



**The World Political Forum
General Assembly, 2003
(Turin, October 23-24)**

**The World of the XXI Century:
New Unity or New Fractures?**

Presentation

BY
MIKHAIL S. GORBACHEV

The World Political Forum has been established to provide a new impetus to international politics. It fulfils this aim through its mission, which is to develop new ideas on the basis of profound study of the main problems of our time and to contribute to restoring dialogue to its rightful place as the principal method of addressing the world's problems.

Politicians alone cannot cope with all the challenges that the world presents today. Politics has to interact with civil society, and with the intellectual community. Therefore, dialogue is needed, a wide-ranging dialogue that will help us develop workable approaches to meeting the challenges of our globalised world. The world needs a vision, driven by the will and perseverance to make this vision a reality. We need to cultivate a new culture and stimulate new approaches, because the world needs a culture of peace. Even if we have a vision appropriate to the challenges of the contemporary world, even if we have the political will, we still have to make sure that there are the mechanisms needed to implement the decisions.

We set out from the conviction that history cannot be, and is not, preordained. In every kind of situation there is always room for alternatives, there is always room for initiative, and this presupposes the need for political action, not only by politicians, but also by civil society, organisations, and movements. We reject pessimism in evaluating our current and future possibilities because pessimism could result in an irreconcilable conflict between civilisations from which no modern armaments could save us.

The World Political Forum is not intended to assume the functions of the institutions of foreign and domestic policy-making. Our responsibility, our mission, as I see it, is to provide information to, and share knowledge with politicians, the business community and international organisations, because it is a lack of knowledge that has often made politics so misguided and unpredictable, based as it is mostly on intuition, hasty evaluations and conclusions. Too often, we have seen actions that have little to do with the responsibility that politicians should feel to their nations and to the rest of the world but rather reflect the calculus of how much these actions could strengthen one's position on the eve of elections. We all share a common responsibility and concern not only for the world of today but also for the world of the future. Many of those at the World Political Forum were instrumental in contributing individually and jointly to ridding the world of ideological confrontation and the threat of devastating nuclear conflict. We seek now to be instruments once again.

The World Political Forum has become a place for interaction, in this particularly difficult age, of both former and active political leaders as well as scientists, men of

letters, artists, economists, academics and political observers. We want to involve as many people as possible in our project, people with different ideological views and origins, to involve them in a common discussion on the seemingly impenetrable problems of modern politics. The World Political Forum has chosen Italy as its home as it is unique in its historical and geographical significance. The country is a meeting point at the juncture of the European and the Mediterranean cultures, between the Balkans and the Middle East, between the Christian and Muslim worlds. Italy, like the World Political Forum, is a crossroads of civilisations.

When we began two years ago to think over the idea of the World Political Forum, we could not imagine that future events would confirm so clearly and so painfully, that we were right in expressing our concern over the fact that the course of international events was becoming chaotic, alarming, I should even say dangerous, and politics was substantially losing control over events.

We are now facing an evident crisis in world politics. We see that the decades of the Cold War have been followed by numerous conflicts and 'hot wars': that violence, in the form of terrorism, which mars international relations, and war is once again used as a readily available tool of international politics.

The most dangerous global challenges which the world is facing in the third millennium differ from the previous great threat of nuclear war, which jeopardised mankind's future and in fact its very survival. Today, we are witnessing changes in the global environmental balance, the dissolution of the tacit covenant of peaceful coexistence between man and nature, and this has caused a worldwide transformation. In the interdependent world of today, linked by modern means of communication and transport, diseases like AIDS or SARS can spread like lightning. There are also the dramatic problems of poverty and the hunger of billions of people that can no longer be considered national problems or even regional calamities. Finally, there is the need to manage the uncontrolled processes of globalisation. The spontaneous processes that were unleashed after the end of the Cold War have undermined the hope and optimism that the world had then of creating a new world order.

International organisations, conceived as arbiters of international relations and plenipotentiary representatives of the emerging international community are now in crisis, a crisis brought about by their ineffectiveness in facing new realities. The world needs to reform those international institutions that can still function, but we also need new institutions that can keep pace with the new politics of the twenty-first century to help politicians properly envision the real issues on the world's agenda and together seek convincing responses.

Politics is not keeping pace with the course of events, and this lag has been demonstrated particularly during the Iraqi crisis. There is one question that needs to be asked: Has the military victory in Iraq drawn us closer to a solution of problems that arise from the link between terrorism and the weapons of mass destruction? To me, it is clear that the answer is no. This victory has actually set us back and made such a solution more difficult, because the temptation of asymmetrical responses to the overwhelming military might of the world's only remaining superpower has grown instead of diminished. Terrorist actions are occurring in many regions of the world and are now practically pandemic.

We have seen enough utopias in our lifetime. The socialist utopias, the utopia of a perfect world order - 'the end of history', and now a third utopia is appearing - that of imposing democratic regimes through the use of force. All of them are wrong. I would go further, to say that every utopia in the end makes us all pay a high price for it.

The participation of research centres and think tanks are of particular importance for our mission, not only Western ones but also those representing Asia, Africa, the Muslim world, and Latin America. Many of them have already declared their willingness to participate in the work of the World Political Forum, and to make their intellectual contribution available to us for analysis and documentation. We welcome this participation.

The World Political Forum as a meeting point for comparison of different viewpoints and approaches is becoming a valuable tool for developing new policies, for high-level contacts, and for seeking new methods of research leading to common solutions. Among the most important themes for wide-ranging international discussion are those related to global governance. I think it is worth repeating that only by continuing the processes of democratisation in the world, only by guaranteeing democratic procedures as the functional basis of international institutions will it be possible to extend to everyone the benefits of modern society, to integrate different proposals and choose the most appropriate ones. Nothing can be achieved if pressures and a quest for supremacy replace the democratic approach, and only the path to a new world civilisation can lead to a culture of peace.

MIKHAIL S. GORBACHEV
President of the World Political Forum