

CTMUN
Keynote address
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Challenges Without Borders

I'm delighted to be here this morning to help kick off what promises to be an especially stimulating conference.

As someone who teaches and writes about world affairs, I'm impressed by the scope and range of the questions you are going to be taking up: from controlling human trafficking across national borders, to finding a way to prevent the spread of "loose nukes" and other weapons of mass destruction, to creating international standards for carbon emissions and global warming. It's a hefty agenda. It's also a very timely one!

Indeed, it is hard to imagine a time in the last half century when there was a more palpable need for the kind of international negotiation and diplomacy you will be simulating here at UT over the next couple of days. The current global economic crisis has deepened our appreciation of just how interdependent our welfare and security is on one another. Managing that interdependence is one of the great challenges we face and I'm really glad to see that CTMUN has chosen to zero in on it. I think it gives you a great opportunity to deal with complex real world issues. Selfishly, it also gives me an opportunity to learn from you! My son Josh is "gaming" with you and I intend to pick his brain after you finish up.

In thinking about this morning, and what I might say, I found myself pondering the phrase "challenges without borders." It's a provocative notion, but what does it really mean? There are, I think, two different ways to think about it. The first has to do with "duties beyond borders." The question is whether nations have responsibilities and obligations to peoples beyond their borders? It's a question that the UN has struggled with since its inception, and it is one that those of you scheduled to work through the problems of international trafficking in women and children and the refugee crisis in Darfur will be grappling with because there are no clearly defined, widely accepted international norms here.

The idea that nations have duties beyond borders has gained tremendous currency in recent decades, and is evident in such things as foreign aid, human rights promotion, and development assistance. However, there are many instances in which the international community has failed to act decisively in response to humanitarian crises. Unfortunately, the crisis in Darfur is only the most recent in a long list that includes Rwanda, Cambodia, East Timor, Nigeria, Uganda, to name only the most well known.

At one level, these failures by the international community to act reflect conflicting views about sovereignty. Everyone can agree that nations have responsibilities and obligations to their own citizens, but nations often disagree about when and where those duties should extend beyond the border's edge. Sometimes these differences of opinion are matters of principle. More frequently, these disputes are grounded in conflicting interests over the geopolitical benefits and costs of intervening in the internal affairs of a country like the Sudan and the risks of setting a precedent about the legitimacy of doing so.

The great challenge that faces the diplomats you will be playing is figuring out how to reconcile these conflicts of interest – to identify the areas of common ground and to use what sometimes seem like agonizingly small “baby steps” to generate political momentum for more far reaching, programmatic responses. Learning how to do this demands dedication and perseverance. It also requires the kinds of negotiating skills that Model UN has historically taught through the doing.

I think it is safe to say that those same skills are going to be in even greater demand in the years ahead. And not only because, unfortunately, here will be other Darfurs, but because we are now confronting a second type of borderless challenge: problems that have no easily identifiable home address. These are problems whose geographic scope is truly international and that threaten to do great harm down the road if we don't start dealing with them today. They are the very problems that those of you working in the Office of the UN High Commission on Refugees and the UN Environmental Programme will be addressing.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC) recently released a study entitled “Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World.” You can go to the NIC's website and download a copy. I recommend doing so because it's a view of the future that every educated person should read and talk about with their peers. This is not because the NIC or the U.S. government is the last word

on this subject. It isn't, but because the study underscores how pivotal this second type of borderless challenge is likely to be to our collective security and welfare in the future.

Consider the following. Over the next 20 years, the world's population is expected to grow from the current 6.8 billion to roughly 8 billion people, with Africa and Asia accounting for most of this growth. The many international experts the NIC consulted predict that this population explosion will have several important consequences. First, the income inequality gap between the industrial and developing countries will increase sharply. Second, and partly as a result, the number of migrants seeking to move from disadvantaged to relatively privileged countries will swell. Third, and perhaps most importantly for the United Nations, the rapid increase in population will put tremendous pressure on a number of highly strategic resources, including energy, food, and water.

Resource scarcity may very well prove to be the single greatest problem that your generation faces. International demand for energy, food, and water could outstrip available supplies by 2025 unless the international community begins to address these problems now. Climate change will exacerbate these resource scarcities and the effects will be disproportionately concentrated in regions of the world least capable of dealing with them, most notably Sub-Saharan Africa. Conflicts over resources could emerge. Nations that are already politically fragile could become breeding grounds for terrorist groups seeking to capitalize on the frustration, alienation, and poverty of their peoples.

These are not problems that have a single home address. They span whole regions and even continents. Moreover, demographic and environmental developments that fuel social and political instability in one part of the world will have economic and security implications for other parts of the globe. The claim that globalization is good is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. International interdependence can improve our collective wellbeing, but globalization can and does generate a lot of unintended, collateral damage.

What makes the kinds of problems you will be taking up today and tomorrow so vexing from the standpoint of diplomacy is that they are transnational, meaning that they are unlikely to be effectively resolved by the actions of individual nation-states. By their very nature, they require multilateral solutions. Whether our existing international institutions are up to the task is a critical question and one that I think you can begin to help us think about. For Model UN is not

just about training the future leaders of the world; it can also be a laboratory for testing old assumptions, advancing new ideas, and generating creative solutions.

A few years back UT adopted a motto that reads, “What Starts Here Changes the World.” It is thus fitting that you are taking up these challenging transnational problems here on the UT campus. You won’t solve the problems of the world in the next two days. But I predict that you will leave this conference with a better understanding of what those challenges are, the obstacles that stand between us and workable solutions, and some ideas about what concrete diplomatic steps we might collectively take to make these problems more tractable going forward.

So roll up your sleeves Model UN’ers. You’ve got work to do!