, then any means of obtaining food, becomes a basic human requisite, as well.

Social and economic stability comes from access; access to food and shelter; access to health and education; access to credit.

I wish to finally congratulate you, Your Royal Highness, for your work, through your many charities, to improve the access of the people of Thailand to essential goods and services.

The wealthy and other elites must decide what sort of society they wish to live in. Their alternative is to live in guarded mansions where attack dogs at night mean they cannot go for a stroll in the moonlight.

That is our challenge!

We must work to encourage this dialogue into an exchange of not only technology and ideas, but of resources. From rich to poor; from the wealthy to the needy; both within the global family of nations, and individuals themselves within those nations.

This is the greatest dialogue of all. The transfer of resources from the “haves” to the “have nots”.

This, fortunately for us, Samoans, is an essential part of our culture. The age-old adage is: *“To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected”*.

Why must we all equitably share the world's resources? Because such sharing is based on the only universal qualities that provide us with guaranteed peace, prosperity, and indeed cultural integrity and freedom: love and compassion!

Let us all strive for successful cultural dialogues based on love and compassion. The world and those of us who live in it, will then be a far better place – for everyone!

Soifua ma Ia Manuia

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SAMOA

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