

COMMENTS BY THE DISCUSSANT

Mr. Hatem Aly Labib Gabr

Kosheri, Rashed & Raid, Legal Consultants.& Attorneys at Law EGYPT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have to admit that I was rather surprised to be offered the honour of participating in this panel, because I come from a part of the world (Egypt) that is removed from direct involvement in Asian public administration.

Nevertheless, what I have just heard convinces me that the problems in the fields of public administration do not differ too much in one part of the world from another, and that lessons derived from Asia are most helpful in averting similar problems in other continents.

I would like to state now some brief comments on the very interesting and pertinent papers that were just presented concerning the ambiguous theme of .., governance. ..

First, I must stress a fact - ignored by some - which is that public services have been abandoned and contracted to the private sector since the 19th century under the form of "Concessions of public services," and their revival under the Anglo-saxon form of BOT and its derivatives does not alter the fact that there is really nothing new under the sun.

Second, one must not be too influenced by the ideological and political reasons for trying by every possible means to stress on and exaggerate the role played by non-governmental organizations in public life worldwide, because their true weight and effect in this respect is only marginal in third world countries and apparently even in Japan.

Third, the use of the words "share of power" to define the relationship between the governments and NGO's and similar organizations is mere wishful thinking.

In fact, governments like other forms of living organisms, have to adapt to the ever-changing conditions in order to survive, and thus, they have accepted to relinquish part of their total sovereignty and to collaborate with NGO's but only within parameters that are strictly delimited by the governments themselves.

Therefore ascertainment that the governments are no longer decision makers of public interest, or providers of services, disregards the fact that the basic task of all governments is to make decisions in the public interest, and to provide services in all fields that are not adequately met by the private sector.

Fourth, Performance and similar pledges on the part of the governmental administrations are in most 3rd world countries - mere slogans that are used to embellish their images domestically and before the foreign forums. These pledges have no intrinsic value and there is, most of the time, no practical possibility of enforcing them.

Fifth, most professors of public administration teach the necessity to decentralize in order to achieve a degree of efficient public administration. Nevertheless, I can assure you that in many 3rd world countries decentralization brings more inefficiency and a more corrupt bureaucracy than is the case under the centralized administration which, despite its shortcomings, has a degree of knowledge and traditions that is totally lacking in the new decentralized administration.

Sixth, I totally share Dr. Ho's views expressed in his brilliant paper about the Asian economic crisis and its remedies, which should be a lesson to many countries outside Southeast Asia.

I would particularly stress here the dangers derived from the unregulated flow of capital which can destabilize in a very short time the financial stability of any normally administered country.

I would also stress the dangers resulting from reckless government spending and from the private sector's borrowing linked to corruption and cronyism, which over and above their inherent dangers, demoralize - with dire results - the non parasitical productive forces of the country as well as the young who will lead their countries in the future.

Finally I fully share Dr. Ho's view that good governance in Southeast Asia as in other parts of the world, has to include transparency, accountability, contestation, pragmatism and - most importantly - a committed political leadership.

Thank you.