

Date: April 25, 2015 (Saturday)

Event: 4th Nobel Laureates Symposium On Global Sustainability
--4C: Changing Climate, Changing Cities

Topic: Concluding Remarks

Venue: Asia Society Hong Kong Center

Time: 12:20-12:30pm

There are two kinds of people in this world: the smart and the ordinary. My symposium partner Professor John Schellnhuber and all the Nobel Laureates here represent the former, and I, the latter. Since there are many more of my kind, perhaps we should have the final word.

It was wise of those interested in sustainability to years ago focus on the city rather than on the national or international level. However, as Professor Brian Schmidt and I spoke earlier this morning, I believe that none of us here would think that there is no role for national governments or the international community.

For example, over a decade ago former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz asked me: why doesn't China develop its automotive industry using only electric cars? My answer then was obvious: less efficiency given then technologies for electric cars, and the country was still poor at that time. However, if the international community at that juncture was serious about global sustainability, then it must pull resources together to help China develop its world's first car market that comprises only environmental sound automobiles. If it had been done, today China will be a lot greener and so will the rest of the world.

As the symposium progressed in the past three days, several thoughts entered my mind. One relates to capitalism and the role of markets. It was primarily market economy which has given the world its wealth today. But as we all know, development brings its own problems such as climate change. To address them, we should use market forces, together with proper government policies at different levels. For example, in the past electricity companies in Hong Kong made more money by selling more electricity. Thanks to government policies and market principles, now they make more money by selling less. As a result, the environment is better off. For that reason, we need Nobel Laureates in economics to be engaged in these symposiums.

Another line of thought also came to me. It relates to politics and policies, and so we need perhaps Nobel Laureates of the Peace Prize. For example, it is highly doubtful if China could have achieved so much economic development in so short a time had it not been for its present political structure. To address problems arising therefrom such as pollution, it is equally doubtful that any other form of government can so effectively deal with them.

Finally, these few days I have heard mentioned values and cultures. Such in society does not change quickly. It will take at least a generation. This is why we need the younger people here like those invited by symposium co-organizers Asia Society and Potsdam Institute.

As I had said yesterday, our generation--those born soon after World War II--was the most selfish. We exhausted the earth's many resources; we polluted the land, sea and

air; we piled up so much debt that our generation will never be able to repay. The next generation will suffer from our actions. Hopefully symposiums like this one will at least point the way to stop the slide and to remedy the situation.

What gives me hope is this: my generation grew up not being sensitive to the natural habitat around us. That is not the case with my sons. Let us hope that we will not further corrupt the environment to a point which is beyond the repair of our next generation. We may not have more than one generation to get the job done before mankind self-destructs.

I wish everyone--and the planet--well.

RC:jc:yh