

UN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
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“OPENING REMARKS”

by
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Chairperson (*ad interim*)

Let me begin by welcoming all of you to this Ninth Meeting of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) under the auspices of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (ECOSOC).

In that regard, I would like to extend my gratitude, on behalf of all assembled here today, to Haiyan Qian and her team for the good work they have done, under her direction, to bring us all here and to prepare so well for this ninth session of our committee. The fact that we are here notwithstanding the trouble in the airline industry due to the volcanic eruptions in Iceland that has grounded planes in Europe make us even acutely aware of the global village we live in, and how our destiny is tied to what happens in the remotest part of this world.

When such tragedies occur we should become even more committed to the need to have our governments work in concert to solve global problems under some shared rules and values, and to appreciate that some of these rules and values are already enshrined in the UN Charter and its many conventions. That they have been elaborated upon in the myriad of resolutions that have been passed at the General Assemblies and special conferences called to discuss burning global issues. And that we have already filled libraries and archives with global agreements on peace, security and how to manage global common goods such as the environment, international waters and even our adventures into space.

The *theme* of this ninth meeting could not therefore be more appropriate. For the next two days we are going to spend time discussing “*Challenges to and Opportunities for Public Administration in the Context of Financial and Economic Crisis.*”

Without pretending to go deeper into the matter at this point in time, let me just say one or two things as we set the agenda for our meeting this morning.

This Committee is fortunate in that we represent the mosaic of cultures, levels of development, strength of voice and successes in confronting human problems that is characteristic of the face of UN membership. We are, therefore, going through this crisis in different ways, and hence we may have to learn and share lessons on what works and

what does not work; on what methods can solve our problems and what cannot in short, medium and long term periods.

These problems are many but they could be summarized into three essential; categories:

First, problems related to the failure of institutions that have all along been assumed to be the driving forces behind the success of capitalist society: markets, finance capital (particularly banks) and the capitalist state.

Second, the questions being raised regarding the sanctity of liberal values which hold people together as they interact in capitalist society nationally and globally; always believing that *the best government is that which governs least*.

Thirdly, the uncertainties which have engulfed people almost everywhere regarding *what is to be done* at the national and global levels to ensure economic recovery on a sustainable basis given that there is little consensus on how best governments can/should regulate banks and markets while also managing national and global economies in the interest of all mankind.

What *voices* will we listen to in discussing these issues? Which institutions will be used by the people and by governments to articulate the issues and prescribe solutions?

I suppose the fact that we call ourselves “experts” means that we at least have some inkling into the nature of these problems and we can analyze them competently so as to propose some possible solutions,

Let me welcome the new members to this group of experts. They no doubt bring with them some fresh thoughts and ideas to rejuvenate us and shed some more light into the complex issues that we have before us today. I want also to welcome representatives of member states, international organizations and NGOs who are in attendance this week.

Finally I have a word of encouragement. True or false, Daniel Gross, in a long article in this week’s issue of *Newsweek* (April 19, 2010), argues that “the long term decline of the US economy since the financial meltdown of 2008 has been greatly exaggerated. America,” according to him, “is coming back stronger, better, and faster than most of its international rivals” (see his article entitled “*The Comeback Country: How America Pulled Itself Back from the Brink and why Its destined to stay at the Top.*”

The tale of the economy’s remarkable turnaround is largely the story of swift reaction, a willingness to write off bad debts (i.e. pay the banks for their sins of mismanagement, self indulgence and greed), and restructure, and an embrace of efficiency—disciplines largely invented in the US and at which the US excels, so argues Gross.

He goes further to assert that America still leads the world at processing failure, at latching on to new innovations and building them to scale quickly and profitably. “We are the most adaptive, inventive nation, and have proven quite resilient, says Richard

Florida, sociologist and author (see *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity*) who Gross quotes approvingly.

As students of Public Administration, what we do not get from David Gross is what role government or the state has played in all this, and how political leadership—intertwined with corporate leadership—facilitates such things as bank bailouts. In other words, what is it in the political economy of *some* capitalist states, like the U.S., that makes such *innovation* possible? Or can such innovation be seized as available templates to be used in solving the financial crisis or its effects or reverberations in developing economies?

We are here this week to pose such questions which are obviously debatable, hence the debate that we must of necessity engage in vigorously.

Thank you and welcome to the debate.

At the United Nations in New York
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