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The G20 Summit – or the T20?

90% of global GDP will be represented at the G20 table in London on 2nd April. All that will be missing is 90% of the world's countries.

The simple fact of globalisation dictates that all countries, the world over, have been affected by a tsunami of crises – of finance and food, of energy and the environment. Equally, all have an interest in what goes into the G20 meeting, and what comes out of it.

Providing the foundations for new prosperity is a task which demands a global response that is comprehensive, inclusive and sustained. It is our hope that the G20 addresses the challenges of more than its own 'magic circle'. The jury is out: the G20 Finance Ministers' preparatory meeting in Horsham a fortnight ago was ambiguous on the level of ambition, unity of larger purpose, and openness to the concerns of the wider international community.

G20 leaders in London can take to heart two related considerations in advance of their meeting.

First, the message of the 'G172' that is not invited to the London table, is that every country in the world needs a stable and vibrant global economy. The impacts of the global slowdown are being felt most strongly, and will be felt for the longest time, in the developing world. In many of these countries, economic stability is a matter of life and death.

The G20 has the leadership and levers to deliver – and to look out for the whole world. It can deliver the policy coordination that can halt the economic slide. That, in turn, can reverse the dramatic decline in investment, capital and remittance flows to the developing world. The G20 could usefully examine why developed countries are receiving support for their banks and car industries, while developing countries receive nothing in their rescue packages.

Meantime, the G20 can also bridge the gap by continuing to assist with developing countries' most immediate needs, and by continuing to support the greatest of all global commitments, the one made in 2000 to meet the UN's eight Millennium Development Goals.

Global trade levels are contracting at rates not seen for two generations. The G20 must finally find a way ahead to advance free and fair trade, as the assured means of restoring global prosperity. Many of those excluded from the Summit are the most dependent on trade, and it is they who will be the victims of an incipient and alarming trend towards a protectionism which –

since the G20 met in Washington last November – has seen 17 of its members introduce measures to keep out foreign trade. If the G20 is to match its rhetoric, its actions should give greater reason for optimism. The pledge made to deliver the Doha Round by the end of 2008 evaporated.

Second, for the ‘G172’, every country has an equal interest in effective international financial institutions as the engines of global cooperation. The World Bank and the IMF of today were built to serve another age, by another – much smaller, much less representative – ‘international community’.

They need to be re-equipped, far beyond mere tinkering, for the purposes of the 21st Century. They need to be re-formed, on the basis of principles shared and enacted by all. The aim must be to create new institutions characterised by legitimacy, equal voice and fair representation, flexibility, transparency, accountability and effectiveness. As a first step to inclusiveness, the G20 should commit to hearing, discussing and addressing the views and aspirations of non-members, even if those others can’t be present at its own table.

As the international community looks back with recrimination and sideways for solutions, it must still look forward. The financial crisis has prompted a new interest in and commitment to the need for truly collective global engagement.

The lesson of 2009 must be the need for a renewed global resolve to meet these challenges in a way that benefits all. Our current reality is partial globalisation; our shared goal is inclusive globalism. A new multilateralism is an imperative, not an option.

The G20 can be the T20 – the Trustees of the whole world’s interests.

(681 words)

ENDS

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The Commonwealth of some 1.9 billion people numbers 53 countries (5 in the G20, 48 outside), while La Francophonie of some 870 million people numbers 56 states and 12 observers (2 in the G20, 66 outside). 10 countries are members of both organisations: Cameroon, Canada, Cyprus, Dominica, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, St Lucia, Seychelles, Vanuatu.