

Holistic Approach to National Growth and Security: A Global and Local Perspective

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Your Lordships, distinguished speakers, the Vice Chancellor, faculty members and students, I thank the Vice Chancellor of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Major General Milinda Peiris, and the Dean of the Faculty of Law, for honouring me with this invitation to deliver a talk on the timely topic, “Holistic Approach to National Growth and Security A Global and Local Perspective”.

At the outset, I would like to say that I’m sharing my views today with you, not as an academic, but as a human rights and child rights practitioner, who has followed a non-adversarial approach, in making various interventions in the human rights and child rights field. It is significant that the topic I have chosen for my talk, highlights two important issues namely, national growth and security from a holistic perspective. I would like to begin my talk by examining the word ‘Holistic’, because it is only when we possess a clear understanding of this word that we will be in a position to do justice to the topic of this conference.

The term ‘Holistic’ is derived from the Greek word ‘Holos’, meaning ‘whole’. Holism expresses the idea that everything is part of the whole, as all parts are indissolubly interconnected. Nothing can exist independently of the whole or can be understood without reference to the whole. If I may explain further by referring to medicine, in medicine holism means that the whole of a sick person; their mind and the way of life, and not just their body and the symptoms of the disease should be

considered when treating them. We are deliberating on the theme entitled holistic approach to national growth and security at a critical turning point in the history of humanity. We are experiencing at first hand, the ramifications of our ignorance of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all phenomena. The COVID pandemic is challenging our existence as human beings on this planet earth.

The COVID pandemic is challenging and also questioning the way we humans have interacted with nature in all its integral aspects. It is equally making us question the way we have, all over the world, governed our countries for decades in thoughtless ways and exploited the natural resources of the planet for the sole purpose of human flourishing and human growth. We have not considered the long-term effects of this on the natural world of which we are an intrinsic part and on which we depend all our physical, even for that matter, spiritual needs. In other words, COVID-19 is putting a question mark over our very existence as humans on this planet. Humanity has more or less vested with the belief that it can conquer any enemy by the use of mighty forces, and the most sophisticated weaponry. With this belief, many wars had been waged, won or lost, across centuries by humans against fellow humans. But, the war we are waging at this hour, globally, is a war against a tiny virus, not visible to our naked eye.

A billion-dollar armoury of sophisticated weaponry or a fearless armed force cannot fight on our behalf and rescue us from the crisis that we are faced with today. The sheer magnitude of the COVID-19 virus is demonstrated by the fact that, COVID-19 related deaths in the US have surpassed American lives lost in World War-I. According to Geopolitical and Geoeconomics analysts, the world is experiencing very serious COVID-19 related economic crises such as, mass unemployment, increased economic inequality and community disruption. We are witnessing just the tip of the ice burg and deeper challengers are yet to be witnessed or experienced.

Who can predict with certainty that the COVID-19 will be the last of its kind to attack humanity. In this context, I believe, it is very opportune to approach the subject of national growth and security from a holistic perspective and comprehend where we have gone wrong as human species, then perhaps we can transcend this crisis with insightful strategies strongly grounded in our Asian philosophical traditions and values which recognise, that we are part of a process that intrinsically connects and sustaining us all in intricate patterns of mutual causality.

Applying this eastern concept of interdependence and interconnectedness of all phenomena, let us now turn to the two subjects of national growth and security. For decades we have understood these terms in the narrow sense of the words, for an example, national growth is understood in terms of economic growth. We have measured it with the yardsticks of Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the appropriateness of GDP as an indicator to measure the economic well-being of a nation is being questioned, due to its

inability to measure the real state and quality of all aspects of life of the people and of the nation.

Lately, we have seen some more holistic approaches to this being applied by certain countries. Bhutan for example, employees an indicator called gross national happiness (GNH), to measure their economic condition and well-being. It places a great importance on preserving the nation's ecological heritage. Some discussions are also underway in India, to develop and ease of living in debts, which is aimed at measuring the quality of life and sustainability, as well as economic health. Thus, it measures the all aspects of lives that people truly value.

If we approach national growth from a holistic perspective, I emphasise that it should encompass the sum total of human growth of our country. I would like to quote Article 27(1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to substantiate my point. It states that, "States parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development." This provision truly embodies the concept of holism. In this holistic sense, I believe that national growth should represent, reflect and epitomise the total human personality development of its citizenry in five domains; physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social. The dangers of placing sole or excessive emphasis on physical development and ignoring the mental, spiritual, moral and social dimensions will in the long run cause serious harm to national growth and society as a whole. It will also post unprecedented challenges to the security of a nation. While fostering national growth based on interconnectedness and interdependence of all aspects of national life, we must remember that this must include the most

vulnerable, the marginalised and the impoverished. The national growth of a country has no meaning if it fails to fulfil the basic needs of the poor and the marginalised. In other words, holistic approach to national growth must not leave anyone behind and should not be driven by the exclusive needs of the most powerful and wealthy in our nation.

The holistic approach to national growth also means caring for the earth. It means preserving and fostering our biodiversity; the seeds, soil, water resources, the fauna and flora, and clean air. It means above all that we should not engage in selfish exploitation of nature's wealth. This will simply endanger our existence and the existence of all the other species. The holistic approach to national growth also demands that we put an end to corruptions, wastage and the misuse of the nation's resources and worth, and instead ensure their more equal distribution for the well-being of all Sri Lankans.

Turning to the term 'security' in a simplified way, it can be defined as activities involved in protecting a country, building or a person against attacks, danger, threats, etc. In the common parlance, we anticipate a threat, a danger or an attack from an enemy within or outside the territorial boundaries of a country. In the presentday context, is it appropriate to confine the definition of security to this narrow domain? Specially, considering the security, the so-called security challengers caused by the fourth industrial revolution, namely the 'internet revolution' and also the new normal precipitated by COVID-19 pandemic. When approached from a holistic perspective, security cannot be taken in isolation and in a fragmented sense. On the premise that all phenomena are interdependent and interconnected, security too is very much intertwined with national growth and cannot be separated.

For a nation to thrive security approach from a holistic perspective should embrace physical security, psychosocial security, digital security and I would also add ecological security, specially in the COVID-19 pandemic context. I might add that all nations are now completely interlinked and national security cannot be considered without considering international and global security. Does not holism take us in this direction?

I would like to recall that we are a nation that has lived with a 33 year long war and two insurrections in the south. Although we have overcome three major violent encounters, the war that we had been waging against each other, decade after decade, generation after generation, continues in our hearts and minds. I would say the Sri Lankan psyche, we are entangled in memories, stories, opinions and views about what happened in the past. We are engaged in an unending ongoing dialogue with ourselves and others, justifying our hostile reactions and unable to comprehend the way to transcend our collective suffering and look beyond.

We have failed to understand that our hatred, anger, fear and ill will against each other have contributed to our collective suffering. As a nation, we need to investigate our collective suffering; the Sri Lankan wounded consciousness, hateful consciousness, egoistic consciousness, and dominant consciousness without blaming and accusing each other. This collective, wounded, hateful, egoistic and dominant consciousness has unfortunately set into every aspect of our life be it public or private. This I consider as the biggest security challenge that we are facing at this critical hour and also, the biggest stumbling rock in achieving the vision of the present government, "Vistas of prosperity and splendour". From a holistic

approach, if security is to be a progressive contributor to individual and national growth, while upholding the rule of law, equal application and equal protection of the law, the entire security apparatus should contribute towards physiological and psychosocial security of our people and eradicate fear, anxiety, fright, alarm, panic from the hearts and minds of our Sri Lankan consciousness.

When talking about the holistic approach to national growth and security, I would like to refer to Singapore, which became a first world nation from a third world nation within just one generation. Singapore has come a long way since independence, and throughout its economic progress, the governments of the date reiterated their commitment to promote a gracious society. Addressing the 1996 national day rally, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong emphasised that Singapore should develop its economy, but that economic growth should be complimented with personal development and embrace social graces. The Prime Minister further stated that, we need to go beyond economic and material needs and reorient society to meet the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social needs of their people. On the eve of the national day of Singapore in 2012, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasised that, improving hardware like new housing, flats and more metro train lines is just one aspect. He said, strengthening our heartware traits such as mutual respect, care and compassion meritocracy and integrity is more important.

Mr. Lee highlighted that Singapore's aim is not about being a wealthy and modern society. He said just as important is nurturing a society that is caring. The reflections of the prime ministers of Singapore amply demonstrate that hardware; economic growth and

infrastructural development should go hand in hand with heartware; growth in personal development and social values. As we celebrated the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi this month, I would like to end my speech with three quotes by Mahatma Gandhi. The first quote by Mahatma Gandhi beautifully captures the importance of individual growth vis-à-vis material growth. "Historically we are a country that has proudly spoken of a cultural heritage that had struck a balance between material growth and individual growth from a holistic perspective. The concept of 'Dhanyagara'; land of plenty, 'Dharmadhweepa'; land of righteousness amply speaks of this cultural heritage. Mahatma Gandhi believed "real wealth is in people, not in gold or silver and the true veins of wealth are in flesh". He said that the final consummation of all wealth is in producing as many as possible the most number of full breathed, bright eyed, and happy hearted human beings". The COVID pandemic has taken us back from the globalization drive that we embarked upon in 1977. I think it is putting us on a new dual carriage way called 'Glocalization' which reminds us to value more what is local and more sustainable, both in terms of people and land. In this connection I would like to share the second quote by Gandhi. He said, "I do not want my house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any". Finally, I would like to share this quote that has some bearing on the security that we are talking about. Mahatma Gandhi said, "I have three enemies. My favourite enemy, the one most easily influenced for the better, is the British Empire. My second enemy, the Indian people, is far more difficult. But my most formidable opponent is a man named Mohandas

Karamchand Gandhi. With him I seem to have very little influence.”

Thank you very much for your beautiful presence at this conference.

Thank you.