



## Revolution in Human Affairs CAPS-WAAS Workshop, New Delhi, February 9, 2011

While administering relief and development aid in the Far East during the early 1950s, former WAAS President and Club of Rome member Harlan Cleveland coined a new phrase to describe a striking phenomenon which he perceived would have profound impact on the future course of democracy and human development. He spoke of a *revolution of rising expectations* awakening the population of former colonial nations, releasing newfound aspirations, energy, hope and confidence among those who were previously oppressed, suppressed or simply resigned to the meager, unchanging traditional life of their forefathers. This was the subjective psychological basis for the remarkable renaissance of Asia that began with Japan, then rippled across Asia, among the Asian Tigers and more recently China and India.

Four decades later, Academy Fellow and Pugwash member Jasjit Singh perceived a related phenomenon which was as disconcerting as Cleveland's perception was inspirational. He was struck by the fact that increasing prosperity in his native India and other developing countries was associated with higher, rather than lower, levels of crime, social unrest and violence. He observed that a rapid rise in social expectations was at once the driving force for social progress as well as the source of increasing social tensions and social instability. While some sections of the population were enjoying unprecedented economic opportunity and prosperity, those who remained outside the orbit of the general social progress were made increasingly aware through the spread of television, newspapers, travel and migration of the stark contrast and growing disparity between their meager existence and that of progressive classes. This led him to formulate the counter conception that when the gap between rising expectations and ground level political, social and economic opportunities becomes too large, the energies released by greater awareness may turn into frustration, disenchantment, social unrest and even terrorism. This thesis was set forth in a report of the International Commission on Peace & Food and is elaborated in an article by Jasjit Singh in this issue of *Cadmus*.<sup>1</sup>

These two perceptions formed the starting point for formulation of a new WAAS project which was proposed by Jasjit Singh during the strategic planning process, approved by the Board of Trustees in August 2009, and officially launched at an international workshop in New Delhi co-sponsored by the World Academy and the Centre for Air Power Strategy on February 9, 2011. This project focuses on the inextricable linkage between human development and human security and is founded on the realization that the two are complementary aspects of a common social process.

While the workshop was in session, events in Egypt dramatically demonstrated the relevance of the theme and the importance of understanding the linkage. Media reported that many of the leaders of the democratic revolution in Egypt were educated, unemployed youth

who had become aware of their constitutional rights but were denied actual opportunities to exercise them. The workshop also explored manifestations of this phenomenon in countries such as India, where rising levels of urban and rural prosperity are accompanied by rising levels of organized violence among a growing Naxalite movement of impoverished tribal communities, which is spreading rapidly from state to state.

At the same time, it was noted that the phenomenon of rising expectations is not confined to the developing world. That prompted Bob Berg to raise the question why no revolution has occurred during recent times in the USA, in spite of widening economic disparities. What are the factors that convert stratification and inequality into violence? What is the role of globalization in unleashing and directing social aspirations? Winston Nagan identified the spread of universal, secular human values as a critical factor and argued that we need better theory that will enable us to explore the multi-dimensional aspects of this phenomenon and evolve effective strategies to transform the awakened energies into constructive social progress. Discussants contrasted the paths taken by India and China; whereas in democratic India aspirations have risen more rapidly than ground reality, China has utilized social control to contain expectations while taking aggressive steps to improve actual living standards. Ivo Šlaus observed striking differences between the democratic movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Today democracy is more centrally a social movement focused on human rights than a class political struggle to determine the form and control of government.

In future this project will examine the linkages between unemployment, social stability and social security in both developed and developing countries, a theme explored elsewhere in this issue of *Cadmus*. It will also explore the factors that are responsible for the onset of revolutionary movements in an age of global telecommunications.

## Notes

1. International Commission on Peace & Food, *Uncommon Opportunities: Agenda for Peace & Global Development* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 22.