

# Opening Address by the First Lady of Tanzania

*Mama Anna Mkapa*

The last century witnessed unprecedented scientific discovery, and its gross misuse; unprecedented wealth creation, and its unfair distribution—wealth that does not always bring happiness. What promise should the new century give to the victims of the misuse of scientific knowledge, and those that have to subsist on less and less of national and global wealth?

As I was preparing for this occasion I was struck by the emerging concern for economic and social justice evident in several industrialised countries and multilateral financial institutions, including the question of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, the war on poverty, and a world trade regime that is inclusive and beneficial to all participants. At his last National Prayer Breakfast as President of the United States of America, President Clinton had the following to say: “We know we can’t build our own future without helping others to build theirs. But many of us live on the cutting edge of a new economy while over a billion people live on the bare edge of survival.” Yes, we live in an era of unprecedented prosperity of the few, and an unprecedented, and growing, wealth gap, within nations and between nations. The strong get stronger, and the weak get weaker.

There are in the world today 1.3 billion people who subsist on less than \$1 a day. But the assets of the world’s 200 richest people are more than the combined income of 41 percent of the world’s population. The Time Warner–America Online merger has created a company worth almost the same as the combined gross domestic product of sub-Saharan Africa. Unless the leaders of the most economically powerful nations gather the political will to reverse this trend, to tame the economic tendencies toward survival of the fittest as in the jungle, our common humanity will no longer be common.

At the Prayer Breakfast I referred to, President Clinton must have had these thoughts in mind when he challenged his fellow citizens thus: “The question I would hope that all my fellow citizens would ask themselves today is what responsibilities are now imposed on us because we live at perhaps the greatest moment of prosperity and promise in the history of our nation, at a time when the world is growing ever more interdependent. What special responsibilities do we have?” Posing this question, and acknowledging that unregulated competition is a negation of our common humanity in a common planet, is at the heart of development ethics.

We learned in the last century that open-market economies are more productive and efficient than closed, planned economies. We learned that democracy, with all its imperfections, is the best way to organise society. It is now time to learn—as Bill Gates, Ted Turner, George Soros and other

philanthropists have learned—that the first to benefit from this competitive and open world have a duty, a responsibility, to those that are still weak and disadvantaged. *Noblesse oblige*. Privilege entails responsibility.

Development ethics is not against prosperity; it is against the pursuit of prosperity at all costs. It is against prosperity predicated upon prejudice and selfishness. It is against prosperity based on exploitative mechanisms of production and trade, and it is against prosperity based on taking too much from our environment and putting in too little. In pursuit of prosperity today, we must never forget our obligation to leave behind an environment that will provide for, and sustain, the prosperity of our grandchildren. To me that is an important aspect of development ethics, and in the final analysis plain common sense.

Development ethics is not against globalization; it is about creating space for the weaker members of the global family at the negotiation table where decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods—for them and their children—are made. Development ethics is about realizing that globalization will be meaningful and acceptable only if it leads to universal human development.

Is globalization helping to lift the poor out of the morass of poverty, or is it increasing the wealth gap, within and between nations? Is it empowering the poor to lift themselves by their own bootstraps? Are the benefits of science and technology shared widely or narrowly? Development ethics is about equitable and sustainable development, not only in relation to incomes but also in relation to education, health, food security and safety, debt relief, and democratic participation.

Development ethics is not against competition; it is about guaranteeing equal chance to fellow citizens of each nation, and to the member nations of our common world—equal chance to live a dignified life, and equal chance to improve the quality of one's life.

Practically all governments of the world profess a commitment to basic human rights for all people, including the right to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In other words, they are all committed to giving an equal chance to all people to live a happy life, a life in freedom and a say in the affairs of their communities and nations.

But theory and practice are poles apart. It is not beyond the means of the wealth available in the world today to ensure women do not die in childbirth; that all live births grow to a healthy adulthood and do not perish before the age of five from easily preventable or curable diseases and malnutrition. And lest we forget, it costs only \$17 to immunize a child against the six core diseases of polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, measles, tetanus, and tuberculosis.

Our common world has the resources—human, technological, and financial—to save the millions of lives that perish from hunger and disease each year. But that can't be, and people will continue to die of hunger and disease as long as we make the knowledge to increase food production, and the science to prevent or cure diseases, the source of prosperity for the few rather than a source of life for the millions in poor countries.

Development ethics is about giving everyone a chance to live a healthy life. It is about developing mechanisms that will adequately reward and encourage scientific discovery, while spreading its benefits deep and wide.

Development ethics is about giving all children, boys and girls, equal chance to prepare for a more meaningful role in society and acquiring through a wholesome education the capacity to work for a better life and a better society. The world has enough wealth to guarantee basic and quality education to all of its children. But does it?

Millions of African children and others from poor segments of our common planet grow into an uncertain adulthood having not seen the inside of a classroom. Their parents were too poor to finance their education, just as they will be too poor to finance the education of their own children. Development ethics is about breaking this vicious circle of poverty driven by lack of education, by the lack of opportunity.

In 1990, the world made a commitment to ensure all children get a full primary education by the year 2000. Yet, as we stand in the year 2000, 125 million children worldwide are not attending any school, and the universal primary education target date has been pushed to 2015. And at current trends and projections, that also is too ambitious. Yet, we all agree that education is the single most important factor in development. Development ethics must address this tragedy.

Development ethics cuts across practically all sectors of human life, human development, and human association. One other important issue is the question of governance. Development ethics is about democratic governance: governments of the people, for the people, by the people. But there is nothing inherently ethical in democracy, and all politics have the tendency to get dirty. The only difference is that unlike in a dictatorship, the people have a chance to demand accountability of those they put in power, and periodically pass judgment on them, and if necessary throw them out.

So the ethical value in democracy is not given, or guaranteed; it must be demanded and it must be relevant to a country's history, culture, and experience. Without an active civil society strengthened with civic education, democracy can be as depraving as worse forms of governance. As Winston Churchill once said: "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

With accountability and openness comes the question of corruption. Development ethics is about the unceasing war on corruption. Corruption is a universal menace—whether it is perpetrated by leaders of rich countries for political advantage or by the underpaid clerk in Tanzania to feed his children.

Just as corruption is universal, the war on it must equally be universal. Grand corruption in Tanzania can have its roots only in rich industrialised countries, or multilateral financial institutions, that finance large development projects in poor countries. Political will to fight it must be evident on both ends of the corruption line.

Corruption is now no longer a question of the personal criminality of those involved. It is a development issue as well, as it diverts resources from development for public good to “development” for private gain. Development ethics is about ensuring efficient and effective use, for public good, of government revenue, of grants and of loans taken in the name of the people who eventually have to repay them.

Which brings me finally to the imperative of debt relief. The new century and new millennium is a time to give heavily indebted poor countries a clean slate with which to chart a better future for them and their children. For it is downright unethical to let your women and children die, or to deny children an education, just to pay the interest on old unpayable debts!

For those countries that have demonstrated the will and capacity to better manage their economies and have proven that debt relief will go to fight poverty, there is only one moral and ethical imperative on the part of creditor nations: a complete debt write-off. And it doesn't cost too much. The debt burden of twenty of the world's poorest countries could be lifted for the cost of one stealth bomber!

I want to bring my opening remarks to a close. I want to leave you with the following passage from the address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on January 10, 2000. He said:

*It seems to me, that the men and women of the 21st century will be called to a more developed sense of responsibility. First, their personal responsibility, in fostering a sense of duty and honest labor: corruption, organised crime or passivity can never lead to a true and healthy democracy. But there must also be an equal sense of responsibility towards others: an attitude of mutual assistance in the workplace and in the social sphere, respect for nature and the environment, all these are required if we are to have a world where people live together in a better way.*