

# New Thinking, New Connections

by Abiodun Williams, President, The Hague Institute for Global Justice, The Hague, 2nd Global Table

**A** career in the United Nations and at the helm of international think tanks has afforded me the opportunity to engage in dialogue with some of the world's most challenging thinkers. It has also enabled me to debate pertinent issues with a varied group of scholars, practitioners and leaders from a variety of different backgrounds, prompting new thinking on my own part. But few events achieve these goals alone; in that sense, the BMW Foundation's Global Table series' success in doing so was quite remarkable, and is a testament to the foresight of its organizers.

As a participant in the 2nd Global Table, "Limited Resources – Opportunities Without Borders," in Menaggio, Italy, I talked with those engaged first-hand in confronting the challenges posed by increasing limits to our use of natural resources, and offered a practitioner's perspective, viewing the issue through the prisms of Conflict Prevention, Rule of Law, and Global Governance, the areas of focus for my own organization, The Hague Institute for Global Justice. I was struck at the meeting by the various

implications of natural resource exploitation for international security and governance. Our discussion was nimbly moderated and sensibly drew on the far-sighted work of Alejandro Litovsky and his Earth Security Initiative. From a global governance perspective, the links drawn by Mr. Litovsky and others between the balance of global power, the distribution of resources, and prevailing governance arrangements corroborated research being done at The Hague Institute and offered new pathways for questioning conventional wisdom on the international governance architecture.

The timing of the Global Table was, for the purposes of my own work, quite propitious, not least given the ongoing work of the Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance, a high-level panel on UN reform chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and former Nigerian Foreign Minister Ibrahim Gambari. Michael Schaefer is another prominent member of the Commission and was able to contribute to its work not only in terms of his impressive expertise, but also through the outstanding network to which he and the BMW



People from various backgrounds: Abiodun Williams at the 2nd Global Table in Italy, October 2014.



Questioning conventional wisdom: "The informal atmosphere spurred new thinking and new connections."

Foundation have access. The discussion on natural resources at the Global Table fed directly into the work of the Commission and helped to shape several of the recommendations which were presented at its launch, which took place at the Peace Palace in The Hague in June 2015. Saliently, the Commission drew attention to the security and governance implications of the unprecedented transboundary movement of illegally extracted natural resources and called for changes to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), including to ensure complementarity to the Sustainable Development Goals, which were agreed in New York this September.

Reflecting on the Global Table, plaudits must go to the Foundation and how it conceived a gathering of leading authorities on an important subject, and managed to do so in a way that fostered collegiality and encouraged participants to speak from their own expertise as well as from

their institutional briefing books. The informal atmosphere which predominated at Lake Como, and the lack of a rigid structure to the meeting – even as it was well-moderated – combined to spur new thinking and new connections, enriching the debate. The Global Table Series is an inspired initiative by the BMW Foundation and is making a sterling contribution to contemporary discussions of critical issues in the field of security, justice, and governance. I am delighted that the Foundation has elected to focus its upcoming Global Table cycle on the topic of good governance, which is an imperative at the heart of not only international development but also of international security. It is my own belief that without the rule of law, there can be no growth, no peace, and no guarantee of human rights. I welcome the contribution that will be made by the BMW Foundation and Global Table participants to this field and look forward to supporting this important initiative further. ■

**"Reflecting on the Global Table, and on why its relevance endures, plaudits must go to the Foundation and the way in which it conceived a gathering of leading authorities on an important subject, and managed to do so in a way which fostered collegiality and encouraged participants to speak from their own expertise as well as from their institutional briefing books."**