

Introduction

1. The terms of reference of our Group required us to focus mainly on the process of the North-South negotiations rather than on matters of substance. We recognise, of course, that substantive differences of formidable dimensions exist and that these constitute the major obstacle to progress. We recognise also that questions of substance and form can never be clearly separated. On the other hand we cannot accept the conclusion, sometimes drawn from this, that form and process are merely a reflection of substantive concerns. The relationship between the two is more complex than that and, as the attention which has been given from time to time to the modalities of negotiations suggests, the process can exert an influence on substantive matters, as well as be influenced by them.

2. Moreover, as well as influencing each other, form and substance are to an important extent shaped by factors beyond themselves: prevailing perceptions and assumptions which provide the prism through which the issues are defined; the negotiating machinery and institutions already in place; prevailing norms concerning negotiations; and the general political context of interest and relationships in which the negotiations are approached.

3. Aware of the profound changes of structure and consciousness in the world, of the absolute poverty in which at least one-sixth of the world's population lives and of the consequent growing threat from this to the stability of the international system, and of the continuing stalemate in the North-South negotiations despite the remarkable growth in international economic integration, we have considered that our primary task is to provide a basis for immediate action. Hence we have structured our Report to provide a programme of action which carries the unanimous endorsement of the Group. It calls on both the developed and developing countries to take certain urgent steps to overcome the obstacles which we have identified in the path of recovery and development.

4. Some of the ideas set forth in our Report have been canvassed for many years and represent the practical wisdom of negotiators on either side. But while articulated in moments of insight, few negotiators have been able to act upon them because of the constraints and commitments under which they operate. We have sought to give those insights a new cogency by bringing them together in one place and integrating them into a coherent basis for action. It is a programme which will demand statesmanship and moral courage from both North and South — no easy matter in a time of growing difficulties.

5. We are convinced that our recommendations, if carried through, will have a catalytic effect in building confidence and demonstrating to each side that mutuality of interests which, on deeper reflection, characterises our interdependent world.

6. While in approaching our task we have focused attention on facilitating the forthcoming negotiations, we venture to think that we have at the same time identified a number of approaches and principles which will be valid into a longer future.

7. At a time when the path of negotiation is itself under challenge, it is worth remembering that it is the resolution of differences through negotiations rather than the use of force which characterises the advance towards higher levels of civilisation. As such, meaningful negotiations cannot be avoided. It is our hope that wherever leaders meet now and in the future to discuss those issues vital to the organisation of the human community they might find in our Report some pointers as to methods which might facilitate the reconciliation and the advancement of national and global interests.