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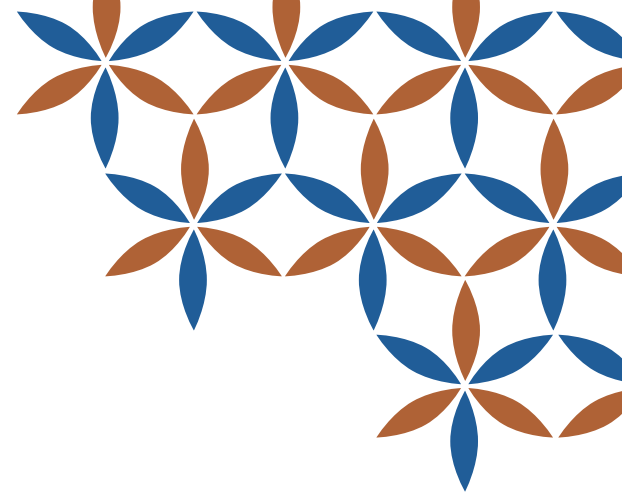
منظمة التعاون الجنوبي

ORGANIZACIÓN DE COOPERACIÓN DEL SUR

# *Regional Integration, Transformation, and the Renewal of **Collective Dreams***

*A Dialogue with the Secretary-General  
Manssour Bin Mussallam*

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## **Regional Integration, Transformation, and the Renewal of Collective Dreams**

*A Dialogue with the Secretary-General*

**I**n this edition, the Secretary-General discusses the significance of regional integration for wider South-South co-operation, the centrality of transformation—in contrast to mere reforms—within the Third Way of Development, and the imperative of an emancipation from “the dictatorship of technocracy” and the corresponding renewal of collective dreams in the development discourse.

Interviewer: **I would like to ask you about regional integration, in so far as I have heard you repeatedly mention its importance to your vision. I also want to ask for your thoughts on regional integration efforts that have occurred in my own region of origin, Latin America and the Caribbean, as an example.**

**Secretary-General:** To answer this question, we should start with the Greater South, which we have previously covered, and I will hence not dwell on it. As you are aware, a considerable part of my thought is premised on consolidating, strengthening, and expanding South-South cooperation. And as mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Balanced and Inclusive Education, the South is composed of Peoples and States which are very diverse in their histories, in their cultures, in their languages, in their realities, but that also share systemic challenges and aspirations rendering cooperation amongst them particularly relevant – to realise those common aspirations and overcome those shared challenges. Now, how is this related to regional integration? Why do I consider regional integration to be also necessary within this Southern vision? In fact, why do I consider it, to some extent, as a condition for effective South-South cooperation? First and foremost, because the rationale for regional integration is the same as the rationale for the Greater South and for South-South cooperation. Regions share many realities, aspirations, sometimes even cultures and languages, in a manner that is even more pronounced than when looking at the Greater South, making cooperation and integration also necessary at the regional level. In other words, the same logic as South-South cooperation is amplified at the regional level.

The second reason for my emphasis on regional integration builds on the first. At the OSC, we are unequivocal in our recognition of the importance of, and support for, the endogenous dimension of development and self-reliance. Yet, we must also recognise that no country can possibly be completely self-reliant in all areas, and in those areas in which a country cannot be self-reliant, the rationale and necessity for collective self-reliance – which is a transversal axis of the OSC Programme – emerges. In fact, it is not only

necessary, but also desirable – to pool resources, to pool efforts, to pool intelligences together. In many respects, therefore, regional integration is necessary for self-reliance and endogenous development, be it in terms of research capacity, of finance, of economies of scale, of technological development.

Yet when I speak of the importance of regional integration it is not necessarily, not exclusively economic or political, but can and must also be cultural. To provide an example, concretising my point, from my mother tongue. In Arabic, there is no uniform way to translate “transdisciplinarity”. In fact, we do not even have a grammatical rule enabling us to create an immediately understandable neologism for it. This means that each translator, each researcher, each author tends to translate the concept of transdisciplinarity – which is not a concept that is endogenous to Arab thought – in their own, different way, which often consists of a sentence such as “dialogue between and beyond disciplines”. This generates a fundamental problem, not only of efficiency in writing, but of interchange of knowledge. If the Palestinian researcher, interested in transdisciplinarity, undertakes a review of available transdisciplinary research from the Arab region, it is highly probable that they may never find – except by personal recommendation – the article published by a Moroccan scholar on the topic of transdisciplinarity.

This simultaneously hinders the Palestinian researcher from access to further transdisciplinary knowledge, despite writing in the same language, and prohibits any potential collaboration which could have been fruitful. And whilst the Arabic language is one of the richest that I know, in the 21st century it also is in need for a new wave of standardisation and innovation to address emerging concepts and realities. Yet no single Arab country can possibly, on its own, standardise and innovate the language. Nevertheless, through regional cooperation and integration, in the cultural, linguistic sphere, it is entirely possible. To address this problem, one could conceive, for instance, of an intergovernmental Arabic Institute or Academy – not dissimilar to the Académie Française – where our writers and intellectuals would convene, not only with regard to the standardisation of these translations across

Arab countries, but also to innovate within the language. In other words, coining neologisms where relevant and necessary, accompanied with new grammatical structures or rules that still follow the internal, millenary logic of the language, which is necessary for our development. This would be an example of regional integration that is neither political, in the common sense of the word, nor economic.

Interviewer: **But it is still politics, in a way, isn't it?**

**Secretary-General:** Certainly, if one follows any matter to its logical conclusion and implication, everything is political at the end. But it is not politics understood as the process of governing a country, nor is it directly related to foreign relations amongst sovereign States. In sum, these are the two reasons for which I talk about regional integration – the first being that the rationale for South-South cooperation, namely sharing challenges and aspirations which make cooperation necessary and desirable, is amplified at the regional level; the second is that endogenous development and self-reliance is not always possible, nor desirable, entirely at the national level, rendering regional integration necessary and enriching.

Having stated these general principles, or reasons, allow me to add that whilst we certainly need our respective regional integrations to be based on fair foundations, at the same time we also need them to be stable, to be inscribed in time, to be founded in terms of a people. For clarity on this part, let me define my terms. And Debray's definition is perhaps the best that I have come across in that sense: a population is the set of individuals that occupy a space; a people is a population that has crossed time, becoming heir to a history and to a memory. Population, space. People, time. And in this regard, for regional integration to be integration and not mere cooperation, it must make a people, which requires time. Accordingly, integration must quintessentially have solid, lasting foundations.

Now, to address your question on my views of regional integration efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean, without mentioning any specific initiative,

I can recognise some considerable successes in cooperation. I also notice the shortcomings of numerous integration platforms. My view is that most of these shortcomings are largely due to platforms of integration being founded on ideological proximity. And in this regard, I am not judging any specific ideology, but limiting my judgement to the sustainability and stability, or lack thereof, for integration. The day that the government of a given country changes, as has happened, and it does not share the ideology of its predecessor, it withdraws from the instrument of integration. In other words, these instruments of integration are not stable over time, and time is the precondition to a people, which most of these instruments have not been able to do. I therefore have my reservations on these efforts – not because I do not share the aims, on the contrary, but because I have concerns about the sustainability of the processes and frameworks.

Interviewer: **Yet, these platforms, instruments, and organisations generated happiness for thousands and millions of people.**

**Secretary-General:** It may certainly be so, but that does not constitute a good example of regional *integration*. Then, if you wish to ask me about other purposes than integration, such as cooperation and solidarity, I may tell you that they could indeed be considered as good examples for those other objectives, but not for *integration* itself. In fact, I believe that there is real work to be done in terms of authentic regional integration in our countries of the Greater South, with particular emphasis on the Latin American and Caribbean region, because integration is an area where Latin America and the Caribbean, by not having its own intergovernmental organisation, lags behind the rest of the South – possibly with the exception of some sub-regions in Asia, given the size of the continent. I have followed, recently, the conversations about institutionalising the CELAC as an organisation, for example, I certainly hope that these efforts come to fruition in terms agreeable to all. But in any event, I believe in the importance of strengthening Latin American and Caribbean, African, Arab, and Asian regional integrations. I would also say that it is important to note that regional integrations in the South strengthen each other because – and here we return to the importance

of South-South cooperation – they learn from each other’s successes and shortcomings, integrating themselves.

Interviewer: **There must be integration between regional integrations.**

**Secretary-General:** Exactly, if you want to put it that way. Well, I suppose that is all that I have to say about regional integration in the general sense.

Interviewer: **I would like to ask you about a theme that you touched upon several times in speeches and interviews that I’ve read, which is the importance of ideals, and the collective capacity to dream and to build, since it fits with our conversation: regional integration as a dream to strengthen ourselves.**

**Secretary-General:** The issue of renewing with ideals is indeed one that I repeatedly raise in my interventions. As you are aware, mine is the unwavering position that we are in need of vision, because without vision, without knowledge of where we are aiming to be in 20 years, there can be no plans. And with neither vision nor plans, there can be no actions, only reactions. Similarly, without dreams, there can be no mobilisation, and without mobilisation, there can be no transformation. Beyond goals, we need ideals. To be clear, of course that we also need goals, which are technocratic, to support our ideals, otherwise we remain in the abstract, but we cannot limit ourselves to technocracy.

Yet, since the triumphant march of neoliberalism, technocracy – which is a policy support function – has proclaimed supremacy over politics – which carries a project, and not merely measures, for society – and delegitimised dreams from the political and from the international discourses. Our world divorced from dreams. To convey my point more clearly, let me give concrete examples. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whether you were capitalist or socialist, there was a dream in the political discourse: listening to speeches of John F. Kennedy in the United States, you can hear a dream for his country and for the world – one with which you could disagree, but a dream nonetheless; on

the other end of the political spectrum, listening to a speech by Fidel Castro in Cuba, you equally heard a dream for his country and for the world – once again, a dream that you may not share, but a dream nevertheless.

Human beings – and here, I am equally included – need more than good *policies*. We also need a little bit of *poetry*, of *transcendence*, of something *bigger* than ourselves, something *transgenerational*. That is to say, knowing that, in all probability, the dream for which I am fighting will not be fully realised in my own lifetime, I am not deterred nor discouraged, because I am aware of the transgenerational nature of my struggle.

This goes in the sense of Fernando Birri, who apparently said – and I am paraphrasing Galeano who was himself paraphrasing him –: “what is the purpose of Utopia? She is always in the horizon. If I take ten steps towards her, she takes ten steps back. I clearly will never reach her. So what is the purpose of Utopia? Well, that is precisely the purpose of Utopia: to make me walk.” Oscar Wilde wrote something similar, in the 19th century – and I am again paraphrasing –: “a map on which Utopia does not appear is a map that is not even worth glancing at. It abstracts the most important country, the one where Humanity always lands. And when it lands there, it looks around and, seeing a better country, sails out again.” And he concludes, and here I quote, “Progress is the realisation of Utopias.”

In sum, we must renew with dreams and ideals, to emancipate ourselves from the technocratic dictatorship in which we live, for that is the only manner in which we can both be authentically human and achieve the future that we deserve. And mind you, I am talking about emancipating ourselves from the technocratic *dictatorship*. I am not stating that we have to *eliminate* technocracy. Technocracy is necessary – we need technicians, we need expertise, we need pragmatic measures. But we also need much more than that. Vision must always precede action programmes. *First poetry, then policy.*

Interviewer: **In your answer, you stated that “without dreams, there can be no mobilisation, and without mobilisation, there can be no transformation.” Could you elaborate?**

**Secretary-General:** We should perhaps start by defining our terms, or the difference I make between reform and transformation: reform is merely cosmetic alteration; transformation is changing dynamics. We are not interested in reform, because we know that the system itself contains dynamics that reproduce inequality, reproduce the injustice of our dependency, reproduce a broad set of woes. It is hence the underlying dynamics that we aspire to change, which means transformation.

To illustrate my point: we are often told that the capitalist system is the root cause of climate change. There is certainly some considerable truth in that statement. Our development models, which emanate generally from a capitalist paradigm, are certainly damaging to the environment. But it also has to be said that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, socialism did as much damage as capitalism to the environment. Because on either side of the political spectrum, the paradigm was productivist: capitalism being about producing more in order to accumulate more wealth; socialism being about producing more in order to distribute more wealth. So, in either case, you found a productivist conception of development – a constant pursuit of more production, more growth – for different reasons, through different means, but productivism, nevertheless. The root cause of the climate catastrophe to which we are heading, hence, is not capitalism *per se*, but productivism.

Needless to say, a legitimate argument can be made that capitalism without productivism is impossible, but my point stands: if you pass to a socialist model with a productivist paradigm, then you will still be accelerating climate change. In terms of our development models, if we aspire to avoid a climate catastrophe, it is the underlying dynamics of productivism that we must change – which constitutes transformation, and not just a cosmetic alteration which would be, for instance, more public expenditure

on reforestation whilst preserving the same productivist dynamic in fossil fuel industries. To be clear, however, I am not stating that transformation in this example would be against production and growth – it would be both nonsensical and, I dare say, dangerous to believe such a thing –, but that in the context of climate change, transformation would conjugate production with “happy sobriety”, in the words of Pierre Rabhi, it would marry growth in certain areas and degrowth in others, it would balance material prosperity with ecological well-being. Another brief example, for the sake of clarity: our countries remain, largely, net exporters of raw materials, or at best intermediary materials. Reform would consist in measures to produce, or extract, more raw materials for exports, including through the importation and use of technology for more efficient production; transformation would consist in the construction of an ecosystem and supply chain to ensure the export of processed materials with value added within the country, including through the development of endogenous technologies.

Having explained the difference between reform and transformation, with the reasons for which we aspire to the latter, I can perhaps address the part about mobilisation, albeit briefly since it appears self-explanatory to me. Since transformation is a fundamental change of dynamics, which entails an overhaul of the system, it cannot be merely decreed as a reform could. You can issue a decree prohibiting the export of raw materials. You cannot decree high valued-added industrialisation. In other words, transformation requires *collective* action. As a parenthesis, for the sake of clarity, when I say collective action, I do not mean “many people, doing the same thing, at the same time”, but rather a coordinated, multi-pronged and purposeful struggle. In other words, for high value-added industrialisation, you must mobilise sectors and people.

To keep the same example yet make it more precise, to illustrate mobilisation broadly and partially, we can refer to the case of a coffee producing country that mostly exports green beans, which is the case of most of our coffee producing countries. And let us assume that this same country has limited domestic coffee consumption, which is the case of some of our countries.

Transformation towards exporting processed coffee, whether capsules or other forms, instead of green beans would require mobilisation in the following, non-exhaustive sense: the ministry in charge of the economy and industry issuing policies that incentivise coffee processing and de-incentivise green bean exports; the current green bean coffee exporters to gradually transition their business model towards value addition and consumption domestically; the private sector investing in coffee processing and packaging plants; banks, to finance this production; the technical and vocational education and training sector, to provide coffee master roasting and blending courses; consumers at home, to consume more coffee in support of national production; consumers abroad, to sensitise them to the importance of purchasing coffee processed in the country of origin, which would generate more income for producers than coffee processed in Europe, even if Fairtrade, and so on.

On the other hand, in the case of reforming the sector of coffee by removing restrictions on the importation of technology for increased yields of green beans for export, or to facilitate direct exports without intermediaries, only requires a limited amount of actors to issue the corresponding policy. In sum, transformation requires the involvement, in different ways, of numerous actors who are not all direct stakeholders, acting in a synergetic manner; reform only needs two sets of actors: the governments issuing the policy and the direct stakeholders concerned by the new policy. Hence the reason that I state that without mobilisation, there can be no transformation.

Finally, to address the aspect of dreams in this formula, so to speak, I will do so very concisely because I believe that I've already expounded upon it earlier in our conversation, and I will focus on its relation to mobilisation and transformation. A coordinated, multi-pronged and purposeful struggle can only be considered a collective if its constituents feel united, or at least linked, beyond short-term transactional interests, by something that is, as I've said before, bigger than any one of them taken individually, by something that transcends them. This is the only reason for which anyone would mobilise in a sustained manner: contributing to the realisation of a larger aspiration.

To return to the example of coffee: a product being affordable is not enough for a population to start consuming it; importation restrictions being lifted and tax benefits are not enough for a business to take on the risk of investing in a non-existent coffee processing and encapsulating industry; the availability of TVET courses in coffee blending and roasting is not enough to attract a critical mass of young people to follow this career path; and I could go on. The consciousness of contributing to the edification of the country, to the achievement of prosperity that is shared amongst all the nation's children, to the realisation of authentic development, however, is a source for mobilisation. The example is incomplete, because a dream would need to be much broader than a single sector, but I believe that I have conveyed the point. In other words, the shared dream in which one believes of a better, fairer, prouder future – for oneself, one's family, one's friends, one's country – invites, incites mobilisation, that is concrete action to realise this vision. This is why I stated that without dreams, there can be no mobilisation, and – as I explained before – without mobilisation, there can be no transformation.

I would only add one additional element to everything that I have just said. Because the sentence “without dreams, there can be no mobilisation, and without mobilisation, there can be no transformation” makes it seem that the process is linear, when it's in fact circular. That is, it is equally true that without transformation, there can be no dreams, and without dreams, there can be no mobilisation, and without mobilisation, there can be no transformation, and so on. I am aware that this may sound complicated or confusing, but what I mean is that for a dream to be a dream, it must be transformative. Precisely because reform is only a cosmetic alteration of reality, reform is satisfied with the present, with *today*, which it only wants to build upon, change a little bit, adapt a little bit. Transformation is dissatisfied with the present, with today, and is preoccupied with the future, with *tomorrow*, to which it wants to give birth *yesterday*. No one goes to bed dreaming about balancing government budgets – they may believe it necessary, they may want it to happen, but it is not what they dream about in the intimacy of their own home. Reform is incapable of building dreams, only transformation can.

Interviewer: **These are powerful ideas. I would now want to go back and refer to the contrast you systematically make between charity and solidarity. Could you elaborate on that, and if it is in any way related to what we have been discussing?**

**Secretary-General:** Well, as I have repeatedly said in the past, solidarity is horizontal, practiced amongst equals, whilst charity is vertical, practiced by the powerful towards the powerless. In addition to that, charity entails several other problems. The first is that, by its verticality, it is almost dehumanising, or at the very least discomfoting, for the person who is obliged to receive it – good intentions notwithstanding. Because no one should, no one wants to depend on the compassion, on the generous sentiments of others. Secondly, charity is an anaesthetic to alleviate an evil only temporarily. The solution of charity to the problem of poverty is: “I shall ensure that the poor do not starve” – nothing else, nothing more. Not that they *live*, not that they can be *emancipated*, not to contribute to an environment where they have opportunities to make a living. No, charity’s solution to the problem of poverty is not to ensure that the poor can *live*, only that they can *survive*. Solidarity, on the other hand, whilst still addressing the immediate needs of the poor, inscribes its present actions within a longer-term purpose which is to, at the very least, *eliminate* poverty, if not to build shared prosperity. Hence, when I say that solidarity, as the alternative to charity, is horizontal, between equals, it means that one is ready to sacrifice part of one’s own comfort for others. Because your well-being is mine too. Because we are a society, a community, a collective. Charity is giving the leftovers; solidarity is sharing the meal. Charity is about *you*, the one who needs, and *I*, the one who gives; solidarity is about *us*, the community whose members mutually support each other. Charity is generosity; solidarity is justice.

Interviewer: **And, in light of our conversation, I take it that solidarity is fundamentally linked to regional integration.**

**Secretary-General:** It is, but solidarity is, in fact, linked to everything that we do. There is no part of what we want to do at the OSC that is not *imbued* with solidarity. Because solidarity is not about doing you a *favour*. Public policy for the reduction and elimination of poverty is not about doing you a favour. In helping you, it is the entire society that is helped. Because, in the end, we are all going to live better because you, too, live better.

This leads me, indirectly, to the essential conversation of the individual versus the collective, which is very present in the Universal Declaration of Balanced and Inclusive Education. The Declaration repeatedly refers to the collective, but so does it refer to the individual – it does not have a Manichean position. Yesterday, we knew societies where the collective was sovereign, but so sovereign that the individual was suffocated. Today, with exceptions that prove the rule, we are individualistic societies where the individual is sovereign, but so sovereign that the collective is diluted. Today, what we aim to do from the South, with a third way of development, is to precisely articulate a synergy between individual and collective sovereignties. We do not want the collective that suffocates the individual, nor the individual that dilutes the collective – today, we want the collective that is composed of individuals. The Declaration says, at one point, that the individual has the right to exist and to *belong*, but also the right to *be* and to *differ*. To exist and to belong, and to be and to differ. That is the kind of society to which I aspire. At different times, in different ways, the individual must sacrifice for the collective and the collective must sacrifice for the individual. These are some of the general principles through which I see the world – they are as applicable to the family unit and to a country, as they are to regional integration, to the South, and to Humanity.



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