



**THE NORTH/SOUTH CONFERENCE FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
THURSDAY, 28 MAY 1998**

On Thursday, 28 May, participants at the North/South Conference for Sustainable Development focused on "A Closer Look at Solidarity." They heard keynote speeches and a panel discussion on "What Does the Foundation for Solidarity Mean for Switzerland?" in plenary and met in several simultaneous workshops. The meeting was chaired by Anne-Marie Holenstein, Executive Director of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund.

**PLENARY**

Chair Holenstein introduced the questions for consideration: what does solidarity mean for Swiss policy; what forms could solidarity take in civil society in the North and South; and what duties should be assumed by the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity?

Dai Qing, Chinese journalist, spoke on the Three Gorges Dam project in China. She suggested that the project is one consequence of the situation resulting from economic reform and the opening of China in the early 1980s, from which graft, corruption and fraud flourished, freedom of speech became increasingly suppressed, and China's natural and cultural resources were increasingly degraded. She noted Chinese dictators' preoccupation with the project over the past 70 years but said the debate has intensified in the last decade. The debate is no longer about a hydroelectric plant but rather its forced construction amidst popular resistance, characteristic of Chinese society at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its political and economic systems in transition and public assertiveness and environmental awareness on the rise. She stated that dam builders promise abundant electricity, improved navigation, model homes and clean water, but government officials will not take responsibility for the inevitable negative consequences. As a cultural journalist, she would not have become involved in the Three Gorges debate, but the scientists and engineers and those to be affected have been silenced. The first book on the project was banned, and as the editor, she was imprisoned. She underscored the heavy price people pay for speaking out in China.

José Ramos Horta (East Timor) spoke about how "development means liberation." He said that amidst the controversy of the role of Swiss banks in World War II, it is important to recall the contributions Switzerland has made towards peace and its role as a place of asylum. He highlighted the large number of conflicts and refugees in the world and the millions of deaths that conflict has caused since World War II and the end of the cold war. He said weapons trade fuels most of these conflicts, with developed countries selling weapons to developing countries that cannot even afford clean water, education and food. He warned that the high unemployment resulting from the Asian economic crisis could lead to regional and possibly global instability. He advocated addressing the root causes of financial chaos in the region, such as a lack of democracy and government accountability. He stressed that although only fifty

people are responsible for Indonesia's debt, it will be the Indonesian people who pay. He highlighted how the recent developments in Indonesia present opportunities for democracy and liberation of East Timor. He urged people to remain vigilant and to support the democracy movements in Indonesia as well as Burma and Tibet.

The ensuing discussion addressed the sale of arms to developing countries engaged in civil wars, as well as strategies to pressure the IMF to require reduced military expenditures when imposing structural adjustment programmes. A panelist called the European code of conduct on arms transfers a small step forward but expressed hope for a total ban on conventional weapons' sales.

P.V. Rajagopal, Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation (India), spoke on solidarity with the forgotten. He stressed active rather than theoretical solidarity and said the present educational system creates intelligence but kills feelings. He highlighted difficulties that local NGOs face in countries with oppressive regimes and said many struggling for basic needs are often imprisoned. He linked the increase in Southern governments' support for multinational corporations (MNCs) to an increase in oppression and warned that non-violent struggles could turn violent if the world does not demand change. He criticized Northern NGOs for failing to understand Southern struggles and underlined the importance of introspection and change. He said that many Northern NGOs only focus on quantifiable results, are increasingly controlled by experts and managers, and cooperate with Southern governments, thus legitimizing those governments that give MNCs and banks so much power. He recommended fighting against MNCs, corrupt governments and expert-controlled NGOs and said solidarity requires understanding highly complex situations. He stressed focusing programmes on the poorest of the poor, ensuring control over means of production and joining the millions struggling for survival through active solidarity.

Vandana Shiva, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (India), stated that globalization is redefining our understanding of wealth and free trade is denying the creativity and rights of nature and people. She highlighted how states are becoming increasingly accountable to capital and less so to their own citizens. She illustrated how globalization is driving a wedge between North/South solidarity by noting how Northern consumers opposed to genetic engineering are told they are impeding the right of the hungry in the South to food, which is a social, political and economic lie. She said the patenting of life is related to the most pressing issue confronting North/South solidarity -- the theft of traditional knowledge by MNCs through bio-piracy. She decried the propagation of a global monoculture based on the conception that a child thirsty for clean water really needs Coca-Cola and a young girl dreaming of going to school really wants a pair of Nikes. She stressed that not taking more than one needs is the basis of solidarity, leaving enough for ecosystems, other species and all people's livelihoods. She stressed that humanity must create a solidarity that seeks freedom in inclusive and non-violent ways and respects and embraces diversity.

The floor was opened for questions, and one participant asked how a successful anti-poverty strategy should be designed. It was emphasized that poverty is not static and strategies must be flexible and make corporate deeds and charters accountable.

### WORKSHOPS

**Human Rights and Development Cooperation:** The workshop resulted in a resolution to be presented to the Swiss government regarding policy towards East Timor. The resolution demands: communication by the Swiss government to the Indonesian government demanding that NGOs be allowed physical presence in East Timor; humanitarian, development and environmental aid; and witnesses to monitor the situation.

**Solidarity: Between Altruism and Self-interest?:** The workshop acknowledged a tradition of solidarity in Swiss foreign policy, but determined that it is obsolete today. Participants focused on the need for a new solidarity that takes into account economic and environmental aspects, which are at the center of the solidarity debate.

**Towards More Coherence in International Development Cooperation:** Participants discussed two modes of institutional structure to promote policy coherence: centralization of development policy issues in a single government agency, or distribution of issues among various agencies. Participants also discussed the concept of coherence, which was clarified by the example of policy contradiction, stressing that the quest for coherence does not require consensus.

**A Closer Look at Solidarity: Conditions Formulated in the South:** Participants considered the conditionalities of the North and the negotiating position of the South in development cooperation. They suggested methods to improve cooperation, including establishing reciprocal systems of solidarity, allowing the South to set priorities and addressing political debates before developing action plans. They called on the South to encourage grassroots movements to apply political pressure at the national level and on the North to lobby governments to halt capital flight, influence financial institutions and encourage fair trade.

**What Can Children's Literature in the South and the North Contribute to Solidarity?:** Participants discussed developments in African children's literature, how it can remain independent when confronted with books imported from the North, problems surrounding the transcription of orally transmitted stories and the portrait of African society presented in books for children and adolescents.

**How and Where Should Switzerland Act to Promote Peace?:** Participants discussed the relationship between development and conflict, means of conflict prevention and resolution, Switzerland's position of neutrality and its humanitarian tradition. Participants stressed the importance of: intervention at the earliest possible stage of conflict; facts, not media, in determining when to intervene; and a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, including democratization and human rights. Participants concurred that development is the best source of peace.

**Future Generations: Sharing Resources, Participating in Decisions:** Participants discussed difficulties and challenges to civic action and participation of youth. They emphasized that, to promote access to resources such as education, health, work and culture, new forms of leadership and new channels are required to foster a different relationship with society based on creative and democratic debate and action.

**Export Credit Agencies and the Three Gorges Project:** Participants discussed: who supports and who opposes the project in China and why; the potential impact of the World Commission on Dams; and the fate of those resettled by the project. A panelist explained that much of the financial backing for the project has come from export credit agencies (ECAs) such as the Swiss Export Risk Guarantee, most of which lack any environmental or social guidelines. He said NGOs are coordinating to pressure ECAs to institute such guidelines.

### Who Dictates the Agenda for North/South Solidarity?:

Participants discussed: the growth of the NGO "industry" into a huge competitive business with high management costs; the interdependence of Northern and Southern NGOs; examples of Southern initiation of projects; and the need for both advocacy and implementation. Participants outlined principles to serve as a basis for North/South solidarity, including: partnership; transparency; honesty; clear definition of roles and objectives; declaration of all parties' interests; professionalism; sustainability; community initiated and beneficiary-driven action; self-reliance; resource sharing; moral solidarity; and South/South and North/North collaboration.

### PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel on "What does the Foundation for Solidarity mean for Switzerland?" was moderated by Jana Caniga, Swiss Television Network, and was comprised of Christaine Langenberger, Member of Parliament, Maga Wicki, journalist, Kurt Koch, Bishop of Basel, and Peter Arbenz, Association for the Support of the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity. The panel discussed the establishment of a Foundation for Solidarity that would be based on a trust of \$7 billion gifted by the Swiss government, allowing it an annual budget of \$350 million from interest. One panelist emphasized that solidarity is the recognition of equal rights for all people and that the Foundation would be for the present and future and based on coalitions with others in defense of human rights. Another panelist stressed that solidarity is a two-way street. One panelist said opposition to the Foundation stems from reluctance to examine the past, specifically the recently revealed role that Swiss banks played in accepting stolen Jewish gold during the Holocaust, and emphasized that these psychological issues must be addressed. It was noted that the Foundation's creation forces Switzerland to address a painful aspect of its past while building something positive for the future.

The floor was then opened for questions. One participant appreciated Switzerland's efforts to alleviate poverty but noted the absence of proposals for action on the economic and political causes of suffering. Panelists responded that the Foundation should not be an instrument of Swiss foreign policy but noted its call for establishing democratic structures. One participant asked for ethical standards for proposed investments and preferred a tax on high capital incomes rather than raising funds on the world market. A panelist stressed that although criteria for investment were still not clear, ethical and ecological standards would be taken into consideration. One participant underscored changing global priorities and imperatives, redefining "economics," empowering the South to take initiative, and developing a new sustainable development model.

Participants emphasized the need to: remain vigilant, as simply creating the Foundation does not mean solidarity has been achieved; ensure that the Foundation's money does not find itself in the pockets of the corrupt in the South; and involving the South in determining how funds will be used. One participant said the difficulty with the Foundation lies in its seeming presumption that solidarity can somehow be bought. One panelist expressed hope that the Foundation focus on youth and receive the support of NGOs, churches and other citizens' groups.

### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**PLENARY:** Participants will hear opening remarks and an introduction to Future Workshops from 9:00-9:30 in the Parliament Building.

**WORKSHOPS:** Several Future Workshops will convene, in an analytical phase from 9:30-10:45, a visionary phase from 11:15-12:30 and an implementation phase from 14:00-16:00 in the Hotel Kreuz.

**PANEL DISCUSSION:** Youth will present political and business leaders with proposals formulated in the Future Workshops in "The Moment of Truth" from 16:30-17:45 in the Federal Parliament Building.

**CLOSING CEREMONY:** The conference will conclude with a ceremony in front of the Parliament Building at 18:00.