

Interview

How to Make Globalization Work

An Interview with The Honorable Tony Blair



The Hon. Tony Blair

EDITORS' NOTE Tony Blair is the Representative of the Quartet – U.S., Russia, E.U., and U.N. – to the Middle East, through which he is focused on working with the Palestinian Authority to prepare the institutions and groundwork for statehood, as part of the international community's effort to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace. The goal of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation is to promote respect and understanding between major religions and to make the case for religions as a force for good, demonstrated by organizing interfaith education and social action projects to overcome global poverty and conflict. Tony Blair's Africa Governance Initiative helps some of Africa's most engaging leaders deliver the change their people need to relieve poverty. The Tony Blair Sports Foundation aims to increase the number of volunteer coaches and officials so that more children and young people get the opportunity to play sport. Tony Blair's recent projects include launching a new governance project in Liberia, overseeing the progress being made on health care in Sierra Leone, and meeting partners in a pioneering interfaith project in Nigeria. He served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from May 1997 to June 2007. He was a Member of Parliament for Sedgefield from 1983 to 2007 and Leader of the Labour Party from 1994 to 2007, resigning from these positions in June 2007.

One of your key focuses is the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI). What role does AGI play, and how is the model working?

What unites all of the work I do is one very simple theme, which is, how to make globalization work. The world opening up is a good thing; it brings opportunity, but it also brings immense challenges, and globalization will only be accepted by people if it's seen as just and fair in opening opportunity to everyone, not simply to an elite few.

I try to do work that tackles what I think are the central obstacles to globalization being accepted as a positive opportunity. One of those is appalling poverty suffered by people, particularly in Africa.

The lesson I took out of my time in government, where my government trebled aid to Africa, is that aid is important, but it is insufficient on its own. The core challenge that Africa faces today is good governance. It is not just about the absence of corruption; it is about the presence of capacity, and effective governing.

So for the Africa Governance Initiative, which we started in Rwanda and Sierra Leone, and we're doing in Liberia now as well, is to hire a group of young people between 25 and 35 who have worked in the U.S. administration or the British government, or they might have worked for McKinsey or in a bank or a private sector consultancy, and they spend a year working as part of our team who work alongside the President of the country. I interact with the President politically, and the combination of the politics and the technical ability is designed to create the levers of capacity around the President, so when they're trying to do something, it actually happens.

In Sierra Leone, for example, we recently helped organize the largest private sector conference for one African country that has been organized in London. In another country, we might take a priority the President has, like getting power to the country, and work intensively on that alongside them. It's all about building capacity. It is operating in three countries at the moment, but we are also being asked to look at others.

In these areas, have you seen the kind of progress you had hoped for, and is the model making the impact you envisioned?

The model has exceeded our expectations. What happens with a lot of these countries,

particularly if they've been through very troubled times – as is the case with Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, with prolonged conflict – is their institutions of governing are wrecked. So some of them have fantastic natural resources, but they don't have anybody who can negotiate the proper terms of a contract to get those resources exploited properly. Sometimes there is no proper functioning private office around the President, so his schedule doesn't work and his time isn't used properly. Sometimes, they spend all their time negotiating with the donor community on a range of different projects instead of focusing on one or two key priorities and getting them done.

So our team is very much about not trying to tell those countries or their Presidents what to do, but in working with them to deliver their priority.

In your role as the Quartet Representative addressing an issue with a long history and many challenges, what progress has been made, and do you see true opportunity for change?

I believe that, unless we can find peace between Israelis and Palestinians, it's really hard to promote the change we need to see through the Middle East and beyond. So this is a major global issue, as well as primarily an issue for Israelis and Palestinians.

If we want to build peace, we have to build from the bottom up – Palestinian statehood – and not simply try to negotiate it from the top down. Israel will not feel safe with a Palestinian state unless that state is securely and properly governed. That means that you need the Palestinian capacity to be able to develop proper rule of law on the Palestinian side.

Likewise, the Palestinians will never make the compromise that is necessary to produce a two-state solution and to provide that security unless they have some stake in the future – unless their economy is developing, and what is happening on the ground is matching the expectations of the politics. I work alongside the Palestinian authority to try to promote economic developments and to promote capacity and the rule of law, supporting particularly the plans of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

My assessment is that on the West Bank we have actually made quite a lot of progress, but the situation in Gaza is still very difficult.

You are also very focused around



I have a Sports Foundation where I used to represent people up in the Northeast of England, and it's small, but it helps train the coaches and officials for grassroots sport. Sport is an important part, especially for deprived kids in difficult communities, of developing the necessary life skills to get themselves out of their difficulties.

You've addressed many issues both outside of

breaking the Climate Deadlock Initiative and have a partnership with The Climate Group. Can you give an overview of that partnership and how that has progressed?

During my time as Prime Minister, I could see that climate change and energy security is a real issue. But the question is, what is the right global deal, because unless you can get a deal with America and China both in it, it doesn't matter that you've got 180 countries agreeing to it – those are the two that count.

The Climate Group is a business NGO, because I don't believe this thing can be done unless it's done with the business community; if it's done to the business community, it's going to be a big problem. My program is to find a practical, sensible way to amalgamate the efforts that individual countries are making and to develop a framework that is radical but still realistic. In other words, it sets the world on a new low-carbon path, but does so in a practical and achievable way, and doesn't end up with a whole series of unrealistic demands being made that people are never going to meet. So that is the work we do on that.

In the creation of your faith and sports foundations, what specifically made you focus on those areas in terms of the impact you hoped to make?

The Faith Foundation is my major foundation, and that is to promote interfaith understanding and respect. This is all part of how we make globalization work, which effectively pushes people together through communication and mass migration. All of our societies in our major cities are a melting pot of different cultures, races, and faiths. In this new world of globalization, faith can play a positive or negative part. Faith can be a means of giving values and some sense of common progress, or it can alternatively be a means of identifying you against the other person and become a danger.

The purpose of the Faith Foundation is that through our schools program, people of different faiths across the world are using the Internet to connect; our action program brings people of different faiths together to tackle malaria and the millennium development goals; and our universities program, which is now in several different countries, promotes that greater religious and cultural understanding.

office as well as inside. From your experiences, how critical are public/private partnerships in solving many of these issues?

Absolutely. First, we haven't developed the global institutions yet to deal with these global problems; second, in the 21st century, we should realize the power of government but also the limits of government, and sometimes, civic society acting. Global nongovernmental organizations can play a significant and sometimes an even more significant role.

For example, what the Africa Governance Initiative does, by being a self-standing independent non-bureaucratic force for change, is better than a clunky government bureaucracy from an overseas aid department trying to do the same thing. So, today, civic society can play a far greater part.

Many suggest that because of the strain and the personal life challenges, the next generation is not excited about a role in government. Do you worry that we're not going to get the type of talent we need to serve?

There is a danger of that. I'm not in government anymore, but it is important that people respect their leaders. They may say they don't deserve respect, and sometimes that is true. But having sat in the hot seat on Downing Street and having taken decisions in government, I can tell you, it's a really difficult task. It's an immense privilege to do it, but it is important that we have a better understanding and relationship between politics and media today, because we do need to have a good gene talent pool coming forward for political service, and we also need far greater interaction between private and public sectors. The best politicians are those who would

have spent some time not doing politics, and we need to encourage that interaction.

Do you ever miss those days?

Occasionally, because you would not be human if you didn't, but on the whole, I did 10 years in government, and I find what I'm doing now immensely fulfilling. I recently came back from Sierra Leone and Liberia, and we just started in Liberia, but in Sierra Leone, we are making a definable difference, and that is an immensely exciting thing to see. So sometimes, out of office, with much greater focus on a smaller number of issues, it's possible to make an even bigger difference outside of office than inside of office, at least on those issues.

As someone who likes to get things done more immediately, many of the issues you're addressing have a long-term focus. Is it hard sometimes to be patient?

Yes, it is, but on the other hand, I came to this with my eyes open. I feel these issues are of such fundamental importance. My Faith Foundation is going on about 18 months and it has built up very strongly. I'm committed that even if it takes a long time to do, I've got the rest of my life to do it.

Those who look at the issues around globalization say it's hard to be optimistic. Are you optimistic, and do you feel that people should be more positive about the future and what is being done?

I am optimistic, and for one reason: one of the great elite myths in the West is that we think one way but the rest of the world thinks another way. In my new life, I've managed to travel extensively; I now do a lot in China and the Far East, as well as in the Middle East and in Africa, and people are the same the world over: they want good governance, they want the rule of law, and they want to get on by hard work and merit. And that is the thing that should give us some optimism. A country like Rwanda, where there was a genocide 15 years ago where one million people died, is today on its feet, being encouraged with investments, and growing 7 to 8 percent or more per year, and its people are beginning to notice the benefit. Change can come. ●



Tony Blair meets the staff at the Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, Rwanda's biodiesel research lab (top left); Tony Blair visits Runda Ilsonga school, Rwanda with Education Minister, Dr. Charles Murigande (above)