

## World Knowledge Forum 2012

### Global Agenda 2013

Thursday, October 11, 2012

Predictions for 2013 were bleak in the discussion on the final day of the 13<sup>th</sup> World Knowledge Forum in Seoul. Four panelists offered their agenda suggestions for 2013, but overall felt that the upcoming year will not see major changes in world conditions.

Speaking on the panel were Christopher Hill, Dean of the Josef Korbel School of International Relations at the University of Denver; Shen Ding Li, Dean of Fudan University's Institute for International Studies; Michael E. Brown, Dean of the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University; and Supachai Panitchpakdi, former Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand and two-term Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

"One of the goals of this conference is to come up with ideas to address problems and make the world a better place," Mr. Brown informed the audience. He outlined three sets of issues that he feels will come to the forefront in the upcoming year.

Mr. Brown first addressed "issues that are urgent and important and bound to be on the agenda, whether we like it or not." These issues include the crisis in the Eurozone, the nuclear threat from Iran, the unfolding situation in the Arab Spring, potentially-escalating island disputes in East Asia, and the looming transition period in Afghanistan.

Secretary-General Panitchpakdi agreed with the issues presented, particularly the problem of the Eurozone. He believes that the crisis will become much worse in 2013 because of the leadership vacuum. "For now, we just keep kicking the can down the road," he said, later predicting that 2013 will be the year that a decision is finally made.

Mr. Hill agreed with this assessment but placed greater emphasis on the problems facing the Middle East. "The main issue that the world will be very concerned about is the development of the Iranian nuclear program. It is unlikely to go away on its own," he said. Mr. Hill believes that a top priority in 2013 should be a new policy approach. Mr. Shen agreed, stating that he feels Chinese leaders are prepared to take a definitive stand against Iran's nuclear program.

The four men also acknowledged the tensions over islands in the Maritime. However, Mr. Shen believes that the Chinese government is showing "rising maturity," and that the rivalries, particularly between Japan and China, will be handled by new governments that are coming into power in 2013. "We are committed to using peaceful means to handle our dispute," he assured the audience.

Less clear was the issue of resolving conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan. "What we have, in effect, is a full-scale civil war in Syria," Mr. Hill noted. He feels that the U.S. administration is holding back from supplying weapons to Syrian allies for fear that weapons might eventually fall into the wrong hands. He also sees Afghanistan as a continuing threat as U. S. forces prepare to depart from the troubled region.

The second area that Mr. Brown drew attention to was the need for internal reform in several key countries. He listed the United States, China, India, Russia, and the European Union as nations that need to resolve their own issues before the world situation can improve. "Internal reform is not easy, and it's also not optional," he said.

A third issue was the challenge of international cooperation. In addition to the international conflicts that Mr. Brown felt were both urgent and unavoidable, all four panelists emphasized the importance of the relationship between the United States and China. Mr. Hill assured listeners, however, that the U.S.-China relationship is "too big to fail."

Mr. Shen felt that resolving even one of these international issues would benefit the world situation. "If we can solve all of them, 2013 is bound to be a secure year," he added. Mr. Brown seemed less certain that the issues would be

resolved this year; at the same time, he did not predict that the situation would worsen. "Hopefully things will just stay cool," he offered.