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Opening Statement

Ethics and Policy

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ETHICS AND POLICY – OPENING STATEMENT

It is indeed a privilege and an honour for the International Peace Bureau (IPB), which I represent, to open this discussion on “Ethics, Values and Policy: Our Deeper Unity, Our Common Humanity” – a theme that is clearly timely and relevant in the current context of global affairs. The IPB was founded in 1892 as a direct result of the third Universal Peace Congress held in this eternal city of Rome in 1891. As the world’s oldest and most comprehensive international peace federation and the Nobel Peace Laureate in 1910, we continue to be proud to be associated with the Nobel Laureates Summit and we thank the Gorbachev Foundation and the City of Rome for your hospitality and the arrangements.

The IPB would like to propose that our consideration of this agenda item be structured in three parts. This initial session will consist of an overview of the subject. Thereafter we will have a session entitled, “Peace and Security: Multilateral and Disarmament Imperatives.” The final session will be “Sustainable Development: Building a Culture of Peace.” This is not of course a rigid compartmentalization because building a culture of peace requires an integrated agenda.

The use of the term “Ethics” for a set of moral principles presupposes that we are all bound by a common understanding of what we mean. In a very broad sense, we are talking about the absolutely irreducible minimum of humankind’s cultural, moral and spiritual achievement over centuries of civilization. It is not only what distinguishes the human species from other living beings, but also the soul of humankind. It is the quintessence of all religious philosophies and the highest common factor among all cultures.

Ethical choices are central to the human condition and can not be marginalized. Each one of you in your exemplary lives, and every institution represented here is uniquely equipped to describe how ethics played a role in the policies pursued by you in advancing the common causes of humankind. It is widely, but wrongly, assumed that the realm of ethical values and the world of pragmatic politics are wide apart and that never the twain shall meet. Your achievements alone illustrate that there can be a fusion between ethics and policy, and it is this fusion that contributes to the betterment of mankind and to peace. All of you have felt the heat of political expediency and the pressures of powerful forces luring you away from ethical values. That you withstood that heat and those forces is a measure of your contribution to humankind.

We are still in the early days of the first century of a new millennium in the human saga leaving behind the bloodiest century of all time. There is a unique opportunity for us to use the indisputable influence we wield, individually and collectively, to shape a world order that is built more solidly on ethics than on the pursuit of individual profit or national self-interest. In the year 2000 the largest ever gathering of Heads of State and Government met at the United Nations in New York and issued the historic Millennium Declaration. Significantly, before the Declaration embarks on setting objectives in respect of the different areas of peace, security and disarmament including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction especially nuclear weapons; development and poverty eradication; human rights, democracy and good governance including the Millennium Development Goals; protecting the vulnerable and meeting the special needs of Africa, it addresses the issue of fundamental values underpinning

international relations in the twenty-first century. That demonstrates a remarkably sound judgment of priorities. If the leaders of the world cannot agree on the ethical values that bind them together, they are unlikely to agree on common goals and common strategies to overcome what Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called ‘problems without passports’.

It is relevant for us therefore to review these shared values set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration as a common ethical base. They comprise six of the most basic aspirations of humankind – **freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility**. From each of these fundamental values we draw our guidance for the specific action plans that the international community committed itself to in the Millennium Declaration. It is a moral compass for us all. As universally shared values and principles they are the essential components of peace and non-violence leading humankind away from conflict and the clash of arms towards the peaceful settlement of disputes. Individually these values represent powerful forces that have inspired and motivated humankind throughout millennia of history. They have been accelerators of human progress. Collectively they represent the benchmark against which we must judge our performance as individual nations and as the world community in taking humankind forward to a better and safer world.

- ❖ **Freedom** - was the spur that rid the world of slavery, colonialism and apartheid: it is the ethical value that protects men, women and children from fear, exploitation and abuse, from injustice and deprivation and from want and hunger.
- ❖ **Equality** - is what drove societies to abolish discrimination on the basis of colour, creed, wealth, ethnicity, aristocratic origin and gender: it is the ethical value that empowers individuals in society and nations in the international community whether big or small, rich or poor, mighty or meek.
- ❖ **Solidarity** - is the sense of a common identity as one human family with reciprocal duties and obligations that has led to social contracts and social security within countries and to the aid and assistance of the wealthy and developed countries to those who are stricken with disease, disaster and endemic poverty: it is the ethical value that must ensure the elimination of injustices, asymmetries in globalised development and absolute poverty.
- ❖ **Tolerance** - is the glue that has bonded us together as human beings with mutual respect for each other despite our astonishing diversity both within nations and the international community: it is the ethical value that will prevent ethnic and religious conflict within nations and the ‘clash of civilizations’ on a global scale ensuring instead a ‘dialogue among civilizations’ and the celebration of human diversity as an endowment.
- ❖ **Respect for nature** - is what has preserved the available and potential natural resources of our planet Earth and our ecological system as our common heritage to serve the genuine needs and not the greedy wants of humankind: it is the ethical value that will guide us to sustainable development managing our consumption of resources equitably and wisely so that we pass on the world which we occupy as a trust, to generations to come in at least as healthy and wholesome a state as we received it from preceding generations. Finally,

- ❖ **Shared responsibility** – is the common realization that we are one brotherhood and sisterhood placed together in a world that is more integrated than ever before through the processes of globalization and that the management of public goods has to be achieved optimally through participatory, people-centred endeavours and good democratic governance at the national level and through multilateralism and international organizations - with the United Nations at its apex - in the collective response to global challenges to international peace and human security: it is the ethical value that will prevent humankind from anarchy and self-destruction through selfishness and profligacy and the insurance policy to achieve a rule based international order founded on the bedrock of international law, human rights, equity and justice.

The translation of these ethical values in the daily world of human interaction – to do the right thing for the right reason – presents all of us with an enormous challenge. I am deeply convinced that with the influence you command, you can and must make a difference. At the end of this discussion I know that what you will say collectively will be heard throughout the world. We are here because of a common bond of having served the cause of international peace and security. We have to continue to serve that noble cause although we may not be in government and although we may not all be policy-makers. But we cannot ever underestimate our collective potential to influence Governments and to guide policy formulation on ethical lines. So can civil society collectively. We can provide leadership to civil society. No Government or group can claim a monopoly over wisdom. Nor can they claim to be the sole interpreters of the national or global interest. We are not exempt from this general premise but we can contribute towards the public discourse on national and international policy by emphasizing the ethical dimension. Already there are danger signals that illustrate an erosion of the ethical base we have in the world. Terrorism, nihilism and anarchism are ominous symptoms. Are they the result of perceptions that the policies pursued in the past have been divorced from ethics? Or are they the emergence of a new threat for which our collective response must not be militarism but a return to implementing our shared value base of ethics honestly, transparently and consistently?

Let us launch our joint quest for a greater role for ethics in the formulation of policy to respond to the new threats to security and to the other challenges facing humankind today. It is an urgent task to preserve and develop the mainsprings of our common humanity for a new and glorious chapter of human history. Despair is a terrible condition breeding cynicism and destructive violence. We must give the world hope based on fundamental moral principles. It is the certain path for humankind's future.

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