Independent Commission on Multilateralism
"Social Inclusion, Political Participation, and Effective Governance in
Challenging Environments"
Keynote address by Maged Abdelaziz
March 13, 2015

Seventy years ago, global governance was born with the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions. Above all, the significance of this development indicated a realization that, in order to save the successive generations from the scourge of war and promote a harmonious and economically stable global order, states had to engage collectively. And yet the notion of multilateralism is inextricably "state" based. A strong and stable state is a prerequisite for a strong, stable and *functional* multilateral order.

The "state" today however is under multiple pressures. This in turn has reverberated negatively on the multilateral institutions of today's world. When the architects of the post-war order convened in San Francisco, the definition of the state – and of international relations altogether - was very different. The state was a cohesive entity, a means of rule over a defined or 'sovereign' territory. It was the provider of goods and services. It enjoyed full hegemony over the use of force. The notion of a non-state actor was, for the most part, alien.

Over the last twenty-five years, the spread of democratic governance, information technology, globalization and economic interdependence have provided expanded opportunities for countless numbers of people around the world. At the same time, new challenges, from rising inequality to increased geopolitical competition and transnational terrorism and extremism, have challenged traditional notions of the state. These trends are forcing us to rethink our understanding of terms like "social contract", "citizenship", "political participation", "governance" as well as the relevance of the vertical "state-society relations " framework.

We stand at an important juncture of history. Today's dynamics and the present historical consciousness are challenging traditional notions of top-bottom governance models, at the national, regional and global levels. Inclusive, participatory and effective governance practices are needed more than ever at all three tiers.

National Dimension

State actors have grown four-fold since the creation of the United Nations. The number and variety of non-state actors, civil society organizations and networks, and citizen-led movements have also increased dramatically. The emergence of these actors represents an existential crisis to the state: its monopoly on power, influence and service delivery has been upended. How does the state rethink its role as a service provider in such times? In Egypt for example, we moved from an

economic system where the state was the only employer to a situation where the private sector is responsible for the employment of 75% of the workforce and for the implementation of 70% of development plans. How does the state reconcile its role in such a radically transformed economic environment?

The citizen has become disillusioned. What was once a passive "subject" is now an empowered, connected and knowledgeable entity that is challenging the state and eroding its power. But the relationship is not meant to be an antagonistic one – at least that was never the intention behind a healthy and stable social contract in the classical definition.

Today's citizens have acquired a very different understanding of the realities they live in. They are pushing for greater agency in how they are governed. In many instances, disillusioned citizens have grown less deferential to authority. They are resorting to various ways of voicing their grievances, not all of them peaceful. The last four years are a testament to this phenomenon: from the Arab uprisings to the turmoil in Ukraine; but also in several austerity-afflicted European countries.

Governments, for their part, frequently respond in ways that seem incomprehensible to their citizens. The response has often come too late or been miscalculated. Rather than compromise, we see instances where the state tries to clamp down. But what we know from history is that repression backfires: militant groups thrive and extremist ideology is empowered when civilians are persecuted or disillusioned.

Take Boko Haram as an example. After the reestablishment of a civilian government in Nigeria in 1999, a group of Nigerians in the north resumed the periodic protests against what they saw as mismanagement, corruption, and exploitation of the poor. They withdrew from society as a means to have little contact with the government. In some places, self-sufficient communities took shape, some of which comprised over 5,000 people. These were mostly nonviolent, however extreme they might have been in their religious outlook. Boko Haram grew out of one such community. The group turned more extreme as a decade long struggle of back-and-forth violence with the authorities ensued, culminating in a police and military crackdown on Maiduguri. This in effect gave rise to the Boko Haram we now know today.

Boko Haram is only one of the many examples in Africa. Terrorist and criminal networks pose a significant threat to the peace and security of almost all of Africa's sub-regions: Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar Al-Sharia groups in North Africa; Al-Shabaab in East Africa; the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa. While interstate conflicts have become less frequent since the beginning of the new millennium, the militant non-state actor represents the greatest threat to Africa today.

But it is precisely because such groups tend to take advantage of socioeconomic conditions to their own advantage that they represent a deep and long-term threat. They are filling a vacuum and playing the state's role, which endows them with local legitimacy in their areas of operation. The state therefore finds itself at a critical stage where only through reforming its social inclusion agenda and improving its capacity to deliver goods and services – ultimately reducing marginalization and the sense of victimization which provides fertile breeding ground for extremists – can it begin to remedy the problem.

While challenges to the state are mostly internal, they have serious regional and international consequences on peace and security. Borders are being challenged in places like Iraq, Syria and Ukraine. Secessionist actors are gaining momentum in places like Yemen and Libya, many of which are violent non-state military actors or part of criminal networks. While the long-term historical causes need to be taken into account, the short-term causes boil down to systemic state failures. These are, quite simply, manifestations of a governance crisis.

The top-bottom governance relationship between state and citizens is no longer sustainable. Safeguarding equal economic opportunities, accountability, and citizenry participation have become indispensable features of effective governance. We have seen over the past few years the cost of the failure to uphold these values. In light of these challenges and in order for the state to stay robust and resilient, we must ask: how can citizens' demand for political space be taken into account? How should states improve the management of diversity and their capacity to address religious/ethnic tensions in a peaceful manner?

In 2015, the citizens in more than 10 African countries, including Nigeria, Burundi, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Egypt and Tanzania will go to the polls to cast their votes in presidential and/or parliamentarian elections. These elections are likely to take place in a tense and volatile political atmosphere, thus raising the chances of election-related violence. A degree of flexibility and compromise ought to be shown by political elites to avoid such an outcome.

When it comes to political participation, I think of two examples which have been obstacles in the past: 1. alienation and exclusion of the opposition 2. the inability of leaders to relinquish political control.

The tendency to extend a presidential term beyond the two terms allowed in the constitution or in the established rotation practice agreed upon among political actors has proven to be of fatal consequences. We have seen this before in Burkina Faso and we are seeing its impact on the current political situation in the DRC and Nigeria. In Cote d'Ivoire, the refusal by former President Gbagbo to step down after losing the election led to a serious political crisis that threatened to reignite civil war. How can the multilateral system respond to the manipulation of political institutions? Was the parliament in Syria following due democratic process when it

is approved amending the age requirement to allow Bashar al-Assad to ascend to power?

The exclusion of the opposition – particularly after political elite has won an election – represents a similar fatal mistake.   There is no room for majoritarianism or a "winner take all" approach in today's political climate. Instead, mechanisms for pluralism and greater inclusivity in political decision-making are needed more than ever.

Inclusivity does not simply mean political parties but all members of society including women and youth. Gender and youth actors have contributed tremendously to bettering the peace and security agenda in a number of countries. How can recent successes on gender equality initiatives lead the way to more inclusive decisions making processes?

Regional Dimensions

Regionalism and regionalization bring an extra layer of complexity to the current global political landscape. Regional organizations continue to grow and expand, many of them taking an assertive stance and devising new norms and institutions to promote peace, security, and development as well as economic stability. This on the one hand is an indicator that states cannot approach today's challenges alone but it can also be read as a response against a multilateral framework made up of a class system of unequal partners, not fully attuned to the needs or the realities of its constituents.

Some of these interactions and exchanges at the regional level are positive in nature: enhanced trade exchanges, regional infrastructure projects that promote regional integration as well as the establishment of regional institutions to address issues of peace and security.

But others are more negative dynamics which further add to burdens of the state: the spill over of conflict, the influx of refugees, illicit cross-border activities of terrorist and extremist groups and organized crime networks. However, these challenges were themselves served as a motivation to advance regional collective action to meet challenges. In other words, crisis brings opportunity. This was epitomized by the recent African Peace and Security Council on 29 January 2015 to authorize the deployment of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to deal with the threats posed by the Boko Haram: a strong regional response to an evolving regional problem.

The regional sphere has proven to be very important in promoting inclusion and effective governance. The African Union's transition from the policy of non-indifference instead of non-interference was crucial to supporting the transition in an increasing number of African counties to multi-party participatory systems. With the support of partners, including the United Nations, mechanisms have been

established at the national and regional levels to resolve conflicts, consolidate peace and stability, and promote accountability, rule of law and good governance, including the African Peace and Security Architecture, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

The effectiveness of regional blocs and organizations in promoting the values of transparency, accountability and participation is varied and inconsistent, which begs a number of questions. Why has the AU been more successful in this regard than the League of Arab States? What role do history and culture play in influencing political systems to embrace such values? Has the absence of charismatic leaders in the third world left a vacuum that state institutions were not able to fill? To what extent are regionalism and the regional integration process an important medium between the "national" and the "global"?

Global Dimensions

As I reiterated earlier, healthy states are a key ingredient for a healthy multilateral system. In other words, getting one's "house" first is essential to keeping the "global house" in order. And yet the same principles of inclusivity, participation and effective governance are needed just as badly at the multilateral level. Much more can be done to reflect the needs of today's world, to make the system more representative, inclusive and, ultimately, more fit for purpose.

There have been a number of positive developments in the past twenty years on the multilateral front. The new concepts of human intervention, responsibility to protect, and rights up front were a manifestation of the growing importance attached by the United Nations to civil and political rights. The Millennium Development Goals were an important vehicle to promote social inclusion through addressing poverty and hunger and prioritizing access to basic services, particularly education and health services. By the same vein, the MDGs had a positive impact on political participation, at least from the angel of women's participation. *"The proportion of seats held by women in national parliament"* was one of the main indicators to measure progress towards MDG3 "promote gender equality and empower women". I am glad that many African countries have made significant advances in promoting women's participation at all levels of decision making.

The envisaged emphasis of the post-2015 development agenda on reducing poverty and addressing inequalities is definitely an important asset to the efforts to close the gaps in socio-economic inclusion and good governance. The timing could not be more crucial: a recent Oxfam report that was published ahead of the last World Economic Forum meeting in Davos warned that the combined wealth of the richest 1% will overtake that of the other 99% next year unless the current trend of rising inequality is checked.

Development partners should scale up cooperation to help addressing poverty and inequalities and promote socio-economic inclusion.

Current global political, monetary and trading governance mechanisms, including the United Nations Security Council, International Financial Institutions and G20 suffer a real legitimacy deficit. These mechanisms are in dire need for reform to give voice to the voiceless and marginalized in order to have a say and real participation in decision making and norm setting. Almost 80% of the Security Council's agenda covers a part of the world that has no permanent voice in the chamber. This comes to show that the current architecture – one based on the geopolitical and economic reality of 1945 – is simply out of step with today's needs. Equal and fair representation at the highest level of international decision-making ought to be a serious option on the table as a real manifestation of international good governance.

Finally, the double standards in international response have hurt the credibility of the system. How can the veto to continue being used when trying to prevent foreign occupation or the impunity of perpetrators of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Conclusion

Our discussions here today and tomorrow could not be more timely. The world will soon adopt the post-2015 development agenda that emphasizes peace and security, governance and human rights as critical enablers for inclusive growth and sustainable development. The recently adopted African Union Agenda 2063 expresses strong commitment to good governance, democracy, social inclusion and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. Promoting women's economic and social inclusion and political participation were at the centre of debates in the United Nations this week during the session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Furthermore, this meeting touches on very important aspects that go to the core of major review processes that the UN is carrying out this year, namely, the review of UN peace operation, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. While addressing issues of peacekeeping, prevention, peaceful settlement of conflicts, a candid discussion is needed on the role of military alliances such as NATO in shaping and supporting UN responses. I was glad to hear that the Independent Commission on Multilateralism which has convened this very retreat is working with full awareness of these initiatives and their outputs, to ensure complementary and avoid duplication.

In other words, the buzzwords of social inclusion, political participation and effective governance are out there.

But rhetoric is not enough. The rhetoric needs to evolve into real concrete action and every actor must play his/her role. To change for the better, we must act incrementally and with prudence. We must also remember that this is not a tabula rasa. We are not here to re-invent the wheel. We have as a starting point a Charter

that remains relevant and has endured for seven decades. It is a living thing which we were given a mandate to continuously build on and improve.

As US President Truman said seventy years ago, 'No one claims that it is now a final or a perfect instrument. Changing world conditions will require readjustments--but they will be the readjustments of peace and not of war.'
But he was not the only leader at the time who referred to the Charter as the guiding light: the great Indian statesman Jawaharlal Nehru warned that "we cannot give effect to the Charter quickly because the world is imperfect. Nevertheless, we should move in that direction step by step. The first thing to remember and to strive for is to avoid a situation getting worse and finally leading to a major conflict, which means the destruction of all the values one holds'. It is now our responsibility to live up to that message – still relevant over half a century later - and to protect those very values which we are needed now, more than ever before.

Thank you.