CONCEPT NOTE
The world in (dis)order: A dialogue towards shared narratives

The illusion is over. The triumphant moment should have arrived, as Fukuyama eulogised, the "end of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Instead, a rising, swelling, insistent tide of anger, anxiety, and discontent has quickly demolished this sense of euphoria. Many considered Fukuyama's dictum as false triumphalism; to others, sheer naivete.

The litany of disenchantment reverberates.

Leaders who were once the champions of open borders to allow the free exchange of goods, people, and ideas, want to erect walls instead. Numerous people across the globe respond with enthusiasm to leaders that would deliver them to the promised land of ethnic homogeneity. Once celebrated as the hallmark of civilised society, multi-ethnic pluralism has been overtaken by the prevalent and palpable fear of 'the other'. What went wrong with the multiculturalism idea? Most societies today are torn between those who embrace diversity and those who see it as a threat. How to reconcile them?

Mindless wars have created unprecedented humanitarian disasters, sapped human and material resources, and producing no winners, only victims. Societies torn apart by conflict and destroyed by war have spawned a whole generation of embittered youths who have lost everything, and therefore have nothing left to lose. The world today is teeming with people who are hateful towards countries that have either stood by, or perpetrated, their shattered futures.

The Rhodes Forum: What should we do? Over the past eighteen years, the Rhodes Forum has brought together numerous leaders, concerned individuals, and citizens from across the world to tackle pressing problems. This year, the Forum will raise the tough questions; promote creative disruption; and assemble a new narrative founded on values that continue to be cherished and shared among many. Different panels will examine the following questions: *How did we get here? What are the roots of this global discontent? What should we demolish and how do we (re)construct?* But most importantly, the Forum will strive to answer this question: W*hat can we offer that is new and liberating? How and where do we begin?*

The Forum is organised around three dimensions of critical global importance:

1. **Prosperity and economic progress.** As the possibility of a global recession looms, the rise of China and India become interesting cases to consider, especially because of their contrasts. Against the background of a spectacular record on poverty reduction for millions of Chinese citizens, does the Chinese approach have strong appeal for other struggling economies? Does the Indian model of economic development offer a similar pathway to social progress and development based on an open democracy? Can solutions be found to solve the problem of global inequality and to erase poverty once and for all?

2. **Global architecture and global (geo)politics.** Today, we are witnessing the progressive disintegration of international institutions and the rise of potential new ones that could change the architecture of international governance altogether. New forms of multilateralism are raising questions over the selection processes for 'global governors' and the representatives of these global institutions. New forms of diplomacy in the spheres of science and culture are changing the conventional practices of international relations. The Forum hopes to examine the new forms of global governance, the potential leaders of this new architecture, and the larger question of how to promote inter-civilisational dialogue.

3. **Digitalised lives and the return to civility.** Global public discourse today has steadily moved away from civilised interpersonal exchange into coarse, unrefined, and unrestrained language that violates universally-accepted norms. The internet has become a powerful tool in propagating this new form of public exchange. In an era of digitalisation, public policy has yet to address the use of global digital space to promote harmony, prosperity, and human happiness. Equally, public policy has to address the active regulation of this technology to prevent its negative usage, particularly by the manipulative forces of states and markets. The return to civility is an important condition for human civilisations to thrive and flourish in the era of digitalisation.