Panelists' Remarks

Wally N'Dow, Ashok Khosla, Veena Das, Njongonkulu Winston Hugh Ndungame, Joel H. Meyers, Yolanda Kakabadse, William F. Vendley, Azim A. Nanji

Wally N'Dow: We are woefully unprepared to cope with this coming "century of the city," this urban century that is already upon us. This is particularly true in the developing parts of the world but it also applies elsewhere. In the developing world—where the means are usually not present, where the infrastructure needs overhauling or putting into place, where the services do not function, where the economies are not doing very well—if the cities do not work, the national economies will not work. This is a fact that we must repeat endlessly. In a developing country when the capital city fails—because the infrastructure fails, because there is no human solidarity, because work has disappeared—that country's economy will collapse.

It is very important that we remember this. A nation can never be part of the global system unless its cities work: the banking systems work, telecommunications work, the insurance services work, the judicial system works, the travel services work, and there is basic physical safety and personal security. This realization is fundamental. We cannot cope with the challenges and dilemmas of urbanization until we do a few things differently. For example, we have to move away from the traditional thinking that national governments can do everything necessary to make cities function, to make them more livable. Governments are only a part of the solution. They do not often have the resources required and no longer see themselves as the sole possessors of ideas and vision.

We need the participation of civil society and its various groups—we need the partnerships. We need organizations, some of which today have tremendous vitality; we need nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—they are doing a lot of good work in many parts of the world, and if we were to stop what the NGOs are doing in many cities and urban areas throughout the world, catastrophe would result. We need universities, research institutions, women's organizations, the private sector, youth groups, and grassroots organizations. That broad partnership with the family of nonstate actors must come into play and make a contribution in ideas, in resources, in advocacy, and in the social capital that is needed to make our cities functional as well as likable. We also need to identify and share good examples of success and best practice.

Ismail Serageldin: Ashok Khosla, you have struggled with issues on the role of NGOs, partnerships with business, and making it work. I am not sure you have a very defined perception of what the governments should do, but you have some perceptions on what governments should not do.

Ashok Khosla: I have much sympathy with what Wally N'Dow said, but I come from a different perspective. I kept asking myself what is a good city? What is a bad village? And I came to the conclusion some time ago that I can only

see it through the eyes of a child. Is it a livable city where I have the chance to fulfill my potential? That perspective drives what I think needs to be done; a large city is really many small villages if we design it right.

A small village can be governed, and the governance issues are basically crucial. Does the child or the parent have the ability to design the schools, the education system, the health system, and all the other things that make a difference? There are many issues involved—technological issues, business issues, private sector versus public sector issues, and so on—but it is not very difficult to design a livable settlement. The problem is that we have not been able to break away from the past. We have not been able to say that the way we have been running things in the past is not good enough and we need to look now at new ways to do things in the future.

The fact that three-quarters of the next century's citizens are going to be living in cities that do not exist today can be seen as an opportunity, not a problem. This means that we can redesign cities so that locations, transportation corridors, land values, and the development of communities can be designed with forethought, and in such a way that the minimum energy and material requirements and maximum satisfaction can be built into those cities. I think it is a terrific opportunity. But the fact is, we risk wasting this opportunity because our governments and our systems of decisionmaking today prevent us from looking at innovative ways to do these things.

But if we were to get beyond them, I think the future would be terrific. Urbanization need not be negative; a village is a pretty brutal place to live. I work in villages in India, spending most of my time developing village technologies, village institutions, village responses, and solutions, and I know that it is not nice to live in a village. We need bigger systems to be able to get the kinds of amenities, the kinds of services that we need. And it seems to me that the opportunity exists right now because we can give these issues some forethought. But if we continue the way we have been going in the past, it will be disastrous.

Ismail Serageldin: That is very encouraging, but at the same time the idea of a dream is part of the liberating notion. The cities have been the place where individualism can express itself, whereas in villages it may be difficult to do so. However, the reality of the urban centers as they exist now is that we have such a huge backlog, is it likely to be solvable in this way? Veena Das has been looking at some of these issues. What is the urban reality?

Veena Das: Anywhere a series of small villages, or a village, is gated as a community for the rich who cut themselves off from the poor and isolate themselves from the problems of the urban area, there are new dichotomies created. Is there such a social creation or not?

My own experience has been that some parts of India have become very violent places in many ways. Equally, my work in urban centers shows that collective violence in the form of communal violence or ethnic riots occurs more frequently in urban centers. For instance, if we look at communal riots in India, 80 percent or more of these have taken place in urban spaces. There is a very clear spatial pattern to violence. Such violence occurs with great brutality either in resettlement colonies that surround the peripheries of the city or in slums in which the poor, the new migrants, and other disadvantaged groups are often clustered. New migrants may be given housing, but it is given in exchange for their services in the organization of the underlife of politics, which embroils them in crime. Paradoxically, this means that violence may offer one of the few opportunities for upward mobility to poor migrants. There is thus a freedom promised by moving to the city, but this freedom is achieved at a great cost.

The Weberian perspective, the notion that the city is a place of freedom, has dominated sociological thinking, but there has been little attention to his other idea, that the city is the site for non-legitimate domination. Thus if we look at the circulation of violence in the city, it seems that while it appears irrational from the outside, it does provide opportunities to those sections of the population who live in marginalized spaces. This is why they can develop a stake in violence.

The second point I want to make about cities as places of freedom is that spaces in the city are gendered. Thus there is continuity between the

way space is structured in villages and in cities, although the restrictions on movements for women and the nature of the gendered violence experienced in these two kinds of spaces may be quite different.

Finally, the overcrowding, lack of sanitation and clean water, and heaps of garbage that define the poor areas in a city make these clusters into places where there is a concentration of disease, violence, and fear. This makes the city in India a place of freedom for some, but a landscape of fear for others.

Ismail Serageldin: The question of the segmentation of cities was, of course, part of the policy in South Africa: the townships. We know of the Soweto uprising—it captured the imagination of the world. South Africa has rightly challenged the world with a real miracle in showing a peaceful transition to postapartheid society. Is there a way of building solidarity across the cities, dealing with the violence, and reknitting the urban fabric so that it embraces a sense of community and not just of individual expression?

Njongonkulu Ndungame: There is a sense in which the abnormality of the South African situation sometimes makes things difficult, but abnormal circumstances sometimes make things possible. Someone once said that South Africa is the laboratory for human relations, and if South Africa can make it, there is hope for the world. The policy of apartheid scattered communities from the places they had lived; people were forcibly removed from their communities and made to reestablish new communities. The wonder is that these communities had a life of their own. It is amazing to those of us who minister to these situations; people are living in the most squalid of all areas, but nevertheless they look smart and clean; their children go to school in clean, white uniforms. This has shown me the great resilience of the human spirit—in the most difficult circumstances people form communities. So I think the investment must be in people, for whatever happens we cannot kill the human spirit.

Some survival mechanisms emerged where people in South Africa were supportive of one another. One of the other contributing factors may be that African philosophy or thought is informed by a sense of community. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," for the African, it is rather, "I am, and therefore we belong." Those supportive mechanisms are there, ingrained in people, and so in this negative situation, where people were forced into townships and other areas when the laws of apartheid were made, without any planning they nevertheless formed communities. Therefore, I think that with adequate planning and preparation, and with an investment in people, there are possibilities of people forming communities in the cities.

Ismail Serageldin: That is very encouraging. Joel Meyers is familiar with the situation in Washington, D.C., where there is neither a formalized nor a legalized exclusion of people. There remain, however, differences between certain parts of Northwest and the Anacostia corridor and the Southeast combat zone. How does one create links of solidarity in a city?

Joel Meyers: The necessity of creating links must be recognized before we can answer the question of how we create links. In the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy there are nine fascinating verses that talk about the discovery of a corpse in the middle of a field. The elders of the closest city must come to the field where the body has been discovered and say that their hands did not shed the blood of this person. No one knows what happened to this dead individual, but they have to say that their hands did not shed his blood.

One of the medieval commentaries notes that the elders also had to say that this person who was found dead in the field, "did not come hungry and we failed to feed him, did not come friendless and we failed to befriend him." It speaks eloquently of the responsibility that communities have of caring for one another. Whether we speak of the complexities of an urban center like Washington or a smaller community, the first question is how does the community itself build caring among the citizenry. This is a crucial issue. In society in general we face a problem of individual responsibility for the well-being of community. There is a great tendency not to care what happens on the next block, in the next neighborhood, and we have to reverse this.

I do see signs of that reversal. I think there is a realization taking place that what happens in one part of the urban environment really does affect what happens in another part of the urban environment. There are programs in every community that try to reach across and bridge these borders, whether they are borders of poverty, of education, or of religious difference. Therefore, I think the first task we have, whether it is in this city or any city, is to help build those bridges between people that can enable us to create communities of caring individuals that, in turn, develop an ability to help one another grow. Then we can turn our eyes and our hearts to the larger problems that confront us.

It seems to me that we are also beginning to learn another lesson, that there is a limit to urban growth. Despite our talk about the next century being an urban century, we are also beginning to become more aware of the limits of urban growth and the inability of the environment to sustain a never-ending growth of our cities, to support the populations. This may result in our cities having a different configuration in the future. Perhaps we will have patterns of smaller cities around a core; then we would have to work at building a sense of community within one city, and then within a larger regional community. Again, the task is to commit ourselves to work together as a community to overcome these issues.

Ismail Serageldin: Yolanda Kakabadse comes from the most urbanized of the developing regions, Latin America, which is more than 72 percent urban—the largest city in the world is Mexico City, closely followed by São Paulo. Yolanda Kakabadse, can we make more humane cities and have bridges of solidarity?

Yolanda Kakabadse: We often talk about cities as if they were homogeneous. We tend to qualify cities and urban settlements as one thing, and I think this is a great mistake. It is not the case in Washington, D.C., Mexico City, or São Paulo. We have to analyze how communities make a city. I have no experience with other continents, but in the Latin American context I know there is a sense of solidarity in the community, and it is more evident among the poorest people. The richer we are, the more resources we have, the more our attitude toward the community is individualized. We drive the car, push a button for the garage door to open, drive into the garage, and are not concerned with what is going on outside the walls of our home. This does not happen in the poorest communities, where there is a sense of solidarity among the people. In such communities, for example, the women look for ways to support each other with childcare and to support the sick and the elderly.

What is solidarity about? I think it relates to the issue of sensibility, of being able to sense the needs of other members of your family, of your neighbors, and of the immediate community—and therefore to sense the needs of the city. We often find, in those communities that have a very high sensitivity toward others, the capacity to negotiate, the capacity to deal with conflicts. I remember organizing a workshop for training facilitators for conflicts, and one indigenous person of the Amazon was there. Halfway through the workshop, which was about one week long, he came to me and asked how much we were spending on this course. I told him about US$20,000, and he replied, "well, that is really stupid of you. We do this every day, you know."

And then we come to another reality. It is we in the urban environment who are talking about the incapacity to have a dialogue, to communicate, to resolve the conflicts that arise. Yet these are normal human capabilities in communities and among people who have just their basic needs covered, and sometimes not even those basic needs. Therefore, I always question, who speaks for the city? Who speaks for the community? It is usually the individuals who have isolated themselves from the community, who have been elected to public posts, who speak in the name of the community. And those who lack the capacity to enter that political arena, but whose sensibilities may make them better equipped to represent the community, are not doing so.

I would like to leave that on the table because I think it is a very interesting phenomenon, that the less representative we are of our communities—the more isolated we are—the more we claim the right to represent the community. Something is wrong with this; it is not a demonstration of solidarity or of the sensibility that should exist within the members of a community.

Ismail Serageldin: I just returned from a meeting in Copenhagen attended by NGOs, professional groups, politicians, and others. A minister reflected that we are all politicians, but only a few of us bother to get elected. I thought this a very compelling statement. This question of solidarity is at the heart of how we identify with our family and beyond. Frequently we identify ourselves very much by negating others. In other words, defining ourselves as "not the other." And the boundaries of where the "us" ends and the "them" begins plays an important part in the fracturing of society. William Vendley has done much to try to cross these kinds of boundaries. Does anything from your experience translate beyond these questions toward applications?

William Vendley: Crossing boundaries provides suggestive hints of the kinds of issues we are all increasingly going to have to face as diverse populations continue to encounter one another. Let me give you one example. Just two days ago I came back from Sarajevo, where the religious leaders have quite courageously begun to work together. There are, as you can well imagine, a lot of remaining difficulties. One of the problems discussed is the fact that in Sarajevo there is basically no longer a Serbian Orthodox community in residence. The kind of "cleansing" of populations that people were so rightly concerned about is still going on at the present time, although it is not violent. Communities are frightened to live together.

A wonderful Serbian Orthodox priest made an interesting comment. He suggested that for the cost of one-third of a tank, we could assist the Serbian Orthodox community to come back into Sarajevo, by rebuilding their cathedral. Notwithstanding the enormous and crucially important work of the intergovernmental and international agencies, the comment struck a cord. We need to look for the ways in which the most rooted local structures can be empowered to do the job at hand. War causes terrible injuries, some of them are obvious, others less so. In either case, we are challenged to investigate and support when possible those local structures that mediate community.

A second example comes from Sierra Leone, where I spent time just before the recent coup d'état. Prior to the coup the country had struggled for a number of years over a series of difficult situations, including an insurgency in the country that drove people out of the villages and into refugee camps outside Free Town. Going through the camps, it was startling to see what kind of organization begins to form, even under the most miserable conditions. At first I did not see very much, but my friends pointed out a new mosque, a school, and other structures built of burlap and a few pieces of wood. The people had begun, under the most difficult of circumstances, to organize themselves. And they had rather successfully transported their communal patterns into the highly difficult camp situation.

The point is that we are going to have to find ways to support those structures that have in the past mediated social solidarity into our new urban contexts. We are challenged to ask ourselves, what are the moral and institutional assets that can become agents of community building? How can we catalyze these assets? Many assets are already available, but need to be creatively reimagined.

Ismail Serageldin: How about this question of institutions of mediation? And how about institutions of transformation and change? Universities are the loci of ideas, role models, the agents of change *par excellence*, and university students have been at the forefront of demonstrations for civil rights and for many other causes around the world. We can ask whether the university in the city is playing a role of modernizing, of being an agent of change, or is it isolated from the community and the city and their issues? Is it an ivory tower or a meeting place? Is it the locus for ideas about change, or is it content to perpetuate the divisions that exist?

Veena Das: I wish there were a straightforward answer to that. There is not. On the one hand those of us in the university have been extremely moved by students'actions during situations of conflict, their efforts to build hope and reconciliation. This was our experience after the 1984 riots in Delhi and the demolition of the mosque. But I think that we have to pay attention to patterns of specialty in the cities. One big issue is that conflicts that are sometimes purely local

tend to become magnified when they are read under the sign of the nation.

Ordinary everyday conflicts occur in all communities, but local communities have ways of isolating or containing the violence so that everyday life can continue. You can love a little, you can hate a little, but it does not come to actually killing each other. However, as these local conflicts in India began to be viewed as having larger, national support, they were interpreted as the actions of Hindus taking revenge on the Sikhs for the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, or as Hindu Muslim riots that are a further continuation of the riots that led to the partition of India. In this way conflicts become more and more difficult to resolve. When international media portray local conflicts as the outgrowth of centuries of strife between certain communities it becomes extremely difficult for local communities to return to ordinary living.

When a commission comes to look into and report on a confrontation this can have its uses. But such reports tend to overdramatize issues—the way in which the borders are defined, the manner in which the frontiers are defined—assuming that this break from everyday life in fact constitutes the everyday life of the community.

So I see students, other members of the community, and members of the global community as making an important day-to-day contribution in the way they look at these communities in conflict—seeing not only their periods of dramatic confrontation, but also their histories of cooperative communal life. It is important to see and make known the specific character of these local conflicts; how they are occurring within and among communities that also have coexisted well in the past, and how, even in the midst of such conflicts, old solidarities survive and new solidarities are born. Very often when we hear descriptions of these breakdowns, we do not also hear how, under the same conditions, people risk their lives to save their neighbors, showing that the everyday solidarities that have been built are not forgotten even in the face of tremendous provocation.

So I do not see the role of universities as some kind of abstract generalization—say, taking a stand with regard to violence in city spaces. What we have to do is to produce this counternarrative through which the memories of these conflicts can be tamed and made to fit within the much larger picture of the everyday lives of affected communities—rather than overdramatized and removed from a larger context, as often happens in journalistic accounts. This has already been done to some extent by university students and teachers in countries like India.

Ismail Serageldin: These perceptions can then be integrated into development. Azim Nanji spoke earlier today about people having different lamps that they look under, and surely the narratives that we all carry, the memories we carry, define us as parts of different communities. Yet every one of those communities, whether they are communities of faith or communities of memory, has a sense of values that says that solidarity is important, that the gaps between the rich and the poor are important.

Yet we see cleavages occurring more often between communities, less often along social-class lines. It seems that it is either ethnicity or religious belief that creates the division, rather than economic distinctions. In the cities, more than anywhere else, we see the richest and the poorest people rubbing shoulders; conspicuous consumption indulged in in the face of the greatest misery; despicable health conditions for some, with children dying of typhoid, while others enjoy gardens and sprinklers and limousines. Yet when cleavages occur, people seem to align themselves along other dimensions than these. What do the common narratives of these various traditions have to tell us about solidarity and how can we bring it to bear on interfaith and intercommunity action within the broader city?

Azim Nanji: Let me just pick up on a couple of points you mentioned, Ismail. One of them has to do with where in the city people locate and enshrine their most important memories. Is it the neighborhood in which they live? The religious space with which they identify? Or some kind of other symbol in the city that is so critical that when it is taken away, or when it is threatened, it leads to violence and cleavages.

If one reads the city simply as a text in the imagination of a poet or writer—I am thinking of

Ngugi Wathiongo, the great Kenyan writer who, when he wrote his first work, *Weep Not Child,* described the locus of tradition from the perspective of his village. However, the magnet for him in that story is the city of Nairobi, which was a colonial creation. He identifies with Nairobi. Jomo Kenyata, as the leader of the protest movement against the British, made Nairobi a battleground and a center of encounter with the British.

In some sense I think cities carry this duality. They have this attraction because of what they represent to people who are in them or who wish to leave them or who live away from them, but at the same time they are places where people can effectively contest those areas of their lives that are threatened. We were discussing this with a scholar from Beirut recently and he was saying that one of the areas of solidarity that they have begun to address is to make the lines that divided various communities now become points of entry for each group to access another group's space.

Generally, my sense is that even if you look at the city of Washington, which was an artificial creation, it symbolizes a particular vision of what a new nation was going to be. After it was built, in the midst of all the wonderful things that were created by a foreign architect, slaves were forced to stay in spaces that were hidden from view within the city. It conferred on them invisibility. What is suppressed for long and remains invisible will, in time, find a way of expressing itself. Conflict becomes one way of doing it.