

« AUSTRALIA'S EDGE IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD »

ADDRESS BY SAMUEL PISAR

UPON BEING AWARDED A DOCTORATE OF LAW (HONORIS CAUSA)

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

WILSON HALL

AUGUST 27, 2008

CHANCELLOR

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ZELMAN COWEN AND LADY COWEN

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

GRADUANTS

IF THERE WAS EVER A INDIVIDUAL LESS LIKELY TO RECEIVE ANY ACADEMIC DEGREE, LET ALONE AN HONORARY DOCTORATE FROM THIS ILLUSTRIOUS UNIVERSITY, IT WAS I, WHEN I LANDED ON YOUR BLESSED SHORES AS A 17-YEAR OLD WRECK, RETRIEVED FROM THE DANTESQUE INFERNOS OF EUROPE. NEED I SAY, CHANCELLOR, WITH HOW MUCH HUMILITY, PRIDE AND JOY I ACCEPT THIS HIGH DISTINCTION.

MY TORTUOUS PEREGRINATIONS MADE ME A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, BUT EVERY TIME I RETURN TO MELBOURNE IT FEELS LIKE A HOMECOMING, AND NEVER MORE THAN TODAY. ON BEHALF OF JUDITH PISAR AND MYSELF, I THANK YOU, SIR, AS WELL AS GOVERNOR AND MRS. DE KRETZER AND DEAN JAMES HATHAWAY, FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY WELCOME, HOSPITALITY AND ATTENTIONS YOU HAVE SHOWERED UPON US.

LAST YEAR, WHEN I HAD THE HONOR OF DELIVERING THE DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS LECTURE ON THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAW SCHOOL, MY THEME, « THE STATE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, » WAS ROOTED IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, ECONOMICS AND CONSTITUTIONAL LAW. ON THIS OCCASION, MY SUBJECT IS MORE PERSONAL : THE TALE OF HOW THIS COUNTRY REDEEMED ME – PHYSICALLY, MORALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY -- FROM THE LOWEST DEPTHS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE, AND PROPELLED ME TO A FEW OF ITS SUMMITS, FROM WHICH I TRY TO SCAN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE.

DEAR GRADUANTS, MY TALE IS MORE ABOUT THIS LAND, THIS CITY, THIS UNIVERSITY, THAN ABOUT MYSELF. AS YOU EMBARK ON YOUR

PROFESSIONAL CAREERS, YOU MAY FIND IN IT SOME RELEVANCE TO YOUR OWN LIVES AND ASPIRATIONS IN OUR NEWLY DESTABILIZED AND INFLAMED WORLD – A WORLD THAT MUST NEVER AGAIN BECOME LIKE THE ONE INTO WHICH I WAS BORN.

IN 1945, FOLLOWING MY LONG STINT AT AUSCHWITZ AND OTHER DEATH CAMPS, AND MY MIRACULOUS LIBERATION BY THE U.S. ARMY, A FRENCH AUNT FOUND ME IN THE RUINS OF GERMANY AND BROUGHT ME TO PARIS. AFTER SIZING UP MY DISASTROUS CONDITION SHE PROMPTLY SHIPPED ME OFF AS FAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE FROM THE FRATRICIDAL EUROPEAN CONTINENT THAT HAUNTED MY MEMORY, TO HER TWO BROTHERS IN MELBOURNE -- ONE A BUSINESSMAN AND THE OTHER AN INTERNATIONAL CHESS CHAMPION.

SINCE I HAD LOST SIX YEARS OF SCHOOLING, MY INDEFATIGABLE UNCLES RUSHED ME TO THE GEORGE TAYLOR INSTITUTION FOR PROBLEMATIC STUDENTS TO DETERMINE IF I COULD BE SALVAGED. SOON I FOUND MYSELF IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER « NON-HOPERS » : ONE SUFFERED FROM A COMPULSION TO RUN AROUND A RACING OVAL – HE WAS THE LEGENDARY JOHN LANDY. ANOTHER BESTRODE THE TENNIS COURTS OF THE WORLD -- NEIL FRAZER. A THIRD GLIDED LIKE A FISH IN OLYMPIC SWIMMING POOLS – ALF FOSTER. A FOURTH WAS OBSESSED BY A MANIA FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE -- MARR GROUNDS. LATER, OTHER FUTURE STARS OF THAT ILK, MALE AND FEMALE, APPEARED IN MY ORBIT, FROM ROBIN SHARWOOD AND JOHN BUTTON, TO FAYE ROSEFIELD AND FENELLA McGUIRE.

WHILE MY PROBLEMS WERE MORE SEVERE THAN THEIRS, I BONDED WITH THEM AND THRIVED IN THEIR MIDST, ENDLESSLY IMPRESSED BY THEIR ETHICS, THEIR WARMTH, THEIR FRIENDLY AUSTRALIAN WAYS, SO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE I HAD KNOWN IN MY PREVIOUS INCARNATION.

THE FIRST CHALLENGES I FACED WAS TO RECOVER FROM TUBERCULOSIS, MASTER THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND WIN ADMISSION TO THIS UNIVERSITY. AS I PURSUED THESE SEEMINGLY UNREACHABLE GOALS, MY BATTERED MIND BECAME A SPONGE, MY THIRST TO LEARN, INSATIABLE. I UNDERSTOOD THAT I HAD TO RECONSTRUCT MYSELF FROM THE BOTTOM UP, AND PUMP THE ADRENALINE AGAIN, AS I HAD IN THE PAST, WHEN MY VERY LIFE DEPENDED ON IT.

INITIALLY, I WANTED TO STUDY SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS. BUT I WAS AFRAID THAT THE VIOLENCE I HAD EXPERIENCED IN BODY AND SOUL WOULD NOT ALLOW ME TO WITHDRAW INTO AN ACADEMIC IVORY TOWER. I CHOSE LAW BECAUSE I HAD WITNESSED UNTOLD HUMAN BESTIALITY AND MAYHEM, TOO MANY MASS EXECUTIONS, WITHOUT TRIALS, WITHOUT JURIES, WITHOUT APPEALS, WITHOUT MERCY. AND THEN, IN SUNNY, DEMOCRATIC AUSTRALIA, I FOUND MYSELF READING INCREDIBLE PRESS REPORTS ABOUT HOW PUBLIC COURTS AND VENERATED JUDGES WERE SPENDING ENDLESS TIME, EFFORT AND RESOURCES TO DECIDE IF EVEN ONE SINGLE ACCUSED WAS GUILTY OR INNOCENT. MY GOD, I FIGURED, THIS

UNHEARD OF RESPECT FOR LIFE, FREEDOM AND JUSTICE IS SURELY THE BEDROCK OF VALUES THAT MUST GOVERN ALL HUMAN SOCIETIES.

MY INSIGHTS WERE STILL NAIVE, MY IDEAS CONFUSED, MY AMBITIONS LIMITED. HOW COULD I, AT THAT POINT, IMAGINE THAT I WAS DESTINED TO BECOME AUSTRALIA'S CHOSEN INTERN AT THE UNITED NATIONS, THE COMMON LAW JURIST OF UNESCO, A PRACTITIONER ACTIVE AT AMERICAN, BRITISH AND FRENCH BARS, AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS LISTED IN YOUR EXCESSIVELY GENEROUS CITATION, CHANCELLOR. BUT MY EARLY IMMERSION IN ENGLISH HISTORY AND CULTURE, THEN IN THE RICH CURRICULUM OF YOUR LAW SCHOOL, WAS ENOUGH TO STIR UP WITHIN ME POTENT FEELINGS AND CONVICTIONS FOR LIFE.

I WAS IN MY SECOND YEAR WHEN ZELMAN COWEN, BACK FROM THE INEBRIATING HEIGHTS OF OXFORD, ENTERED MY UNIVERSE -- A TOWERING FIGURE WHOSE BRILLIANCE AND CHARISMA DYNAMIZED THE ENTIRE STUDENT BODY, EXPANDED OUR IMAGINATIONS, BROADENED OUR HORIZONS AND SHOWED US, BY HIS PEDAGOGY AND EXAMPLE, THAT NOTHING WAS IMPOSSIBLE AND THAT EVERYTHING WAS ATTAINABLE. FROM THE MOMENT HE BECAME DEAN OF THE LAW SCHOOL, THROUGH THE TIME HE REIGNED AS GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA, INDEED TO THIS DAY, HE HAS REMAINED MY MENTOR AND MY GUIDE. WITHOUT HIM THE MIRACLE OF MY REDEMPTION THAT PLAYED ITSELF OUT IN THIS COMMUNITY, AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT FOLLOWED, WOULD HAVE NEVER HAPPENED.

IN 1953, JUST BEFORE MY GRADUATION, SIR ZELMAN WAS APPOINTED VISITING PROFESSOR AT HARVARD. I STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE I FOUND THE AUDACITY TO ASK HIM IF THERE MIGHT NOT BE A WAY FOR ME TO GO TO HARVARD AS WELL. TO MY ASTONISHMENT, HE NOT ONLY GOT ME ADMITTED BUT OBTAINED FOR ME A SCHOLARSHIP TO BOOT. WHY HE WENT TO SUCH LENGTHS ON MY BEHALF REMAINS A MYSTERY. GRANTED I WAS AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT, BUT I WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE. KNOWING SIR ZELMAN AS I DO, HE WILL PROBABLY NOT LIKE WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SAY, BUT I SUSPECT THAT THIS COMPASSIONATE GESTURE, WHICH LAUNCHED ME INTO THE STRATOSPHERE, WAS DRIVEN BY AN ATTEMPT TO UNDO, IF ONLY ON THE INFINITESIMAL SCALE OF MY HUMBLE PERSON, A FRAGMENT OF THE HUMAN CATASTROPHE THAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST. SUCH IS THE MEASURE OF THE GREAT MAN, AND HIS GREAT LADY, WHOM I AM HERE TO SALUTE.

SORRY ZELMAN. WHILE I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THE GOLDEN AUSTRALIAN RULE THAT IT IS INAPPROPRIATE TO SHOW EMOTION IN PUBLIC, I HAVE NOT TRAVELED HALF-WAY AROUND THE PLANET TO RESTRICT MYSELF, BEFORE THIS WONDERFUL NEW GENERATION OF AUSTRALIAN, MULTINATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL GRADUATES, TO THE CUSTOMARY BANALITIES.

I MUST CONFESS THAT MY LEAP FROM MELBOURNE TO HARVARD WAS NOT WITHOUT PROBLEMS. YOU FOOL » I EXCLAIMED TO MYSELF WHEN I ARRIVED IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, « NOW YOU HAVE REALLY GONE TOO FAR. HERE YOU ARE TOTALLY OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE. THE SMARTS THAT HAVE

CARRIED YOU THROUGH THE PITS OF HELL ARE OF NO USE IN PLACES WHERE COMBAT IS PEACEFUL AND NOBLE -- MIND AGAINST MIND, IDEA AGAINST IDEA, TALENT AGAINST TALENT .

MOSTLY, MY DISORIENTATION WAS DUE TO THE DISTANCE I HAD COVERED DURING MY SINGULAR ODYSSEY « OF BLOOD AND HOPE » ; NOT THE GEOGRAPHIC BUT THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISTANCE. AUSCHWITZ, MAJDANEK AND DACHAU WERE LIGHT YEARS AWAY FROM MELBOURNE, HARVARD AND THE SORBONNE. THE FORMER, THE UGLIEST SYMBOLS OF HUMAN EVIL AND MADNESS ; THE LATTER, THE FINEST EMBLEMS OF HUMAN ENLIGHTENMENT AND CULTURE. IT WAS AN ENORMOUS DISTANCE FOR ME TO CROSS, BUT MY ATHLETIC AUSTRALIAN FRIENDS HAD TAUGHT ME THAT THE MARATHON MUST BE RUN TO THE END.

THIS BRINGS ME TO THE CRESCENDO OF WHAT I HAVE TO SAY » : SINCE OUR GRADUATION CEREMONY COINCIDES WITH THE END OF THE BEIJING GAMES, AND THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT IS NOW MOVING TO LONDON, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU A METAPHOR I HAVE NURTURED DURING MY YEARS AS PERMANENT COUNSEL TO THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE, WHERE I PARTICIPATED IN THE ORGANIZATION OF SIX BREATHTAKING OLYMPIADS : MOSCOW 1980, LOS ANGELES 1984, SEOUL 1988, BARCELONA 1992, ATLANTA 1996, AND MOST OF ALL SYDNEY 2000, WHICH PRESIDENT JUAN ANTONIO SAMARANCH DESCRIBED AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY AS « THE BEST EVER. »

IN THE COURSE OF ALL THIS, I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE OF SPORTS HERALDS A NEW AND HOPEFULLY PEACEFUL ERA OF GLOBAL COMPETITION IN ALL FIELDS OF HUMAN ENDEAVOR . WATCHING THE SPLENDID YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN OF EVERY COLOR, RACE AND RELIGION CONCENTRATE BODY AND MIND, STRETCH MUSCLE, NERVE AND BREATH TO GAIN PRECIOUS INCHES, OUNCES AND SECONDS THAT SEPARATE VICTORY FROM DEFEAT, GIVES ONE A KEEN SENSE OF THE MOUNTING ECONOMIC AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL RIVALRIES THAT LIE AHEAD.

IN TODAY'S WIDE-OPEN WORLD MARKETS, OLYMPIADS OF ANOTHER TYPE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN. THE GAMES THEY CALL FOR ARE NOT REGIONAL SECOND DIVISION MATCHES AMONG GENTLEMEN AMATEURS. THEY ARE HARD-FOUGHT CONTESTS WITH NO HOLDS BARRED, WHERE THE BEST MUST MEASURE THEMSELVES WITH THE BEST AND WIN, OR FALL BY THE WAYSIDE.

RECORD AFTER WORLD RECORD IN EVERY SPHERE OF SCIENCE, INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE IS BOUND TO FALL AS CHAMPIONS SUBDUED CHAMPIONS AND THEN SURPASS THEMSELVES, BEFORE BEING SUBDUED IN TURN. REMEMBER THE WORDS OF MARIAN ANDERSON'S OLD AND CELEBRATED SONG : « THERE IS NO PLACE TO HIDE ON THIS EARTH ».

THE FANTASTIC OUTBURST OF ENERGY, INGENUITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE WE ARE CURRENTLY WITNESSING IN CERTAIN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES COMES FROM AN AWARENESS THAT LIFE IS A BITTER STRUGGLE FOR

SURVIVAL WHICH BEGINS AFRESH EVERY DAY. IT IS AN AWARENESS THAT HAS ACCOMPANIED ME THROUGHOUT MY OWN DUEL WITH FATE – A DUEL WHICH FORCED ME TO GALVANIZE TO THE UTMOST WHATEVER MODEST PHYSICAL AND MENTAL RESOURCES I POSSESSED.

THE FATE OF A PEOPLE CAN ALSO DEPEND ON ITS CAPACITY FOR ENDURANCE, ADAPTATION, INVENTION AND CREATION. IN THE LONG RUN, THE TRUE WEALTH OF NATIONS RESIDES MORE IN THE SCANDALOUSLY NEGLECTED GRAY MATTER OF THEIR MEN AND WOMEN, THAN IN THE FINITE MATERIAL RESOURCES BESTOWED UPON THEM BY NATURE. THESE HUMAN RESOURCES, STORED IN THE CRANIAL CAVITY OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL, ARE INEXHAUSTIBLE, LIKE THE RAYS OF THE SUN. THE POTENTIAL TO ENHANCE AND DYNAMIZE THEM IS NOW INCREASINGLY WITHIN REACH OF ALL SOCIETIES.

WE OF THE WEST ARE NO LONGER THE SAHIBS, THE MASTERS OF THE WORLD. OTHER PEOPLES, WHOM WE HAVE OFTEN UNDERESTIMATED, ARE ALSO SEEKING THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE SUN. WE MUST TAKE GREAT CARE NOT TO BECOME THE UNDERDEVELOPED OF THE FUTURE.

TO COPE IN THE INCREASINGLY EXACTING ARENAS OF MOUNTING ECONOMIC COMPETITION, EVERY COUNTRY, EVERY UNIVERSITY, EVERY ENTERPRISE MUST HENCEFORTH GET READY TO PLAY ON CENTER COURT, SPRINT ON THE FASTEST TRACK, TAME THE STRONGEST WIND IN A PERMANENT QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MUST IMPLEMENT REVOLUTIONARY REFORMS AND ENGAGE ADEQUATE MEANS TO OFFER THEIR NEEDIEST AND MOST PROMISING STUDENTS, SCHOLARS AND RESEARCHERS THE BEST FACILITIES, THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES AND EQUIPMENT, SO THEY CAN DEVELOP THEIR CREATIVE TALENTS AND PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES TO A PEAK. FOR EVERY ONE OF THEM IS A POTENTIAL GOLD MEDALIST AND CONTRIBUTOR IN THE RACE FOR ECONOMIC PROGRESS.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT AUSTRALIA'S PROVEN CAPACITY TO TRAIN AND FIELD WORLD-CLASS CHARIOTS OF FIRE, GIVE IT A CONSIDERABLE EDGE IN THIS COMPETITIVE, EXISTENTIAL CONTEST.

FELLOW-GRADUANTS, I CONGRATULATE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU AT THIS MOMENT OF TRANSITION IN YOUR LIVES, AS YOU ENTER THE CHALLENGING AND EXCITING GLOBAL ARENA OF THE FUTURE. ENTER IT WITH CONFIDENCE, ENTHUSIASM, THINK GREAT THOUGHTS, CONCEIVE GREAT AMBITIONS AND PERFORM GREAT DEEDS.

GOOD LUCK!

