

## **AN AMERICAS PERSPECTIVE ON DEVELOPMENT**

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Development

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Excellencies, leaders from world religions, ambassadors for peace, ladies  
and gentlemen,

Thank you to the Universal Peace Federation for hosting this summit for  
delegates from seventy countries in many parts of our shrunken planet.  
Your international work for peace and security, interfaith bridge building,  
the UN and NGO relations, building cultures of peace, and strengthening  
families/marriage is much to be admired and supported by persons of  
goodwill everywhere.

It is also an honour to be in South Korea and Seoul, especially during what  
the government of Canada has proclaimed “The year of Korea in Canada”.  
Much is going well here and your country appears to be an example of  
human development for the entire world. Your democracy, including the  
recent election of Ms. Park as your first woman president (to be  
inaugurated on Monday), governance in general, strong economy,  
education-aided by sacrificing parents, the rule of law, social programs,  
culture, the arts and sports—all seem today to be among the very best  
internationally. Even your dance “Gangnam Style” attracted more than  
787 million YouTube views ,the website`s most watched video ever.

South Korea’s successes were recognized indirectly by the election and re-  
election of H.E. Ban Ki-moon as UN Secretary-General. His Excellency  
noted in his acceptance speech, “My heart is overflowing with gratitude  
toward my country and people who have sent me here to serve. It has been  
a long journey from my youth in war torn and destitute Korea to this  
rostrum and these awesome responsibilities. I could make the journey  
because the UN was with my people in our darkest days...” It was good that  
we all applauded the UN yesterday while being fully conscious of the need  
to reform it for today’s more difficult world.

## Human Development in Americas

The topic for this panel is the Americas; I'll focus in the very brief time available on human development in our region. The roughly billion residents of 36 independent nations in the Caribbean and South/North America are probably all at somewhat differing stages of development. Six of them are in the top 50 of the UN Human Development Index for 2011.

I agree with the thesis of the Harvard/Oxford historian Niall Ferguson in his 2011 book, *Civilization-The West and the Rest*, that those nations in the Americas and elsewhere that have achieved the most to enhance the lives of their citizens accept that democracy requires much more than elections. Winston Churchill, notes Ferguson, probably put the point better than anyone:

“...a society based on the opinion of civilians...(where) violence...riot and tyranny give place to parliaments where laws are made, (with) independent courts of justice in which over long periods these laws are maintained. That is Civilization-and in that soil continually grow freedom, comfort and culture...The central principle of Civilization is the subordination of the ruling class to the settled customs of the people and to their will as expressed in the Constitution...”

The main underlying reason for human development differences in the Americas for Ferguson is that some populations enjoy better representative government with good constitutions and institutions of governance, the rule of law, and the sanctity of private property for all.

It was a major error for the Spanish to attempt to keep both power and land in the parts of the Americas they conquered the hands of the Spanish Crown. It is true that for centuries most property in Britain was held by a small number of families, but at least property rights were secure for those who held some, including much larger numbers of Brits later on. The Homestead Act in the United States gave settlers free land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Secure property rights was a major key to sustained human development everywhere in the Americas and probably here else.

A large blot on the human dignity experience in America, of course, was not abolishing slavery for African Americans until 1863. Canada treated our indigenous people terribly, even attempting to assimilate their children in compulsory and simply outrageous residential schools.

The crucial difference between the Iberian and British Americas, according to Ferguson, was that Simon Bolivar, *el Liberator*, chose not to become a South American George Washington. He rejected a property-owning democracy for all and the rule of law in favour of dictatorship. This left South America on achieving independence from Spain, in Ferguson's words, "with an enduring legacy of conflict, poverty and inequality."

On a deeper level, Ferguson argues that three South American difficulties resulting from Spanish colonization were inexperience in democratic decision-making, the unequal distribution of land itself, and "racial cleavages that closely approximated to that economic inequality. The result was a cycle of revolution and counter-revolution, coup and countercoup, as the propertyless struggled for just a few acres more, while the creole elites clung to their haciendas...This was not a recipe for rapid economic growth."

### **Conclusion**

The key to optimal human development in the Americas and beyond today appears to be property rights, representative democracy, capitalism with a conscience ( nudged in part by smart regulation), freedom of religion/conscience, and the rule of law.

Gamsa Hamnida/Thank you.