



Leading Comments at CCICED 20th Anniversary Forum

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Thank you very much, Margaret. It is wonderful to be back. It is a great honor and I was delighted to be invited and come to what I've always seen as the most outstanding experience that one could be part of. Certainly out of my professional life, I would have to say that this has been the highlight, and I'm sure that it has also been for many of you. This is a long stretch, Dr. Song Jian, from one of these first meetings where you, Professor Qu Geping, Martin Lees, Maurice Strong, and a number of others, were planning for this council to be started. One of my first recollections was to see China being one of the first countries, if not the first, to have a substantial agenda 21 ready to roll out very quickly after Rio. So, to my understanding no other country in the world has been able to undertake a similar initiative as the China Council on environment and development. I think we tried in one or two places, Martin, but it did not work, for some reason. It did not lift. It did not get off the ground. So, this afternoon I am very conscientious of our time, and I would like to just comment on two aspects. Having heard so many tremendous presentations earlier this afternoon, I will try not to repeat those but say that I have been very inspired by them. The two areas are: one, I was reflecting on why this council has been so successful, and with increased success, over the years. And secondly, going back, Professor Song Jian, to one of the points you were talking to: the dilemmas. With great humility I would like to address some of those for the China Council in the future.

So, why has this been so successful? You would all have your story to tell, but from my point of view, I think that first of all there was sustained leadership support at the highest level. We would probably not be in this room without it. Second is that the Council has

worked on the top and most relevant issues to China. Otherwise, again, we would not be here. To me, the third point is that the international experts remained, because they felt that their input was being considered, but I think we also remained because we were learning an awful lot from what was happening in China along the way. I think another reason was the regular reporting, and the fact that the reports that were made by various working groups and task forces did not go into a black hole. We were able to see the progress of how these were being used over time. Another aspect is how the council evolved from the early time to the current situation. It did not stay static; it changed in order to be able to deal with how fast China was changing. Therefore the speed of work was accelerated, the speed of delivery was accelerated, and also we saw, or at least are hearing about at this meeting for example, how people are starting from having painted the big picture in terms of what was to be attained, to then dealing with the specific aspects of getting there. Dr. Song Jian, I was very interested to hear your comments that one has to really go into the specificity, and I think Professor Qu Geping also mentioned that, of what is workable but also what can be implemented. There was another point to me which is why this Council was successful; it was the transparency of how it worked and how the Chinese Government was more than at ease of reporting publicly what was happening here and also reporting on the implementation of the recommendations. It tackled issues that matter. As I mentioned earlier, I think the spirit of learning between the Chinese leadership, the table, and the international community was very strong and remains to this day.

Now let me highlight a few challenges among a very long list that I am sure all of you have discussed, debated, and that we have heard this afternoon. I think one of the issues that we all face around the world, and that China will probably face increasingly, is what I am calling the “push back”: the push back of those who have special interests, be they industries, be they local governments, be they investors, which means that the China Council here can be a very strong counterpart in supporting the right policies and the right regulations that need to be implemented in the face of this “push back” by those who have special interests.

A second dilemma is the whole field of policy capture. Again, by those who have special interests trying to influence, sometimes with a lot of resources, the various policies that they would like to see implemented, which would protect their investment and the revenues which they hope to make. So to me this policy capture can bring a lot of dissonance between what is right to do for the future of a country and what others might prefer to see, in terms of their own interests.

To me, a third area, and this was raised in particular by Dr. Qu Geping, is the increased decentralization in China of authority to other levels of government. It is bringing a situation



where, unless the national government is able to maintain the ground which is essential in a nation to ensure that the public good and the public interest are kept, then the territory could be totally devolved in such a way that there is a cacophony and there is no central heart beating for what is the right policies, the right regulations, the right systems of controls as well as implementation, because implementation in decentralized societies is very hard. I come from Canada and, as you know, we have a very decentralized way; we are a federation, like some of you are around this table, and with greater decentralization comes greater difficulty of ensuring that what is right for the country as a whole is indeed implemented at all levels. We also heard, in particular from Arthur Hanson and Professor Shen, about the place for international cooperation. The globalization of the issues that we are talking about here and that kind of international cooperation becomes preeminent, and not always easy. We have seen some of what has been happening in international fora, where it is very often the lowest denominator which brings about a consensus, where unfortunately, one should have a much higher denominator to work for. We also see situations where different countries are waiting for others before making their commitment to provide what their contribution will be to this very important and central world situation. I think that with the work that China has done, with the work that this Council has done, it is more than important for China to have a very positive contribution to the world debates so they are less dysfunctional and much more able to move forward in terms of what is required so that it is not a question of waiting always to see what the other one will do. As mentioned by Achim, we are dealing with an international very important situation here.

My fourth area, I'll go back to you Professor Qu Geping, relates to how we measure our success as nations, and if the only way we measure our success is by GDP growth and economic growth, we will not get there. I think together we have to find much better ways of identifying what the indicators are for the best possible quality of life for our citizens going forward; I think that this kind of debate is taking place in different fora, but not in the same way. Of course economic growth has its importance if we want to pull people out of poverty, but it may not pull all out of poverty because we have seen a lot of inequity and non-inclusive growth around the world, and we see it today. So I think that to be able to bring forward those kinds of new indicators of success so that we not only have Bloomberg every minute talking about quarterly reports or daily reports of shares going up or down.

A fifth area that I would like to put forward is that of China's very rapid industrialization; I am not sure that any other nation has seen such speed in industrialization and expansion of consumption by citizens. I think that we need to make citizens part of the solution. It is not necessarily easy, Dr. Song Jian, when we have 1.3 billion people. At the



same time, if these 1.3 billion people become committed, and can have in their DNA the kind of life that they need to live and the kind of support for what they want their country to do in terms of policies as well, I think we could have just the greatest revolution that has ever been had. I think that it is possible to have a high quality of life and yet reduce our footprint, and to introduce greater personal responsibility in each citizen of our countries, starting with young people. I think if our youth, through our education system, through our media, and otherwise can have a strong moral compass, ethically, as well as the kind of behavior professionally that they should lead, we might counter some of the issues that were raised by Professor Qu Geping earlier. I think a very positive aspect here is that China has been very open with its people in identifying the major issues that China is facing. Whether it is the nexus between water, food, and energy, or the increased pollution in certain sectors and so on, or what is happening with energy as a whole, it is tremendous in helping people understand what the stakes are, but I think that people shouldn't believe that it is only the government that is part of the solution, but instead that they also have to be part of the solution.

Now of course there are many, many other aspects that you have been discussing and that are important. I didn't want to overly repeat; I've taken off some of them from my own comments because they have been presented so well earlier this afternoon. I must say, Art, that I have a granddaughter as well. She heard me so much talk about China and the Council, that at five years old she decided she had to come to China. As children are very persistent, she never gave up until I brought her to China when she was nine years old, because she decided to study China and by six and seven she knew much more about China than I ever did, after having been here for 13 years every year and more. So she has become a great ambassador for China in her school and in some of her activities now. The Council has set new standards for international cooperation. I have been very privileged to have been part of this most exceptional experiment, in a way, which has now lasted. Let us hope it will be contagious in terms of other countries of the world. We need to celebrate this success, because it's a success of solidarity, between countries, between institutions, between people, that I think we are celebrating today.

You were talking of reward earlier, Dr. Qu Geping, and I think our reward is to be part of this outstanding experience and to have been part of it I fell very, very privileged. So thank you for having invited me. I am very grateful for that.