First of all, I would like to thank the panel members for their papers. I really enjoyed reading them - and it is both a privilege and a pleasure for me to be able to comment on them and to join the discussion this afternoon.

The main point that I gained from the papers in this panel is that we should not be preoccupied with the question of whether or not there are such things as universal values or ethics. As Professor Imamichi noted, the apparent paradox between universal and particular only exists at the semantic level. In the real world – there are some values that may be considered to be universal, and there are some values that have been generated within specific cultures at specific points in time.

Instead of debating the existence of universal values, what we should instead be concerned about is how we can reconcile different particular values - and then balance these different values with what could be considered to be universal values.

As several speakers have mentioned in their papers, different cultures and societies have generated their own frameworks of value and ethics over time. Each society and culture has had to confront similar types of practical questions – such as, how to organize themselves socially, economically, and politically. All societies have had to decide on the most appropriate family unit, or what to do with murderers...
and other criminals. Every society has had to decide on when is it appropriate or acceptable to take a human life – whether euthanasia should be considered to be a humane act of compassion, or an act of murder. Or which should take precedent, the right to life of an unborn child or the right of a woman to control her own body and her own reproductive processes.

Every society throughout history has had to answer these types of questions, and every society has come up with its own answers. Sometimes these answers have been very similar, and the sometimes their answers can seem like they are fundamentally opposed.

It is in the historical process of answering these types of questions, along with some of the more philosophical questions relating to the very nature of human existence, that cultures are built. And each culture has a right to answer these questions in their own particular way.

In a rapidly globalising world, the right that each society has to function in accordance with its own cultural beliefs and established practices of behaviour should be respected.

Yet, as Professor Kucuradi said - cultural relativism should not – and can not - be used as an excuse for human rights abuses. Violent political, military, or religious regimes should not be able to use cultural relativism as a shield against criticism or sanction from the international community.

And the international community can not use the need to respect cultural diversity as an excuse not to criticize or sanction those regimes that habitually engage in the abuse of human rights. Particularly when these abuses occur under a thinly veiled attempt by one group in society to dominate and maintain control over another.
As Professor Kucuradi also noted, some values have more value than others - and are worthy of being promoted as being universal… and if there are any values that deserve to be universal then a respect for human rights is one of them.

But we need to be very careful when we start talking about universal values. Because then the key question becomes – who gets to define what universal is?

As one of the speakers noted in his paper, - regardless of how noble your intentions may be - It is very difficult to talk about universal values without using your own particular cultural values as a starting point. And no one culture has the right to present its own particular values as being universal.

This is an incredibly important point to recognize now – because it is now that we are trying desperately to shape the forces of globalisation in a positive way and it is now that we are beginning to build and consolidate the institutions of global governance.

And if universal values are to provide the foundation for international decision making – then it is crucial that no one culture ends up dominating our discussion of what these universal values are.

No one culture should be able to dominate the processes of intercultural dialogue – no one voice should be louder than the others. And no one culture should be able to impose its own values on either the processes - or the priorities - of globalisation and global institution building.
It used to be that concerned people would warn - that ‘might’ does not make ‘right.’ The loudest and most powerful voices have no greater claim on universality than any of the others.

In the world today it may be more appropriate to warn - that having the biggest purse does not make you right either.

For example – it was a huge step forward for all of us when the Yugoslav government decided to hand over Milosevic to the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague – whatever Milosevic did, he should be held to account for his actions. But it would have been a much bigger step forward for us all - if the Yugoslav government had sent Milosevic to the Hague because it recognized the Tribunal as being an objective source of justice – and not because it felt that it was being held to ransom by Yugoslavia’s need to access international economic aid.

And just so that I don’t end on a negative note here. I definitely share some of the positive sentiments that have been expressed not only in this panel – but throughout the entire conference – about our future. I think that Professor Imamichi is right in suggesting that the future provides an opportunity to invent new ethics – from an equal standpoint – in a new world of modern technology.

And I believe that genuine dialogue is our best hope for building a peaceful, sustainable and just future. How can we possibly learn to understand each other’s points of view if we don’t at least try to understand where those views come from?

And – as several speakers have pointed out - in terms of promoting a constructive dialogue – much of our effort should be focused on the younger generations – because they are the ones who will be building our future – they are the ones who have been charged with the task of building a truly global civilisation.