

human neighbourhood, the young people of Tiananmen Square who called for freedom were calling to us all, in words that could have been those of our own sons and daughters, refusing to accept for their generation denials of freedom deriving from an era which has ended. They were asserting democracy as a universal right and appealing to worldwide human solidarity.

In a number of countries, part of the dramatic change is a new enthusiasm for the market economy – for the Western way of doing things – because it represents, in contrast to the experience of the collectivist model, a way of getting things done. That does not surprise those of us who come from the Third World; for before Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, many Third World countries had already come to terms with the marketplace. But it has been a lesson of bitter experience that the marketplace is anything but magical and can, indeed, be a heartless environment. It is to be hoped that the new leaders in Central and Eastern Europe will recognise that capitalism, like socialism, needs a human face.

IT IS AN INDICTMENT OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY that today, despite massive achievements, our primal reach for freedom is still not everywhere satisfied. All too often this is because of an almost unbelievable capacity to withhold from fellow human beings the freedoms we most cherish for ourselves, and to inflict on them the most horrendous injustices when they demand them as being theirs of right. And mixed up with some movements for freedom, implicit in some of them, is the instinct for separateness; an emphasis on ethnicity, on narrow nationalisms, on tribalisms of one kind or another, a fashion even for fundamentalism. The cry of freedom could herald the breakup of societies in ways we have not yet begun to contemplate.

Last night – respecting the constraint on outsiders not to meddle, but fulfilling, I hope, the duty of friends and family not to stay silent when danger threatens – I ventured to give expression to some thoughts on current problems here in Canada. I reminded the Royal Commonwealth Society how much the Commonwealth cares for Canada which has made the Commonwealth strong and respected; how much the world cares for Canada which has made the world a better place by being Canada. I said that the wholeness of Canada, its multi-cultural ethic, its national integrity (territorial and otherwise) are not just national assets but international ones as well; that one Canada is itself a “distinct society” whose preservation is important to the world; that both the Commonwealth and the wider world will be diminished if your affairs go awry; that what is at stake has implications for us all.

Today, I want to add this: whatever the arguments, or even the agreements to disagree – they must surely all be within the parameters of one Canada. There is no principle of self-determination that leads inexorably to national dismemberment; decolonisation was another matter altogether. Self-determination there meant freedom from external domination. That concept has no application within established nations. Autonomy, devolution, federalism, pluralism of all kinds; forms of economic, social, cultural and political self-expression that we are yet to devise; are the pathways of self-determination within nations. They do not violate borders; they do not diminish the nation’s territorial integrity. The right of self-determination of all Canadians – like all Guyanese, all Indians, all Russians, all Papua New Guineans, all Yugoslavs, all South Africans – is not a right to cease to be Canadian or to make Canada cease to be. This is not new doctrine. You have for years lived by it and

become stronger and nobler for it. Long may you continue to do so – for Canada, and for all plural societies.

BUT THERE IS A FURTHER POINT: WE ARE SURELY TAKING TOO LONG TO acknowledge that we simply have to trim the edges of sovereignty and move to the rule of enforceable law worldwide if we are to save ourselves. There is urgent need for bold spirits to articulate an ethic of human survival and for us to develop global responses to the challenges of today that fill out the internationalist vision glimpsed by the victors back in 1945 when the UN was established.

Peace and security were at the centre of that vision. For peace between the superpowers, for avoidance of an apocalyptic war between them, the prospects are the best for many years. But that is not the end of the matter. We agree readily that peace is more than the absence of war; but are we really ready as a human society to turn our swords into ploughshares? At the level of every human being, but even at a national level, security cannot in any real sense be said to exist in a condition of chronic deprivation.

Poverty itself is insecurity. It is insecurity for the individual because of the fear of hunger, disease, and early death that afflicts the hundreds of millions who live on the margins of existence in subsistence agriculture and in urban slums. It is insecurity for the nation because of the lack of control over unstable and adverse external elements in commodity and capital markets; the inability to afford basic public expenditures, the dependence on external financial assistance with its attendant conditionalities; and the inequality of bargaining power which affects external economic relationships. In North-South relations we are still in the midst of the equivalent of the “Cold War.” There was no meaningful, structured dialogue between North and South on the world economy throughout the 1980s.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT A NATIONAL SOCIETY CANNOT be at peace if power, privilege and prosperity are the prerogatives of only a few. Why do we think our world society can be at peace when

such disparities prevail within it? Far more people today suffer from economic rather than military insecurity: those who die prematurely and others whose lives are blighted by the same deprivations and deformities that go hand in hand with military conflict. Even if we use the crude reckoning of war, the conclusions are staggering. Over a period of five years, the ravages of poverty and under-development account for a minimum of thirty-five million lives and countless shortened and unfulfilled lives. For the poor, it is always war-time.

The relaxation of East-West tensions has surely created a window of opportunity for us to respond to interdependencies through change in many fields, and advance towards a world that respects our inseparable humanity: one in which there must be a better opportunity for development and for a resumption of the dialogue on cooperation – a better opportunity for global solidarity. There is a path opening before us – an ethical path to human survival, an alternative way forward, through strengthening collective processes and discovering new ways of dealing with problems in cooperative not adversarial terms; a more democratic world with more enlightened global governance. □

*On his last visit to the capital city of a Commonwealth nation as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Shridath Ramphal delivered a speech at the Institute for Peace and Security in Ottawa on 5 June. This article is an excerpt from that address.*