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Spiraling in human insecurity

THE HISTORIC EVOLUTION OF A COUNTRY

[Noting a country's spiraling from social exclusion, to social disintegration, to violent conflict, to mutually hurting stalemate and peace. Followed by post-conflict situations as possible pre-conflict conditions!].

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Introduction

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(Paper presented in the expert group meeting on *Structural threats to social integrity: social roots of violent conflict and indicators for prevention* held at United Nations headquarters on 18 to 20 December 2001)

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Introduction

This short essay has been prepared to stimulate discussions in a meeting about structural threats to social integrity. Violent conflict is a threat to the desired social integrity, the crucial aim of a social integration paradigm. Violent conflicts have social roots. It is necessary to identify congruent indicators that allow policy makers and scholars to monitor the evolution of violence and to make proposals for preventing it.

The essay has three parts: (a) a simple conceptual background about what the author means by social integration and social integrity (of course, based on what others have said about it), including a list of ten issues which may be associated to such social conditions; (b) the historical evolution of a country (for the purposes of the exercise the case of a fictional country is presented, although the information is based on a real country) since the late XIX century land reform, that expropriated lands from peasants and indigenous, to a current social life still impregnated of hard and organized crime, with intermediates of military dictatorship, civil war, Peace Accords, and natural disasters and (c) suggestions on sources of indicators in each of the issues mentioned in (a).

1. A conceptual background

A positive approach of social integration may be adopted and followed in research and policy making endeavors. As documents of the 1995 World Summit on Social Development state, “the aim of social integration is to create ‘a society for all’, in which every individual, each with its rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play”.

Social integration occurs when there is a harmonic performance of a society as a whole to satisfy human needs at every level, namely: basic conditions for living, safety, sense of belongingness, recognition of self-merits, and full realization of positive human potential. In brief, a happy living in freedom and solidarity

In that sense, social integration implies greater:

- *Access to justice*
- *Equal opportunities for all*
- *Material well-being*
- *Democratic freedom*
- *Checks and balances of the political system*
- *Equitable distribution of national income*
- *Societal harmony*
- *Legitimate rule of law*
- *Human security*
- *Stable and continuous improvement of living conditions.*

Such ideal condition is a paradigmatic state of a society. Obviously, there are threats, both structural and juncture, to social integration. Deterioration of those social categories is a threat to social integration. The persistence of that deterioration will generate disintegration processes and violent conflicts.

2. A case in point: the country of Wobehalan

WOBEHALAN is a fictional country, fully named "Would Be a Happy Land.

In Wobehalan all the considered issues related to social integration were neglected and disrupted for one century and, as a logical result, there was a violent political-military conflict that reached its peak in the 1980's, and was ended through a successful mediation and peace-accords-building process.

The President of Wobehalan, gave a speech during the ceremony to sign a set of peace accords, in 1992. In that speech, he recognized that the armed conflict, in Wobehalan, had deep social, political, economic and cultural roots.

In fact, during almost the complete Twentieth Century, Wobehalan was ruled by a chain a governments that exercised social exclusion and political repression, and encouraged unjust distribution of the national income.

It is relevant to explain that Wobehalan is a tiny continental country that was conquered by Europeans in the XVI century and was ruled as a colony during three centuries. As it was a frequent pattern, Europeans almost erased from the earth indigenous population. In some instances, Europeans mixed with indigenous people and a mixed breed resulted. In general, power was associated to white skin; under privileges were associated to dark skin. So discriminatory practices became a common deed in that country.

For a better understanding of Wobehalan, it is enlightening to sum up a chronology of its history from the end of the XIX century until current times.

- In the last three decades of the XIX Century, the ruling classes implemented a land reform that expropriated land from peasants, most of them indigenous. The elites needed to consolidate the coffee production for the world market. Indigenous peasants and just peasants became poor unemployed that wandered around selling their labor force for very low salaries.
- The ruling elites needed to implement mechanisms of social control and founded the first institutions resembling police or constabulary forces. Of course, those bodies were in charge of protecting landlords threatened by poor people in demand of jobs, salaries, and food. The newborn security forces used increasingly violent means to control communities and individuals.

- Working people were continuously repressed. As a reaction, they started to use violent means to defend themselves of inevitable repression. Violence became the very ethics of power and a trait of the culture.
- National wealth was increasingly concentrated in a few of hands. Vast majorities were almost penniless and frequently unemployed. A weak institutional building process occurred during the first decades of the XX Century. In virtue of trade international relations, some islands of progress and economic development were built inside the land.
- During the 1930's, governments --mostly in hands of oligarchy representatives in the first 30 years of the XX Century—became led by high rank officials of the armed forces, that played the role of a permanent structure of political power. Indeed, at the beginning, military acted as cronies of the oligarchy and later on, when foreign interests started to act in the domestic political arena, military entered into occasional conflicts with the oligarchy and big businesses. The political regime became harder.
- In 50 years, the military-based political regime became an institutional dictatorship. Early in the 1930's, the government forces crushed a rebellion of peasants mostly indigenous, organized under the leadership of political activists leaned to the left. Actually, some of the leaders were self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninists. That deed was the first stone to build an effective military dictatorship and to throw Wobeland into the entanglements of the bipolar world confrontation. Political freedoms and rule of law were casualties. The political regime was hard, absolute power brought absolute corruption. The judiciary system was both inept and corrupt; poor criminals crowded prisons. Rule of law and equal access to justice were mockery. The top ten percent of the population had the 50% of the national income and the lowest ten percent of the population had only the 2%. During more than four decades, there was only one political party, ruled by officials of the armed forces. The winner of every presidential election was, always, the candidate of that party that was all the time a highest rank official of the armed forces. Often, elections were held with only one candidate, the mentioned military official.
- Some efforts of modernization were impelled by the military rule, but in essence the social regime was unjust and exclusory, the political regime was repressive and the economic regime was characterized by an unequal distribution of the national income. In the international arena, theses illegitimate governments were accepted and respected, as shields that protected the country of the communist threat. And of course, the gross violations of human rights perpetrated by those governments were side seen by western democracies, since the military from Wobehalan

were staunch defenders of the western Christian civilization. Islands of development and material well-being were the window shows of those governments.

- The Cold War put its feet on Wobehalan's reality. The keepers of the unjust status quo proclaimed themselves as pro U.S.A. interests; the opposition to the government was labeled as crony of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Wobehalan rulers were regarded as democrats, and those on the opposing side were communists.
- Political repression became harder. Leftist groups started to organize guerilla units and mass social movements. Society exploded and 50 years of military dictatorship and 100 years of unjust socio-economic regime began to fall in debris. Civil war started sometime at the beginning of the 1980's.

[The civil war was vicious and bloody. The violence —as the generalized condition in Wobehalan's society—impregnated all corners of the country. Social integration and social integrity were prominent casualties.

The civil war became a heavy load for the country. Casualties --most of them non-combatants and innocent people—were counted in thousands. Military confrontation had reached a stalemate. Stubborn rightist political elites, in a suicidal manner, rejected all the expressions of civilized settlement. Little by little the conflict became increasingly unbearable for both parties. Dialogue, negotiation, accords, and the signature of accords were links of a chain that was accepted for both fundamental parties in fight. The armed conflict had to be settled by political means. The country had to build a new social contract.]

- During the armed conflict, violence was rampant. Many individuals adopted violence as a way of living, as an attitude towards life, as the means to solve problems. The conflict provided many people the opportunity to receive hands-on training in communication skills, use of weapons and technological equipment, logistics principles and organizational processes. (These war skills found new uses after a negotiated peace).
- The International community played a vital role in getting a settlement of Wobehalan's armed conflict. Peace accords were signed. Those accords were, in fact, an agreed agenda for political, social, and economic changes. The peace accords looked for establishing a actual democratic regime, to protect the human rights for all, and reconcile the whole society. Of course, the peace accords looked forward to demilitarizing the society and the culture and to put the military under actual and effective civil control, in charge of legitimate popularly elected authorities.

- Most of the peace accords were implemented. They indeed represented a political transformation. One issue was neglected: the socio-economic changes and the fair relations between workers and entrepreneurs. In essence, the regime that consolidated itself at the end of the XIX century remained, with the normal changes imposed by the changing times of the world history.
- Wobehalan started to live a new stage of its history. Wounds were still open. Scars were hard to heal. Youth of the lowest social and economic strata had difficulties to insert themselves in the new situation. Most of them had flown, as children, with their families to other countries where they were excluded and rejected. Now, as teenagers or young individuals would come back to Wobehalan, and again they would be excluded and rejected. Other young people were familiar with the use of weapons, sophisticated equipment of communication, and managerial tools. And they were not re-inserted in social life, but unemployed.
- Human values of hard work, tolerance, solidarity and temperance were the social casualties of the armed conflict in Wobehalan. Conspicuous consumerism and tendency to get money through easy means gained social respectability. Many weapons were left uncontrolled. Proper conditions aroused for full fledged illegal and international drugs, arms, and stolen vehicles trafficking. Corruption and corrupters, both in public service and private enterprise, were to have happy times.
- Ten years after the signature of the peace accords, Wobehalan is entangled in many and huge social problems. In addition to common social pains, natural disasters have hit the country: earthquakes, floods and hurricanes. The capacity of resilience of people in Wobehalan is amazing. People that were expelled by the economic deprived system and the political repression during the 1970's and the 1980's are now relatively well-paid workers in other industrialized countries and they send yearly huge amounts of money in hard coins that support the economy. There are corners and pockets of development and modernity. The government is the result of fairly clean electoral processes. Former insurgent combatants are legislators of mayors of the main cities.
- Notwithstanding those niceties, Wobehalan is plagued with huge social problems with ancient roots.
- A recent survey, (reported by the international press on December 12, 2001) made by a credible think tank in Wobehalan, reports that the major concerns of citizens are poverty, unemployment and economic crisis.

- However, the most visible trait in current life of Wobehalan is the rampant criminality that affects the whole society. Assassinations, kidnappings, assaults and organized crime activities are common happenings in current day-to-day life of Wobehalan. Indeed, a threat to social integration of that suffered country.
- Recently, a sample of reality was taken from the social body of Wobehalan: an important newspaper of any day, October 26, 2001. What follows is the list of headlines of news related to crime that were on the newspaper of that day.

(a) THREE INDIVIDUALS KIDNAPPED 46 YEARS OLD BUSINESSMAN

(b) TWO YOUNGSTERS WERE KILLED IN A DRUG RELATED EVENT

(c) A COMMERCIAL TRUCK IS ASSAULTED

(d) THREE GANG MEMBERS WERE WOUNDED BY OTHER GANSTERS

(e) BUS DRIVER SHOT YOUNG MAN TO DEATH BECAUSE OF TRAFIC DISPUTES

(f) THIRTY-THREE YEAR OLD FEMALE NURSE WAS SHOT TO DEATH IN A 'SPOT OF ASSAULTS' ON THE ROAD

(g) A POLICE OFFICER WAS ASSASINATED

(h) BUS OF PASSENGERS WAS ASSAULTED ON RURAL AREA ROAD

These samples of news on crimes were taken from a newspaper in a country with a population of six million people that survive in 8.000 square miles. Indeed, such conflictive situation is a consequence of ancient disparities and social mishandlings. A pre conflict situation that generated an armed conflict; a settled armed conflict that neglected the socio-economic agenda and the needed deep social changes; a general condition of social disintegration expressed by vicious crimes, both organized and common.

A few days later, November 4, 2001 the local press reported that ten people were killed in a bar in a crime presumably related to gang illegal drug trafficking. In describing the scene of the crime an international press agency reported: "The killing has made us recall the past civil war (1980-1992)".

- It is relevant, for the sake of comparisons, to talk about another small country in the same region of Wobehalan. This country started its social reform several decades ago. After a short internal armed conflict, more than 50 years ago, this neighboring country abolished the army, established public institutions to support the social development, and devoted high percentages of their public budget to education, health, housing and social programs. Since this is not a scholarly essay, but a narrative to provoke debate and discussion about threats to social integration and integrity, not so many figures and statistics are mentioned. However, some exceptions may be valid to enlighten the assertions about the problems in Wobehalan.
- The most recent statistics indicate that in Wobehalan 74% of the population has access to potable and processed water (in the mentioned neighboring country, 98%); 80% has access to health services (in the neighboring country, 100%), 16% of the public expenditures are devoted to education (in the neighbor country, the 22.8%); 2.5% of the Gross Domestic Product is devoted to education (in the neighboring country, the 5.4%). In Wobehalan there are more than 100 deaths, caused by violent deeds, per 100.000 people (In the neighboring country that figure is less than ten). In Wobehalan seventy-six percent of people in jail have a pending a trial (in the neighboring country, 18%).

3...What should be done?

There are several areas and conditions in which some conflicts may arise. The persistence of conflicts in those situations may be source of threats to social integrity. They have mentioned in item #1 of this essay. For each of them some source of indicators may be found. Let us see.

3.1. Access to justice

Situation of prisons, people in jail with pending trial, due process to attend labor demands and judiciary measures to approach environment infractions.

3.2. Equal opportunities for all

Discrimination in education, employment, politics, judiciary system and other related social matters.

3.3. Material well-being

Per capita income, conditions of living (housing, health, recreations for leisure time), access to technology for communications and home day-to-day problem-solving and public transportation.

3.4. *Democratic freedom*

Freedom of speech, free press, informed citizens, accountability of public officials, opportunities for citizens to be listened in their demands as consumers and taxpayers, possibility of citizens to participate directly in decisions that affect their lives, unrestricted freedom to participate in legitimate political activities to elect and be elected.

3.5. *Check and balances in political system*

Voting citizens, possibility to alternate political parties in power, actual and effective separation and coordination of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches, level of involvement of non-governmental organizations, accountability practices, rules for appropriations and budgeting of public funds.

3.6. *Equitable distribution of national income*

National income absorbed by the top ten percent of the population and the ten percent of people at the bottom of the social structure. Comparison of income based on gender, age, ethnic condition, and area of living (rural or urban). People that live above and below the line of poverty.

3.7. *Societal harmony.*

Respect for human rights, prevalence of human values such as solidarity and tolerance, specific weight of civil society organizations oriented to social services, conduct of groups in mass gatherings for sports, entertainment and politics. Vandalism. Gangs of young people. Corruption.

3.8. *Legitimate rule of law.*

Access to due process. Law abiding attitudes. Decisional making process to legislate.

3.9. *Human security*

Rate of crime, mainly of crimes related to threats and actual damages to physical integrity. Police conduct. Citizens' perceptions. Communities at risk. Vulnerability of communities due natural disasters. Illegal drug and arms trafficking. Stolen vehicles. Status of social violence. Homicides. Hate crime. Xenophobia.

3.10. *Stable and continuous improving of living conditions*

Social programs, mainly those oriented to the most needed people. Evolution of the Human Development Index. Perceptions and opinions of citizens. □