



CIC Gala Fundraising Dinner

Keynote address by Angel Gurría
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Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to receive the first Globalist of the Year Award and address this distinguished audience.

I would like to congratulate Jim and his colleagues for their efforts in creating the Canadian International Council. It is an important expression of Canada's commitment to being an active player on the international scene, and I believe the CIC will help Canada's voice have a greater impact on the global debate. Thank you, dear guests, for helping to make this happen – I think you can expect a high return on your investment! So, give generously!

The Globalist of the Year Award is a creative and ingenious idea. It is an encouragement to seek a common understanding of some of the most pressing issues we face today, and to look for collaborative solutions to global problems. Every one of the recipients will become a permanent beacon for globalisation, wherever we are, whatever we do. Every year, the search for the Globalist will itself become an expression of the support this important group is giving to globalisation.

It is extremely gratifying to receive such a prestigious award in recognition of my efforts to support multilateralism in a global environment. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate enough to have many opportunities to promote international co-operation and dialogue – during my 33 years as a Mexican Civil Servant, as a Private citizen, and as Secretary-General of the OECD. I firmly believe in the enormous potential of global integration and international co-operation to make the world a better place. This conviction will continue to guide my actions.

Globalisation brings us together

Globalisation has delivered immense progress. In the last five years, the world economy has experienced one of its most dynamic expansions ever, growing 20%ⁱ, and lifting millions out of poverty. It has made the global economy more resilient and better able to resist crises.

Globalisation has facilitated scientific discoveries which help us live longer and healthier lives. And it is helping to speed up the process of development.

Today, the world is better connected, and its population is freer to pursue opportunities for a better life. Young people can now study almost anywhere in the world, physically or virtually. Workers are better able to provide their services where they are most needed.

Globalisation allows a migrant worker to send much-needed income to his or her family, at home. A Burmese monk can send a prayer to the world through a video on You-tube; and doctors and medicines from all over the world can arrive in Peru hours after an earthquake has struck.

On the other hand, while the idea that in the era of globalisation, "the world is flat", is an inspiring one, I fear that there are still many mountains that separate us. Distance and geography still matter, and not every child is born into this world with the same opportunities. We have not yet reached a level playing field.

If we are not able to distribute the benefits of globalisation more equitably, we could see nations succumbing to the temptation of isolationism. Current threats of trade and investment protectionism would materialise, affecting economic growth, living standards and prosperity.

In this scenario, economic and social inequalities would worsen, exacerbating political and ethnic tensions in different regions of the world. The fight for limited natural resources would contribute to these tensions, and efforts to find solutions to these problems would not bear fruit. We might even see reversals in the progress made in recent years.

We must not be complacent. There is nothing inevitable about globalisation. The Great Depression of the 1930s and the armed conflicts that followed are just some stark reminders of what can happen when globalisation is put into reverse gear.

Multilateralism is the key to addressing global challenges

I firmly believe that multilateralism – an inclusive process, bringing together institutions, governments, business, civil society and other stakeholders – is the key to unlocking what I see as the three key challenges to a sustainable and prosperous future.

First, global financial resources. The contagion of the current US sub-prime crisis, or the rising concern in many quarters about sovereign wealth funds – these are just two examples of challenges brought on by greater economic integration. The response, like the problem, must involve all actors.

Second, natural resources. Sustainable development, energy, water, and climate change are testing our capacity for co-operation and creativity. A major challenge will be to design co-operative global solutions that all countries are ready to implement and to define who pays for what.

Third, human resources. Globalisation has facilitated the creation of unprecedented wealth, but poverty and inequality are still widespread. These conditions feed terrorism, conflict, environmental degradation, cross-border diseases and organised crime. Ageing poses unprecedented challenges in the field of health, pensions and productivity. International migration is the expression of economic stress and unemployment in developing countries. And while it can provide needed manpower to host countries, the challenge is to ensure smooth integration and that greater cross-border mobility does not jeopardise the development of the origin country.

When confronting these challenges, we all have a role to play. Breaking Global Deadlocks is an example of an innovative proposal for a way forward. The contributions of outstanding individuals in the search for effective global governance (be it the L14 or G20) are another example. And I hope that what we have achieved at the OECD in the last year and a half will also be part of the solution.

On this count, I am happy to share with you that our efforts to increase the relevance of the OECD as the hub of globalisation are bearing fruit. We have not only received a mandate to enlarge our membership and to engage with major emerging economies or the world. At their summit in Heiligendamm, the G8 asked us to serve as the platform for dialogue with the O5 (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and Russia) on major issues such as investment, innovation, development and energy efficiency. And we have been tasked to look for innovative solutions to provide services in the poorest and most vulnerable countries through the recent establishment at the OECD of the Partnership for Democratic Governance.

All of this is a strong recognition of the support we have in our member countries, but it is also a reminder that we must continue to pursue excellence in what we do. The way forward is not an easy one. As the old saying goes, “be careful what you wish for, because you may get it!”

What does tomorrow hold?

A divided and unequal world cannot be our vision for the future. I have a much more positive view for the global society of tomorrow. I see a world in which the current “information age” is successfully transformed into “an age of knowledge”. This knowledge will be harnessed by citizens and governments alike, bringing us together in the shared goal of increasing the well-being and prosperity of societies. Together, we would identify and implement the policies needed to achieve our goals, and develop effective tools to measure our progress.

In such a global society, it will be easier to find innovative solutions to the challenges we are facing, domestically and internationally. In the fields of health, climate, finance, migration, water and other areas, strengthened international co-operation will lead to a reinforced and more effective global architecture. This should make our economies more resilient, and our societies better equipped to deal with emerging challenges.

Businesses would work more closely together, sharing and creating new knowledge to thrive and grow. These benefits would spread and be shared among participants at every link of

the global value chain. And we would see the full potential of globalisation realised, resulting in societies in which prosperity leaves no one behind.

I believe this vision is within our reach, and that we have the tools at our disposal to make it a reality. The multilateral governance architecture created 60 year ago has provided us with solid foundations to build on. We need to change and adapt this legacy to today's world and today's challenges, but we are well-placed to do so.

All of you are essential actors in this process. In recent years, we have seen the important contributions that the private sector – the “new philanthropists” – can make to international development goals. You are one of the main agents for spreading the benefits of globalisation more equitably. Your support to the CIC will make a difference.

Every year, the up-coming Globalist of the year should proudly be able to say that globalisation is working in favour of a growing share of the people of the world, and that the world has indeed become a little flatter.

Let us accelerate our work together to make this happen. Thank you.

ⁱ During the period 2001-2006.