THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF SID AND THE
CHALLENGES FACING SID CHAPTERS-

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Managing Director of SID, Dr Stefano Prato,
Members of the SID Governing Council and the Executive Committee,
SID Chapter Leaders,
Invited Guests,

Dear Friends.

First of all, I wish to extend our profound gratitude to Norbert Noisser and the SID Frankfurt Chapter for hosting the SID Chapter Leaders’ meeting here in Frankfurt, and, secondly, for organising this afternoon’s event. It takes serious commitment to undertake these tasks even for a German institution! Thank you so much Norbert. On my part, I am always extremely nostalgic about being in Germany, the land of my maternal grandfather. But don’t worry I am not about to seek naturalisation!

Thank you all for finding time to attend this public event. I want to use this time to share with you my personal perspectives about the Society for International Development and particularly within the context of its historical evolution and of the changing global dynamics. I believe that these contexts have important implications and bearing both on our international organisation and on our Chapters in their varying national dimensions. I also hope that these contexts may help us to reflect on how best to re-examine, re-shape, re-tool and refine the relevancy, efficacy and effectiveness of our global society.

The Society for International Development was born at the dawn of Africa’s decolonisation; a period when Ghana, in Africa, was attaining political independence and several other countries in Africa and South East Asia were slowly moving into independent statehood. India had already gained independence ten years earlier and its influence on the world stage was
encapsulated in and inspired by Pandit Nehru’s speech about ‘tryst with destiny’.

In that August 1947 Speech to India’s Constituent Assembly, Nehru said, amongst other things, ‘Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this one world that can no longer be split into isolated fragments’. How true to-date!

Development professionals based in Washington DC and particularly those working for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were inspired by leaders like Nehru. They became closely engaged by the realities of a fast unfolding but challenging new political and economic order unleashed by emerging newly independent states.

Serious questions were abound at the time about the new role of global institutions: how they could respond to the evident challenges of underdevelopment and of the new expectations which political independence had ushered; expectations about the potential for an economic great leap forward and for a new democratic dispensation driven by self-governance.

There was a sense among those engaged in the field of international development that it was important to contribute to the creation of enabling environments and conditions that nurture, fertilise and support healthy dialogue particularly on how best new forms of international co-operation could be organised and marshalled to support and enhance the building of social justice and sustainable democratic institutions in newly independent states. Equally, there was tentative belief that such environments and conditions could not be effectively achieved through state actors alone.

The idea that democratic institutions comprise both state and non-state actors and that for newly independent states such idea had to be more imperative if sustainable democratic values were to be attained, became the main springboard for the establishment of the Society for International Development in Washington DC in 1957.

Friends,

SID was thus established to become a leading non-governmental, non-partisan, world-wide forum for human-centred development for individuals engaged and interested in international political, social and economic issues. SID was viewed as a possible, to use Paul Ekins’ phrase, ‘institution of interdependence between North and South’.
Looking back to the founding ethos of SID and what has come to be the main defining feature of SID Chapters around the world, I am tempted to postulate that the idea of ‘global citizenship’ outside the nation-state and international organisational constitutional frameworks (such as the United Nations and the European Commission, as examples), was probably born in, from and through SID particularly in so far as civil society role is concerned.

For what, after all, is global citizenship when you flesh it to its bones? In the book, ‘The Condition of Citizenship’, Princeton University Emeritus Professor Richard Falk in his article entitled ‘The Making of Global Citizenship’ points out that in global citizenship there is ‘rudimentary institutional construction of arenas and allegiance—what many persons are really identifying with—are no longer bounded by or centred upon the formal relationship that an individual has to his her own territorial society as embodied in the form of a state. Traditional citizenship is being challenged and remoulded by the important activism associated with this trans-national political and social evolution.’

This is not to say that global citizenship that is fostered through an organisation like SID necessarily infers the uprooting of its members from thinking national and from addressing issues from national perspectives. On the contrary, I think the internationalist character of SID contributes in special ways to interactions and dialogues that benefit from a ‘trans-national’ perspective. It thereby stimulates valuable shared insights and experiences.

In this context, and over time, SID has come to embrace a broader set of global issues such as international governance, human and people’s rights, equity and inequality, women in development and environmental concerns. Indeed, new issues of inquiry, debate and of heightened concern continue to unfold as the world faces and confronts emerging and intensifying challenges.

These challenges include: terrorism, identities (ethnic and religious); nationalisms that foster societal instability and even fragmentation; intolerance and violence. Two years ago, Pope Francis celebrated Mass at Lampedusa in Italy with residents and poor immigrants. Visibly touched, the Holy Father lamented:

‘The culture of well-being that makes us think of ourselves, that makes us insensitive to the cries of others, that makes us live in soap bubbles that are beautiful but are nothing, are illusions of the transient, that brings indifference to others; that brings even the globalisation of indifference’.
The Holy Father’s reaction to the current migrant crisis in Europe is yet another reinforcement to his earlier concerns about hostility and gross indifference to vulnerable human beings. Addressing the US Congress two weeks ago he could only urge: "Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion, with which we want to be treated.”

**Friends,**

My point is this: it would be difficult for us to have a better understanding of the role and place of SID and of its Chapters around the world, 58 years after its establishment, if we fail or avoid to grasp SID’s historical context, evolution and of present positioning.

For whilst SID is governed by a global constitutional framework and ethos, it has also evolved, and importantly so, within national contexts, always re-defining its roles in fit with local circumstances and realities whilst continually informed and guided by an overarching objective of how best to make international co-operation a standard bearer in the global fight against poverty, the promotion of peace, harmony, ecological sustainability and the building of a better and more humane world. These core s probably best define the areas of convergence of SID as an international society.

At this stage, it is important that we remind ourselves of what we are; of the key characteristics that embody SID and its Chapters. Speaking at the 20th SID World Conference held in Amsterdam in May, 1991, Maurice Williams, then President of SID, defined four such characteristics:

First, it is an open, individual and institutional membership society. It is non-partisan and thus allows all ideas to contend. Unlike many international organisations, SID debates issues on their merits rather than ‘static debates’.

Second, it is a global institution in its membership, outlook, programmes and publications.

Third, it is committed to a strong base through country chapters, sometimes with regional focal points. Metropolitan chapters have also emerged over the years. Chapters are autonomous in operations and programming.

Fourth, it is characterised by its democratic, pluralistic and participatory nature. Thus the Governing Council is directly elected by the broad membership and there is respect for gender and age balance.

I may add a fifth characteristic. The underlying strength of SID is the manner in which Chapter leaders and members, in many parts of the world, volunteer their
time and even resources in organising meetings, writing papers and networking. Such commitment is a rare attribute in many non-governmental organisations.

Friends,

Yet, experience has also shown that whilst such dedication often exists it invariably gets undermined by economic realities. Indeed, in some countries, chapters have, in consequence, lost their zeal and effectiveness. Japan Society for International Development decided to secede! Some Chapters have eclipsed altogether! The Kenya and Australian Chapters died a long time back for different reasons. Let me quickly point out though that some of the SID Chapters, Kenya as an example, died because it increasingly became a source of private political and economic self-aggrandisement and, thereby, hollowing out its relationship with social capital and the meaning underlying the Society’s core values. Such leadership is best dispensed with.

The Tanzania Chapter, thank goodness, is now being resuscitated and its Secretary General, June Warioba who is here, may offer insights on what happened and what needs to happen in Tanzania.

One can be nostalgic about SID’s past and deservedly so. In the 1990s SID’s active membership was over ten thousand in 135 countries. I recall that even the Tanzania Chapter had about 270 active members in 2002. Today, SID membership globally is sadly a shade of what it used be.

But then in the 1990s, SID International had major donors and supporters that included: the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Italy and Sweden, the Government of Japan, the Inter-American Development Bank, CIDA (Canada), DANIDA, NORAD, the Netherlands Ministry of Development Co-operation, UNICEF, UNFPA etc.

Such support was well reflected in the international status and prominence of SID members some of whom sat on SID’s Governing Council for a number of years. Unfortunately, such support has collapsed to a large extent and the individuals who significantly contributed to SID’s institutional support have either passed on or have retired.

Friends,

I believe that the low state of membership and of the challenges that engulf it is an important subject which we must seriously discuss and share views on. We need to interrogate why SID finds itself in this condition. Has SID lost the calling power it used to have internationally? Has SID’s relevance in a changed world been diminished? Could it also be that the premises of international co-
operation upon which SID was viewed to be an important civil society player have changed? In sum, we need to determine what is it that has fundamentally changed in the world’s social, political and economic systems and in relationships such as to diminish SID’s founding role and ethos?

With respect to how SID Chapters are organised, I am of the view, that given varying country contexts, there should be no rigid uniformity of their structures and roles except in their relationships with the SID International which is the umbilical cord that joins the world-wide membership. It is through such connection that all Chapters find a democratic institutional basis for electing the SID Governing Council and its Executive Committee. It is a link that also enables them to enjoy a number of common services ranging from the quarterly Development Journal, the Website Forum and attending the World Congresses.

However, you will observe that the strength of the international umbilical cord has weakened in recent years in the light of the changing status in international co-operation adversely affecting traditional donor support to SID International. As a result, in order to survive and continue to play a purposeful role SID International has had to redefine itself and re-configure its institutional role. The SID Managing Director, Stefano Prato, will share with us some of the ‘re-engineering gymnastics’ and how he sees the emerging institutional relationships between SID International and SID Chapters.

Be that as it may, if you examine the Chapter models as represented by the Washington DC Chapter, the Netherlands Chapter, the Frankfurt Chapter or the Tanzania Chapter, as examples, you would discern contrasting models in terms of leadership structure, membership, funding and roles. You could probably then question whether, with such varying Chapter models and roles, SID has not lost its core founding principles and ethos?

In other words, we should interrogate, to what extent SID chapters are organised to pursue SID’s founding goals and whether SID should indeed revisit such goals, redefine and re-shape them to reflect new realities of memberships and of specific issues of local concern and attention in a new world? Earlier, I made reference to SID’s area of ‘convergence’ in terms of ideas and perspectives as a global society. Does such convergence make sense?

Are we satisfied that in recent years SID International Secretariat, for whatever reasons, which we need to interrogate, has increasingly become ambivalent about membership engagement? Where lies the fault or shortcoming? Is it with the Secretariat or with the Chapters? Would the SID membership, for example, be satisfied with a transactional relationship where members abdicate all or
significant responsibility to a deemed able Secretariat? And, in the context of any such ambivalence, how would SID International proceed to propel the international society-wide ‘convergence’ in ideas to the extent of giving such ‘convergence’ real meaning and impetus?

Friends,

What we must consider is whether in the light of changing circumstances, the organisational form, practices, policies and operating systems of SID International are adequate to fulfil SID’s global mission. Our type of organisation faces challenges around clarity of core purposes and how best to reach out and communicate what it espouses and stands for. It is a challenge which Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA, the UK Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, a Society established to enrich society through ideas and action, reflected upon in his speech delivered in London in October, 2010 and encapsulated in the phrase ‘the shifting balance of the inherent organisational dilemmas facing third sector organisations’.

Taylor aptly posited that ‘it is all too easy for head office to see the need for change, decide to act on it and only then share the exciting news with activists and members. Unsurprisingly, this can lead those lay activists to suspect that change is driven not by the best interests of the organisation but by the desire of those at the top to take control or prove they are worth their generous salaries.’

Of course there is no way in which we could today speak of generous salaries to our SID Managing Director and his senior colleagues. Indeed, we owe some of our senior staff hefty back payments. However, what is important to consider in Taylor’s remark is the logic of the perception he presents.

But then how does the broad SID membership contextualise these dimensions in the light of the drift towards a form of governance pursued by the SID Secretariat that is based on a business model and in which the authority of decision making is slowly but surely becoming corporatized? Could SID be slowly losing its basic membership model as a society?

In turn, could such drift be considered harmful in the light of changing circumstances where new organisational forms and practices are considered inevitable to fulfil the society’s mission? Or could the drift be viewed as being merely transient in the face of difficult financial conditions? Or, indeed, could we admit that the drift is a necessary one in the face of objective realities that face most membership organisations around the world today?
Friends,

When we think about SID membership in the context of contrasting national environments where SID operates, the lead-on question is: what are the important drivers for SID’s active membership? How can Chapters network in a manner where they are able to share ideas and activities that foster membership interest? Could it be possible, for example, that through elaborate and well-structured twinning of rich and poor Chapters solutions may be found for re-inventing and renewing the viability and sustainability of some of our Chapters in the developing world? How would the rich Chapters respond and what form of assistance could be structured and for how long?

We have also seen that some thematic issues covered in our Development Journal often help to galvanise chapter activism through dialogues. But much still depends on local issues that are of a burning nature as well as on leadership of the Chapters.

Let me offer some examples. As Tanzania made a political and economic paradigm shift in the 1990s, by embracing a market economy, away from a socialist one and a democratic multi-party system away from a single political party regime, SID Tanzania Chapter was able to attract several people into its membership by hosting several workshops and conferences focused on the transformations taking place.

With the support of Friedrich-Naumann Stiftung of Germany, the Tanzania SID Chapter alone and sometimes joining hands with other non-governmental institutions like the Association of Tanzania Employers, was able to organise conferences on timely issues such as: ‘One World or Several: Policy options for the 1990s with Relevance to Tanzania’, ‘Liberal Principles for Tanzania’, ‘A Case for a Proportional Electoral Representation System for Tanzania’ and ‘The Legal Challenges facing the Marketisation of the Tanzania Economy’. These were burning issues of the time and they attracted a cross section of people in Tanzania-academics, students, private and public sector executives and diplomats. SID membership soared as a result.

In fact, it is as a result of SID Tanzania Chapter being seen by SID International to be a highly vibrant Chapter that its application to host the SID World Conference in Tanzania in July 2002 was readily accepted. The point being made here is that the health of SID Chapters crucially hinges on their activism and the relevance of issues they foster in the national space.

On the question of leadership, the Tanzania experience shows that whenever there is a person with means and is committed to SID’s goals, the Chapter
thrives. What this has meant is that few people present themselves to assume leadership. And those who have been ready to sacrifice time and resources have largely been of the older generation.

The reality is that Chapters cannot thrive by depending on individual membership fees alone. Programming activities, meetings, workshops and dialogue sessions demand time and financial resources. When these are scanty, Chapters inevitably atrophy. I thus hope that at the meeting of Chapter leaders tomorrow we will be able to share experiences and models that assure Chapter viability, vibrancy and sustainability.

Many SID Chapters operate on the basis of voluntary contributions of members and thus face organisational incapacity. Much as volunteering is an honourable responsibility its sustainability can be onerous. Where its involvement is extensive, time consuming and there is no compensation of whatever kind, voluntary work faces the risk of fatigue. Time is an expensive commodity. Thus volunteer work needs long-term commitment.

It is important to underscore though that whilst some of our Chapters are debilitated by lack or adequate financial resources to play the important roles that are represented by SID’s objectives, as an international society, SID would be sacrificing a great deal of the ‘just causes’ that lie at the heart of its ethos notwithstanding the reality that its relevance, priorities and thrust may manifest itself differently at different national levels.

Friends,

SID’s unifying mission and driving spirit must continue to inform the need and justification for its continuing existence. In this vein, the quest for social justice and for development as freedom around the world should surely not attract ideological fault lines. For whilst the extreme economic ideologies of the left and the right re-emerge from time to time as in the recent British Labour Party leadership election, I believe that they merely provide a framework for intellectual discourse, ferment and for broadly rethinking the premises of development in a brave new world.

SID must continue to occupy that space where it catalyses different perspectives about development in its broad manifestations and helps to conscientise citizens, global, regional and local, about the importance of self-governance and the determination of the premises of human-centred development in environments of peace, harmony and sustainability of global commons.

A more humane world will be realised when citizens at national levels as well as ‘global citizens’ become more engaged in resourceful ways and build
capacities to make wise choices about their future well-being. SID has an important role to play in promoting ideas that enhance the social capital of citizens and on how the whole process of citizen agency can best be realised.

SID remains an important embodiment of what ‘global citizenship’ is all about. It must continue to play a global citizenship role, thinking globally, acting locally but also globally. To realise such end goal SID must ask itself the hard questions about its mission and about how best it can recreate and revitalise its democratic culture as a membership organisation.

Friends,

As we meet here, the United Nations General Assembly Summit has officially launched the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which lapsed last week. The new SDGs are 12 illustrative goals under the title of ‘A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.’ SID hails this development in international co-operation. However, it will remain seized of the challenges of implementation both at the levels of marshalling support resources at the global level, a constant refrain from past history, and at the national levels in developing economies where stronger and consistent public policy commitment will be necessary to undertake structural reforms that drive effective social, economic and political transformation. SID will continue policy dialogues around these challenges.

Friends,

Allow me to conclude by saying that next year in August SID plans to hold its World Conference in Tanzania. Your Governing Council and the Executive Committee believe that Tanzania qualifies from a number of indices to host the World Conference. Tomorrow, we shall have the opportunity to distil some of the burning global issues which may form the thematic agenda of the Conference. Amongst them would certainly be the state of our Society and how Chapters can reclaim their central role in its affairs, vision and direction.

God Bless you all and I THANK YOU.