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U.S. BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:  
THREE OBSERVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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A university invites an alumnus to give the commencement address at its own risk.

The old grad returns to the campus and finds his or her heart touched by images from the past: the loss of a venerable building, the retention of a landmark statue. He looks out from his place on the stage and remembers a day many years ago, when he too waited impatiently for the long-sought diploma, symbol of his commitment to what he would become. At the back of his mind the old grad recalls with vague disquiet the restlessness with which he himself suffered through the exhortations and windy pontificating of some long-forgotten sage who, three decades ago, abused the captive tolerance of his own graduating class. He reminds himself that brevity is the essence of virtue, and nostalgia the most difficult of all feelings to share.

Now, having carefully posted all the danger signs, I will happily ignore my own warnings and start down memory lane!

It was some 34 years ago that I sat in the seat that one of you graduates occupies today. Like most of you, I had a sense that I stood on the threshold of my future. I was exhilarated: the challenging course of study was finished. I was proud: I felt that I had added to my intellectual skills and expanded my critical view of the world. As I neared the end of my program, attending classes in that marvelous old building at 1906 Florida Avenue, I considered two possible directions. First, I could follow my father's footsteps into the United States Foreign Service. He had already completed half of his diplomatic career that would span 40 years. Diplomacy was the time-honored field for anyone who sought a professional life in international affairs, and it was the career for which a great many of my most talented fellow students had been preparing

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themselves. The other possibility was the field of technical assistance for international development. It was an almost entirely new concept -- not just a road less traveled, but a trail that had yet to be blazed. Yet I was persuaded that foreign development assistance would become an important part, even a critical part, of U.S. foreign policy. That conviction remained unchanged throughout my career. I still believe it today.

I went to work for the late Nelson Rockefeller in a nonprofit organization he had established as a result of his experience as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Foreign development became my full-time occupation for some 22 years. While today I seem to have strayed into academic administration, I have never ceased to devote a major portion of my time and energy to the development field.

## I. Development Assistance at a Crossroad

The three-and-a-half decades since my graduation from the School of Advanced International Studies are virtually coterminous with the emergence of development assistance as an integral part of foreign policies. Dating from President Truman's famous Point IV speech, in which he announced his program of bilateral assistance to the world's Less Developed Countries (or LDCs), the evolution of development assistance has continued through the postwar years, the Cold War, and détente into our own increasingly uncertain and anxious era. The U.S. now has had some 35 years' experience in development, attempting to help Third World societies modernize and improve their people's lives. Our activities have included not only government bilateral programs such as those conducted by AID and its predecessor agencies, but also multilateral programs and those mounted by corporations, private philanthropy, and voluntary agencies.

Despite this very substantial fund of experience at our disposal, I believe that international development assistance has reached a crossroad as we enter the penultimate decade of the 20th century. The familiar roads diverge into unknown directions, and the road signs of the past give little indication as to how we are to reach the destinations of the future. If we are to make the right choices about which way to turn, I believe three broad observations must be taken into account.

## II. Three Observations

### 1. International Development: The Limits of Assistance

My first observation is that while the drive toward development is clearly one of the most overwhelming global forces of our time, there are limitations to the part that formal development assistance programs can and should play at the present time.

In the first place, we have a limit of knowledge. We still do not know nearly enough about what "causes" development. Trying to explain why growth does or does not occur in socioeconomies has been a central preoccupation of economists and other social scientists since Adam Smith, whose famous essay was suitably titled An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. Thousands of books later, we development

types are still not fully in accord. Oh, we have our theories: investment theories, human capital theories, innovation theories, technology theories, psychological theories, cultural theories, political and historical theories (dare I add "supply-side" theories?) -- it would be pointless to mention them all. If we could spend the time analyzing all the development theories and empirical studies of the last 30 years, I believe the important conclusion we might draw would be that there is no single key, no "fundamental" factor that catalyzes growth and maintains its impetus. We know that growth takes place because of many factors in combination; but the factors and the combinations are not the same in every case. We have yet to draw up a universally valid chart or theory of how socioeconomic conditions combine to cause growth and what combinations are most successful in any given situation.<sup>1/</sup>

Although we have yet to assess and fully understand the successes and failures of our bilateral development assistance ventures, compared with the late forties we know a good deal more about the process. Consider for example, the very important development area of food. In the years between 1951 and 1980, food production in the developing nations rose faster than population -- at a compound annual rate of 2.9 percent, compared to 2.4 percent for population. This was in fact faster than food output growth in the developed nations themselves. (Barr, 1981, 1088) Now, it is true that there were wide variations among countries and regions in the LDC bloc, as regards food production, population, and other aspects of development. But overall, the LDCs' food output grew faster during these years than that in the developed countries -- in part because of international agricultural development projects carried out by the U.S. and other assisting nations.

What else have we learned? Well, in recent years, U.S. bilateral programs have tended to overemphasize massive commodity and credit transfers without sufficiently looking at ways to help target countries build indigenous capacities for meeting their own needs on a long-run, self-sustained basis. For example, in agriculture we have learned that direct supply of, say, large supplies of fertilizer may not be the best way to improve food production and farm family income on a permanent or lasting basis. Unless we work to strengthen the indigenous institutions and human capital, an external "quick-fix" cannot by itself have a lasting impact on food production and can only accentuate dependency. (Wharton, 1982, 6 and 7)

Similarly, the Congressional mandate that assistance programs focus directly on the "poorest of the poor" population in host nations was no doubt motivated by the best of intentions. Nevertheless, if narrowly construed it may not be the best use of scarce development resources. For example, "using a U.S. agricultural research scientist as a county extension agent working with 200 (small farmers) in an underdeveloped nation may be balm to one's conscience because the scientist is responding directly to human needs. But is it the best use of that scientist if alternatively his time were spent on an experiment station where he might discover a new higher yielding variety or technique of cultivation that might double the productivity of millions of such farmers?" (Wharton, 1978, 6)

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<sup>1/</sup>  
- For a recent insightful review see Schuh (1981).

We know that macroeconomic or national planning is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for growth. We know that the social and cultural context in which the planning takes place -- the public response -- is equally important. We know that science and technology in and of themselves are hardly panaceas, if they are unsuitable or at odds with deeply-felt human values or basic social institutions in the nations where assistance is taking place. Failure to look more attentively at these larger questions of "context," if you will, seem to me to have a good deal to say about why development has been notably more successful in some areas -- say, India -- than in others such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Against the backdrop of both our progress in and our continuing need to know more about development must be projected another important limit on what development can achieve: the emergence and maturation of the independent nation states of the Third World. The outcome has been the predictable and understandable dominance of nationalistic political forces. The self-determination of the early post-colonial period has blossomed into the full-blown peer dialogue of North vs. South. Hence, in bilateral development assistance it is no longer a case of our paternalistically choosing or even influencing the developmental goals of the LDCs -- much less their implementation. Just as in the United States, domestic political considerations of international political factors in the LDCs often submerge or defeat the realization of developmental goals and programs. (Wharton, 1977) The political limitations on developmental assistance are real and will continue to grow.

But perhaps the most fundamental limitation is that formal technical assistance efforts are, in the last analysis, only a small part of the development process. Quantitatively speaking, at least, Western tariff policies, OPEC oil prices, or even fluctuations in the U.S. prime interest rate have a greater impact on the economies and societies of the developing nations than the relatively small amounts that have been devoted to development. Growth and modernization throughout the LDCs are world-historical processes, involving structural patterns of trade and resource flow, clashes of techniques and ideologies, and realignments of political and cultural forces. These are all matters that one does not manipulate or shape unilaterally, either behind the scenes or in the field.

In other words, the most important limitation affecting bilateral development assistance is that it has severely constrained financial and human resources at its disposal, and it operates on a world-historical stage where it is but one of a whole constellation of forces -- many of which carry quantitatively much more weight. Hence, it becomes a matter of paramount necessity that developers take steps to make sure that their relatively small available investments bring the greatest possible returns -- to ensure that development programs provide what my corporate friends would call the "biggest bang for the buck." This goal requires that assistance -- whether the most direct kinds of resource or fund transfers, or the most complex, long-range kinds of institution-building -- take place on the strategic margin of effectiveness.

## 2. Changing Conditions in the Third World

My second observation is that the Third World is no longer what it was in 1949 or even 1957 -- not least because there has been development.

Three decades ago, for example, well-trained scientists and professionals were mainly imported Westerners. Today, thanks to both U.S. exchange programs and the development of indigenous educational institutions, many LDCs have a large and growing pool of scientific, technical, and managerial power. (The major exception is sub-Saharan Africa.) Over the years 1961 to 1980, U.S. colleges and universities alone have produced something in the neighborhood of 74,000 foreigners with Ph.Ds. (Syver-son, 1981, 8, 19) We do not know exactly how many past and recent graduates are working in development in their own lands, but the point is that the numbers are vast orders of magnitudes larger than was true during the early years of technical assistance.

What are some other differences? Well, the U.S. once held almost a monopoly on development assistance, but that is no longer the case. In addition to aid provided by the 17 member governments of the Development Assistance Committee, in which the U.S. is a participant, there are also the sizable assistance efforts of the OPEC bloc (2.34 percent of GNP) and the much smaller commitments by centrally-planned nations of Eastern Europe (.12 percent GNP). In these as in our own program, there is considerable intermingling of true development aid and military assistance. Even so, it is clear that the field we once occupied virtually alone has now become quite crowded.

Another change over the years has been the increasing differentiation among the Third World nations. We have "graduate nations" no longer eligible for bilateral assistance, "middle-income nations," "resource-rich" nations, and "resource-poor" nations. This increasing differentiation among developing countries raises a number of questions. Should our aid be focused exclusively on the poorer nations? If not, what policies and instrumentalities should be adopted in our work with "graduate nations"?<sup>2/</sup>

Finally, there is the fact which I mentioned earlier, that bilateral assistance is no longer the dominant or sole actor on the development stage.

All these changes are particularly relevant for the conduct of our bilateral development assistance. Unfortunately, the program and project methods employed by today's bilateral development assistance programs operate as if the Third World were essentially identical to what it was in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

From 1953 to 1956, I had the privilege of being a part of a group studying U.S. technical assistance in Latin America. In thinking about the need to re-examine the administrative mechanisms for the conduct of U.S. bilateral assistance, I took from my library one of the books produced by the project -- Philip Glick's The Administration of Technical Assistance (1957). At the time, Glick's book and its two companion policy pamphlets were the state-of-the-art for the conduct of U.S. technical assistance. When I skimmed through

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<sup>2/</sup> Both Dave Bell and Ralph Smuckler reminded me of previous efforts to recognize the need to develop policies and mechanisms to encourage U.S. collaborative, scientific, technical, and educational activities with "middle-income" developing countries. The proposed ISTC, Institute for Scientific and Technical Cooperation, would have been one response to this issue. When an LDC nation "graduates" is precisely the time "when there should be a major effort to solidify and strengthen the educational and cultural ties that have been built under AID and convert them to long-term collaborative relationships for the benefit of both the U.S. and the country concerned." (David E. Bell, private communication April 23, 1982).

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the table of contents under the section headed "The Choice of Instruments for Effective Cooperation," I found such topics as: "the broad economic survey," "the technical mission," "the university contract," "the training grant for training abroad."

The striking thing about the list is that although there have been significant, even radical changes throughout the LDCs during the last 25 years, most of the same mechanisms still shape our development efforts today!

### A World Commission on U.S. Bilateral Development Effectiveness

The pressing needs to update our assistance methods and enhance the strategic effectiveness of our scarce development resources lead me to propose that there be established an international commission to examine the conduct and mechanisms best suited for U.S. bilateral technical assistance in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond.<sup>3/</sup>

The commission would be sponsored either by a private U.S. foundation or by a neutral agency such as the National Academy of Sciences. The commission should have a duration of no more than two years.

The composition of such a commission should be broad, including not only personnel from the Agency for International Development and the U.S. Congress, but also leaders and scientists from the LDCs and other donor nations. Educators from the LDCs and the United States would take part, as would foundation personnel and perhaps representatives of other voluntary agencies with substantial development experience and commitments.<sup>4/</sup>

Even though the commission's focus would be upon U.S. bilateral assistance programs, an international membership on the commission is vital. Despite the superficial appearance of a "conflict of interest" in having non-U.S. members or even persons from aid recipient nations and other donor nations on such a commission, the net gains

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<sup>3/</sup> Mr. David Rockefeller in a talk to the Council on Foreign Relations (1981) has also proposed the need for a review of U.S. development assistance, but with a somewhat different emphasis and approach. His proposal and mine, however, are quite complementary.

<sup>4/</sup> Hopefully, the majority of the funding might be from private and foundation sources to assure maximum independence. In particular, I doubt that the commission should be of the Presidential genus -- since one President's commission report is often another President's wastepaper. But some Federal funding might be provided to assure access to information and an interest in the implementation of any commission recommendations.

in securing helpful insights far exceed any such dangers.<sup>5/</sup> (Moreover, this view is validated in other experiences as the Canadian aid organization IDRC.)

It would be the responsibility of the commission to collect data on past, present, and alternative methods or mechanisms for the conduct and execution of U.S. bilateral assistance projects and programs. We need to know what has worked and what has not and why.<sup>6/</sup>

The commission would need to look at established practices in light of changing circumstances. For example, bilateral assistance has traditionally involved stationing U.S. administrators and professionals overseas. Yet long-term overseas personnel are extremely expensive to maintain, absorbing a disproportionate part of total assistance funding. With the growing reservoir of foreign talent available, the commission would need to ask itself whether past practices for in-country administration and oversight can and ought to be revised.

Because bilateral assistance is now a more scarce development resource, every effort must be made to assure that it is used with maximum effectiveness. U.S. bilateral assistance must concentrate on those areas and activities where it has the greatest comparative advantage. For example, U.S. scientific and technological skills may have much to contribute to the long-run research efforts of LDCs; on the other hand, we may have little that is unique to provide in improved methods for relief efforts or the delivery of food aid, important as they may be in the short run. (Wharton, 1978)

Determining the effectiveness of our current mechanisms and practices cannot be done in isolation from the problems or subject matter areas of development. The linkage must be made. But the commission would differ from other study groups in that the problem areas will not be primary focus. We have more than enough recent analyses delineating the problems of development. (CEQ 1977; Linowitz 1980; Brandt 1980; FAO 1981) But such efforts rarely go beyond defining the problem with a few overbroad recommended solutions. The detailed solutions and the methods for their implementation and execution are rarely touched. What we need now is to concentrate attention upon the administrative mechanisms, program techniques, and project instrumentalities used in our development assistance.

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<sup>5/</sup> Fowler Hamilton, a former AID Administrator, in commenting on an earlier draft of the speech made the following trenchant observation in support of the commission's proposed international composition: ". . . No society can solve any of its political or economic problems today by its own unaided efforts. Since every significant problem from nuclear warfare to public health now requires international cooperation and, if the Platonic ideal of Western civilization to achieve change by persuasion rather than by force is to be realized, the fora for discussion must be international." (private communication, April 26, 1982)

<sup>6/</sup> Nobel laureate Theodore Schultz made some extremely perceptive comments on this point in his lectures to AID in Washington in February of this year.

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Innovations in the execution of U. S. bilateral development assistance have taken place over the years and are taking place now. Two recent examples are individual U. S. university linkages to specific AID overseas missions for technical support and the development of a "joint career corps" whereby U. S. faculty members will alternate their work assignments between their universities and service to AID in Washington or overseas.<sup>7/</sup> (Wharton, 1982, 6) But what is needed is a far more systematic and objective look at all areas of U. S. bilateral assistance to determine the possibilities for new approaches and mechanisms more appropriate to today. With a broad mandate, I believe that the proposed international commission could conduct valuable investigations to achieve a streamlined, modernized, and more effective U. S. bilateral development assistance.

### 3. Development: the Centerpiece of U. S. Relations with the Third World

Once under way, the commission would, of course, be at liberty to explore a whole range of issues and questions pertaining to the conduct and mechanisms of U. S. bilateral assistance. Its goals, however, should be visionary. It should seek to make

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<sup>7/</sup> These are just two of several innovations that have recently been put into place by the U. S. Board for International Food and Agricultural Development. Charged by the Congress with overseeing and promoting relationships between AID and U. S. universities, BIFAD has worked since 1975 to promote the greater involvement of U. S. land-grant and agricultural universities in foreign development assistance in the war on hunger. BIFAD has undertaken this via several new administrative and program methods. Two other innovations besides those mentioned above are:

(1) The "CRSP" or Collaborative Research Support Program is designed to provide long-term collaborative funding of research programs involving multiple U. S. universities working cooperatively with those in developing countries. The participating U. S. universities share the cost (a minimum of 25 percent) using non-Federal funds, and the research has a dual goal of benefiting U. S. agriculture and the agriculture of the LDCs. Seven programs are under way involving 44 U. S. institutions working in 50 developing countries and with six international research centers.

(2) The "Collaborative Assistance Method" of university contracting allows university participation in shaping project design and work plans in advance; heightens flexibility in working out the timing and mix of inputs with institutions in the developing countries; and serves a long-term commitment of professional resources.

My purpose in citing these examples is not to indulge in self-congratulation but merely to illustrate how in just one area of developmental assistance it has been possible to develop new approaches and mechanisms which are more appropriate to today.

concrete the ideal explicit in my third observation for today: the United States must forge a foreign policy in which technical assistance and overseas development are recognized as the core of long-run world stability, and in which development is the centerpiece of U.S. relations with the Third World.

The U.S. still provides the largest amount of overseas development aid in absolute terms -- but this figure can be misleading. In comparative or relative terms, the U.S. once gave the largest share of Gross National Product as well. Now we give a smaller share of GNP than 12 other nations -- including such currently beleaguered economies as France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. In 1949, official U.S. development assistance amounted to 2.7 percent of GNP. In 1980 it was .27 percent -- shrunken by a factor of 10! Note that at \$7.1 billion, the 1980 net "overseas development assistance" total was lower in real terms than what we provided in 1961. (Hansen et al, 1982, 226)

At the same time, the U.S. is spending 20 times more on defense than on development assistance (Linowitz et al, 1980, 13), and 1981 expenditures for military assistance are estimated at 28.3 percent of total U.S. foreign assistance. (Hansen et al, 1982, 226) What rankles even more is that much of what hides under the cover of "development aid" today is really nothing of the kind, but rather military, political, and economic assistance to nations which U.S. policymakers have designated as strategic allies. In fiscal year 1980, over half of all commitments of economic assistance by AID were in the Economic Support Fund category, formerly called Security Support Assistance. Of that amount, some \$1.65 billion -- over 40 percent of AID's total disbursement -- went to Egypt and Israel alone! (Hansen et al, 1982, 242) For FY 1983, the Administration's foreign aid appropriation request essentially straightlines development assistance, which is up five percent, somewhat below anticipated inflation. But the security assistance request seeks an increase of 35 percent above 1982.

More people have died from hunger in this millennium than from all its wars, but I am not downplaying the importance of defense. I am questioning the persistent entanglement of military and development assistance, which has so far been much to the disadvantage of development. Moreover, I find it necessary to point out that precisely those conditions that development seeks to remedy -- grinding poverty, failures of land reform, and a thousand other manifestations of human disenfranchisement -- often play a major role in precipitating internal strife in the LDCs and rendering them so vulnerable to both domestic upheavals and the adventurist meddling by foreign superpowers.

At a time when weapons proliferation of all sorts verges on being out of control, and when a spuriously fashionable "tough-mindedness" makes it possible for supposedly rational leadership to discuss the winability of nuclear war, it is certainly clear that an overriding concern of foreign policy should be arms limitations. We must indeed pull back from the abyss of final holocaust; hence the urgency of arms control and de-escalation of hostile rhetoric and actions alike. Nevertheless, I believe that the threat of nuclear war, appalling as it is, is basically a symptom rather than a root of international discord -- a symptom with vast potential for catastrophe, but a symptom for all of that. Arms reduction is desirable for many reasons, economic as well as political; yet

arms reduction alone will not address the foundations of international instability. Rather, what is needed is a development-centered policy that recognizes and seeks to reduce the social, political, and economic inequities that undercut order, progress, and prosperity worldwide -- inequities between and among individuals, and inequities between and among nations. Only when these deeply rooted, structural ills have been acknowledged and addressed will the more symptomatic problems of international conflict become amenable to lasting resolution.

Development goals are almost inevitably long-term ones, which day-to-day political and security crises have a tendency to crowd aside as secondary priorities or idealistic visions. Yet I am compelled to point out that we live in an increasingly interdependent and yet increasingly pluralistic world -- a world in which the material capacity to end human want coexists in pathological tension with nuclear brinkmanship. Under these circumstances, I would argue that the only workable foreign policy is one in which long-term and short-term interests converge, in which ideal visions are recognized as the sole ones that are ultimately practical.

### III. Conclusion: The True Goals of Development

You, the graduates of SAIS 1982, are tomorrow's leaders. Regardless of the career path you may have chosen -- government, business, private agencies -- the issue of U.S. development assistance will touch and affect your lives. For you -- for us all -- the challenge of development is greater today than ever before.

Let us not forget the concrete, human dimensions of the problem:

- One human being out of every eight now alive is hungry most of the time.
- Sixteen percent of the world's children are malnourished.
- More than 600 million people live on the equivalent of less than \$50 per year.
- The developing nations have one soldier for every 250 people, but one doctor for every 3,700 people.
- More than 100 million agricultural workers own little or no land of their own.
- While development assistance has brought LDC food production today to a level equal to 87 percent of consumption, by the end of the century the figure could fall to 74 percent. (Linowitz et al, 1980, 3)

When I underscore the importance of development assistance programs, I do not mean to imply that they can -- or should -- gather up the entire LDC world into its arms, sweeping it forward and depositing it with appropriate fanfare on the doorstep of a

Westernized 21st century. In the first place, nothing of the sort is possible. In the second place, many thoughtful leaders and citizens of the LDCs are by no means certain that they want their own societies to emulate our industrialized, compulsively consumptive example. Development assistance as a profession needs to acknowledge candid reservations about both the possibility and desirability of development conceived as the globalization of contemporary Western values.

As I have set forth these three observations for the future, it may have seemed to you that I have been painting a contradictory picture of U.S. development assistance.

On the one hand, I have suggested that U.S. bilateral development programs must deal realistically with a range of theoretical and practical limitations. On the other, I have recommended that development become the centerpiece for U.S. relations with the Third World and an integral part of U.S. foreign policy generally.

Here, I have talked of what is practically achievable. There, I have called for idealistic -- some might say utopian -- commitments to a visionary future.

Well, I am tempted to play the role of the patronizing elder, admonishing you that all great truths are paradoxical and that the answer to most of the multiple choice questions posed by real life is "all of the above."

What exactly does this "all" entail, as regards bilateral development assistance for tomorrow as well as today? Well, development assistance programs aim to improve food production, education, housing, health, and other aspects of material life. But material well-being is not the ultimate goal of development. Income and indeed all other indices or components of material prosperity are, at best, a means to an end. To end itself is the right and capacity for human beings to live to the fullest, as social beings at peace with their world and their fellows.

At its core, the challenge of development abroad is the challenge of human community. Employment, income, and all the goods and services that spill from the cornucopia of knowledge and technology are, at best, tools -- tools we use falteringly in our continuing attempt to ease, once and for all, the strains and tensions that ever threaten to tear apart the fabric of the human race.

From the dawn of humanity to the present, our greatest preoccupation has been with the quantitative aspects of life: enough food, clothing, shelter, and fuel for ourselves and our families. Only recently have a few nations, the U.S. in the forefront, been capable of devoting serious attention to the qualitative aspects of life -- not only for an elite, but for all.

Still at the margin of survival, the remaining three-fourths of the world are determined to develop . . . and they will succeed. But while they are still overwhelmingly concerned with the quantitative aspects of life, they look to us for more than just material aid. They are also watching to see how we face the qualitative issues that have arisen in the wake of our prosperity: the issues of freedom, of equality, and of self-fulfillment.

In these areas no less than in others, the developing nations are watching us closely, and they are watching with agonizing hope. The challenge of development demands our deepest commitment to these intensely human hopes. Only from their realization will there come a viable future for all of us, or for any of us.

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