

## The world *problematique*

By : RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON

Volume: 35 | No: 40

Page : 33

Issued : 10/11/2007

The annual assembly of the Club of Rome was held in Madrid two weeks ago. The Club of Rome is a global think tank and center of innovation and initiative. It was founded in April 1968 by Aurelio Peccei, an Italian industrialist, and Alexander King, a Scottish scientist. It consists of 100 members from 81 countries, a number of them from the U.S. These members are scientists, economists, businesspeople, international high civil servants and former heads of state from all five continents who are convinced the future of humankind is not determined once and for all and that each human being can contribute to the improvement of our societies. I was elected a member of the club in 1993.

In 1972, the Club of Rome raised considerable public attention with the report “Limits to Growth,” which has sold 30 million copies in more than 30 translations, making it the bestselling environmental book in world history. A second report in 1974 revised the predictions of “Limits to Growth” and gave a more optimistic prognosis for the future of the environment, noting that many of the factors were within human control and, therefore, environmental and economic catastrophes were preventable or avoidable. This second report was titled “Mankind at the Turning Point.”

In the meeting in Madrid, Bohdan Hawrylyshyn, chairman of the International Center for Policy Studies and a club member, presented a synopsis of the world *problematique*. Hawrylyshyn had written a report to the club in 1980 titled “Roadmaps to the Future: Toward More Effective Societies” dealing with the question of how selected countries could enhance their effectiveness. It analyzed the determining factors in the effectiveness of countries using economic, political, and social criteria and value systems. It proposed the need for compatibility among values, governance institutions and economic systems, prescribed for a number of countries what they should change in their governance, economic or value systems to become more effective and predicted if their countries in question would be able to make the required institutional changes. It predicted in 1980 the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the economic development of China, the continued development of the European Union and the weakening of the U.S.

In the conference held two weeks ago in Madrid, Hawrylyshyn pointed out the following matters as constituting the great concerns affecting humanity, that is, the world *problematique*:

- **Demography:** Declining and aging populations in rich countries, rapid growth in poor countries. In the rich countries, the financial burden of staying rich may lose some of its dynamism. Many of the poor countries cannot provide the necessary physical and institutional infrastructures for rapidly growing young populations. Inadequate education and unemployment and, consequently, massive migration to the rich countries are the results of this.

- **Technology:** There is rapid development of new technologies, but insufficient wisdom for selecting positive aspects of new technologies and avoiding the negative ones, e.g., nuclear energy may be fine, but not nuclear weapons; genetics for health purposes shows great prospects, but danger of cloning human beings is frightening to many.
- **Biosphere:** We are still using up the resources (minerals, energy, soil, water) at an unsustainable rate. Depletion of many resources is already on the horizon.
- **Climate change:** Pollution of soil, water and particularly air has already produced dramatic changes in the climate, yet the most polluting countries, i.e. the U.S., China, India and Russia, are not prepared to adopt sufficiently rigorous measures to at least slow down, if not reverse, the process.
- **Institutions:** There is an evident degradation and diminishing influence of families, churches, schools and governing organs at different levels from local to national to global. There is concomitant growth of some negative influences of the media (particularly TV and Internet).
- **Terrorism:** This has grown tremendously in strength and has spread virtually worldwide. Many causes contributed to it. Unsatisfied aspirations of self-determination of some ethnic minorities, inability to freely establish political orders based on religion rather than on Western political philosophy, some nihilism and easier availability of instruments of terrorism such as all kinds of weapons and new communication and information technology. The main focus now in countries under threat is to fight terrorism as symptoms. Not enough attempts are being made to deal with the causes behind the emergence of various terrorist movements.
- **World economy:** There is a growing difference between the rich and the poor, with tremendous accumulation of wealth in the hands of 1% to 3% of the population. Economic growth and some aspects of globalization have increased the standard of living of many people. The benefits, however, have not been spread evenly. The differences between some of the richest countries and some of the poorest are still growing. What is equally worrisome and potentially destabilizing are the great differences between the few enormously rich and the millions of very poor people within the same countries. Maximization of shareholder value and amassing of wealth through new financial instruments cannot continue for long. The differences described above have led to bloody revolutions in the past. They may do so in the future.
- **Geopolitics:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we ended up in a unipolar world with the U.S. as a single superpower with the biggest military power, the biggest economy and political strength built on the belief that the country had the best political, economic and social systems. It felt it should be the model for the rest of the world and had the feeling it had the moral right to

decide which are good or bad countries and impose its will sometimes by military means. The U.S. is losing its power and with the emergence of China and expansion of the EU, we are shifting to a tripolar world, which will be followed by a multipolar world with countries such as India, Japan, Brazil, Germany and Russia having more to say about world affairs.

These matters, according to Hawrylyshyn, are the great concerns of humanity today. They affect us in Puerto Rico just as they affect all countries of the planet. They constitute a basic framework that can help us structure our thinking about the future.

