

Honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues,
Thank you so much to the organizers, and particular thanks to my friend Norbert Noisser, for inviting me to join you on this special evening and add my words of congratulation on behalf of the Governing Council of the Society for International Development and its 16 chapters around the world.

My grandmother used to say that wisdom is the ability to tell the difference between a cycle and a trend since, when one is in the middle of something, it almost always feels like a trend that will continue forever.

We are, I believe, at an important crossroad in world affairs. When the modern story of multilateralism ... and the history of SID ... are written, I am confident that that history will include a long list of cycles and a much shorter list of trends. The question is which will be the trends, and what role will we have played in shaping them. The answer matters a great deal.

I was born in 1948, shortly after the end of the Second World War. Those were days of intense internationalism that witnessed the birth of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, the launch of the Marshall Plan, and the creation of NATO. It was a time when much of the world shared a commitment to collective action and to ensuring that we never again faced the horrors of global conflict.

Nine years later, in 1957, the Society for International Development, whose Governing Council I have the privilege to chair, was born in the midst of the cold war with a mission to promote dialogue about

economic and social transformation aimed at constructing a more sustainable and just world. This took place as the world witnessed the dawn of an era of post-colonial nation building. For the first time, the term “international development” gained prominence along with the belief that global poverty was neither inevitable nor acceptable. SID was a tangible expression of that optimism and helped to shape some of the period’s benchmark achievements such as the North-South Dialogue, the movement for gender equity, and the human development index. SID Governing Councils of the period included towering figures like Boutros Boutros- Ghali, Mahbub ul Haq, Barbara Ward, and Enrique Iglesias.

The SID Chapter in Frankfurt was born in 1989, in the midst of this progress, the year the Berlin Wall came down ending the Cold War division between east and west. It seemed that, collectively, we were on the cusp of a host of important breakthroughs. New information and communication technologies promised solutions to some of the world’s most vexing problems and teased the world with the promise of breakthroughs waiting to happen. Conflicts were on a downward spiral; and democracy was on an upward swing all across the planet.

A wave of United Nations conferences captured this enthusiasm and launched a new phase of multilateral cooperation. For many of us, there was new hope that the future could only get brighter – a fact borne out by the exuberance of the economic growth and poverty reduction that were captivating the imagination of many. When, in 2008, financial and food crises spread from country to country, the 60 years of global cooperation since WWII were put to a stern test and

helped to reverse what could easily have become a downward spiral with tragic consequences. None of us expected this progress toward international cooperation to end. We were convinced it was a trend. Some went so far as to call it the “end of history”.

The bursting of these bubbles occurred at a pace that was shocking in its speed and remarkable in its breadth -- pervasive economic and financial crises, new evidence of the existential threats posed by climate change and global pandemics, the re-emergence of social tensions within and across societies, and the return of conflict in both old and new forms. By the time SID turned 60 in 2017, we found ourselves once again facing a polarized world with renewed conflicts between east and west, north and south. Against the expectations of most -- and against the trend we thought existed towards multilateral solutions -- the British voted for Brexit; the United States pulled out of the Iran Nuclear Agreement, several key trade agreements, and the Paris Climate Accords; and a variety of western democracies veered towards nationalism and populism. Our confidence in the future of global cooperation was and remains shaken.

Compounding these challenges, the international order cobbled together in the aftermath of the second world war seemed to be wobbling in the face of numerous attacks on its legitimacy and relevance. And, after three decades of expansion of the neo-liberal economic model, the inequality it spawned has infected many democracies with a streak of populism and insularity that threatens to undermine the foundations of peaceful cohabitation.

While these reversals are sobering, the news at the launch of SID's 7th decade also included triumphs. Development's protagonists and multilateralism's supporters celebrated important gains as the world embraced the SDGs and noted the tremendous progress of the last decades in reducing world poverty, malnutrition, infant mortality and illiteracy.

In 1948, 1957, and 1989, organizations like SID played important roles in making the case for multilateral action in shaping a collective commitment to making the world safer, more prosperous, and more equitable. Animated by the current challenges, I believe that SID must again lean forward on behalf of civil society to advance a 21st century vision of the positive relationship between development, social inclusion, sustainability, and globalization.

As SID/Frankfurt celebrates its 30th birthday and blows out the candles, I can't help but wonder where the world will be -- and what story we will be telling -- when SID/Frankfurt turns 60 in another 30 years. And I ask myself -- and ask you -- how SID can best contribute to the challenges the world is likely to be facing.

In my view, SID contributes most effectively by doubling down on our commitment to act as a "global town square" -- a neutral convener where all viewpoints are welcome -- not as an advocacy group for any point of view or ideology. But beneath it all, we are called upon to raise our voices in support of multi-stakeholder solutions, recognizing that we are stronger together and that a shared commitment to prosperity and fairness for all ultimately benefits each of us.

Although I am here representing SID International, I'd like to speak for just a moment as an American. My country has, at least since WW II, been a consistent supporter of global institutions and multilateral action, and a leader on many international development issues. That posture is currently under serious strain in a world where cries of "Make America Great Again" sometimes seem to drown out the voices calling for shared progress towards a greater world. I am a proud American, but I am surprised and embarrassed by my country and our leadership.

In these times, I believe it is especially important for SID chapters to join hands across countries in mobilizing our fellow citizens and encouraging our governments to resist the temptation to draw inward. We need to raise our voices in support of the internationalist principles that have defined SID since it was founded 62 years ago. I pledge to you my own efforts to support this solidarity.

My friends, if you will forgive me the immodesty, I think the world needs all of us. It is for that reason that I heartily congratulate you on the work you have done for the last 30 years and on your commitment to work that lies ahead.

Thank you again for inviting me to share this evening with you.