



## SID-NL and Humanity House BREAD & BRAINS with Jan Pronk

### *The Future of International Cooperation and International Development: Not on the Right Track*

*On Thursday 19 September 2013, Jan Pronk, former Minister of Development Cooperation, former Head of the United Nations Peace Mission in Sudan, and currently Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague and visiting Professor at the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica, opened the 2013-2014 Bread & Brains series with a critical view on the future of international development.*

### **'We are not on the right track'**

Although many experts in academics, international organisations, governments and the media seem to think that we are on the right track in the field of international cooperation and development cooperation, Jan Pronk argues that the international community has been on the wrong track since the beginning of the Millennium, and that major reform is required. The 9/11 attacks, the subsequent invasion of Iraq by the United States, the non-implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the lack of action in the aftermath of the 2002 Johannesburg Conference on Development and the Environment are only a few results of this 'wrong track'. An analysis of what is wrong exactly in the current approach towards development cooperation is necessary to reveal which approach should be used instead.

### **What is wrong in the current approach**

There is a number of reasons why the current approach and attitude towards international cooperation and development is wrong. First of all, there is a trend to reduce multilateralism and to increase bilateralism and the strengthening of closed groups of countries such as the G20. The G20 is now the major group for political decisions on security issues, both economically as well as politically; this is a distinct change with the past. The world encounters a scramble for influence by large powers such as Russia, China, the United States and the EU. The current crisis in Syria is an excellent example of the consequences. There also seems to be a tendency in the

development discourse that development equals Westernization, which is different from the old concept of development. Reform over the past ten years in fact means an overall reliance on the market and commercialisation.

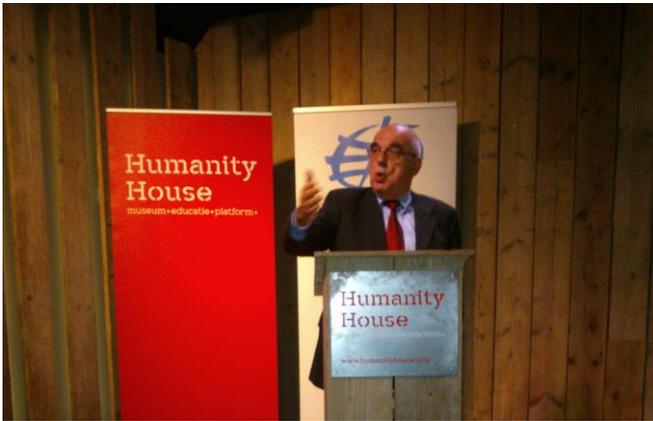
Analysing the current situation, four dimensions characterising the current developments can be distinguished. First of all, it is likely that the nation state will remain the most important and most influential actor in international cooperation and international policy making. Simultaneously, however, transnational companies have become extremely powerful since the 1990s. As a result of the on-going globalisation, they have transformed into power units which equal and sometimes even exceed the influence of important nation states such as Germany and even the United States. This tendency has resulted in increasing inequality both between and within countries. Not just in developing countries but in Europe as well. There is poverty and no political party seems to take this into consideration. The poor are simply being forgotten.

Secondly, there needs to be an analysis of the economic and political aspects of international development, and also of the social and cultural sides. What we see in the past decade is pure global capitalism. There is a strong cultural and social resistance against this tendency in many parts of the world. We have to cope with this.

Thirdly, there is an emergence of dualism in international economic development. Both national and international exploitation of labour has become structurally institutionalised. As a consequence



of neo-liberal policies, labour is unable to protect itself against exploitation; it is possible to go anywhere in the world for cheap and flexible labour. This development is not likely to fade out soon.



The fourth and last dimension is that the international community seems to be blind for the previous developments. This blindness can be seen in the analyses which are constantly published. Some analysts think that there are fewer conflicts in the world, but according to Pronk there are more. The only thing that has changed is the definition of what a conflict is. Many countries in the world show instability. Think of Senegal and Pakistan, Greece and Spain, Egypt and Nigeria. These are very real sources of instability. Media coverage, academic publications and policy proposals all seem to suggest that the international community is on the right track, but it is not.

#### What needs to be done

Following this analysis, five major priorities need to be addressed urgently. Firstly, economic policies which aim to reverse increasing inequality need to be given the highest priority. Not only between countries but also within countries absolute poverty needs to be decreased together with inequality. Contrary to what many people think, globalisation and an increase in international trade are not going to accomplish this.

Secondly, fair distribution of scarce resources and their preservation needs to become policy priority so that the next generations can utilise them as well. Inter-generational human rights are extremely important.

Thirdly, there needs to be a major revision of the attitude of the international community towards international conflict. Today, when a conflict escalates the first question is whether the international community should intervene at all, with the second question being whether troops should be sent. This is

wrong. Boutros Boutros Ghaly said it a long time ago: the world needs an agenda for peace. Not an agenda for conflict containment. Currently, the international community only acts when it is already too late and instability has escalated into conflict or civil war. This is wrong; preventive diplomacy is the only instrument to avert conflict.

Fourthly, the tendency in many wealthy countries to reduce development aid should be reversed. Today's biggest challenges are climate change, prevention of conflict escalation, the preservation of world public goods and the reduction of inequality and poverty. Developing countries cannot deal with these problems alone, they need help. Lastly, the international community needs to return to the principle of sharing power. The system of international law, with big institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations, is in decay. They do not possess the independent power to act on behalf of the world community, but rather do so on behalf of a small group of strong powers. Many governments do not believe in these institutions anymore because the big powers give the wrong example. Confidence and trust needs to be restored in these big institutions and they need to address global challenges together.

Summarising, there are five issues that need to be addressed. There needs to be less inequality; a fair distribution of scarce resources; conflict prevention rather than conflict containment; welfare transfers from rich to poor; and the strengthening of international institutions rather than ruining them. This is a responsibility of the people, too. They need to confront their politicians and tell them: 'We are not on the right track. We need to change'.

SID NL and the Humanity House organise monthly Bread & Brains lunch discussions with prominent speakers. Everyone is welcome from 12:00 onwards to take a break, have some lunch and meet new people. The monthly lunch meetings focus on pressing issues in the field of international development.  
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