Ian Goldin is the Oxford University Professor of Globalisation and Development, the Director of the Oxford Martin Programme on Technological and Economic Change and the founding Director of the Oxford Martin School.

Thank you very much for hosting me for the Coffees of the Secretary-General and thank you for attending my talk. I was at the OECD many years ago and have been in and out of many organisations in the subsequent period. I believe that this organisation, more than any others in the international arena, has managed to renew and transform itself to become even more relevant than I could have possibly imagined when I left in the early 90s—and certainly in the period since 2006 thanks to Secretary-General, Angel Gurría.

I will share with you today some thoughts from my new books and try to provide a perspective of where I see the coming decades heading, because I believe that this institution is really at the heart of trying to shape, not only better lives but also a better future and better policies for better lives everywhere. It is that agenda which requires an understanding of the dynamics of the world in order to work out what your comparative advantages are and how best to affect change. Whether you are successful or not, is not just of importance to yourselves and your own careers, it also really matters to the world.
I believe that our time is defined by the image of the Berlin Wall coming down in November 1989; and it is also about walls coming down everywhere, moving from a divided world where about 200 million people around the globe shared the same information and values in the late 1980s, to a world today where we have 6 billion (of the 7.5 billion in total) sharing information. This is a dramatic change and there has never been a more rapid transformation of the world in the history of humanity. It is a transformation that has shaped our lives in many new ways.

I was at the OECD when the Berlin Wall came down and I remember thinking how remarkable that was; but I never imagined how dramatically it would affect my own life. What we know today with the benefit of hindsight is that within three months Nelson Mandela was released from the prison where he was held for 27 years, within a year he came to Paris and he asked me to be his economic advisor and go to South Africa and run the state bank which I did when he became President. But what I have learnt from that experience is how these events which seem unrelated to our own individual lives, in fact shape them in very new and different ways, and that is because of the complex integration of the world. What happened in Europe led to democratisation in 65 countries around the world over a 5-year period and that transformation included the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Going forward, we need to appreciate that what is happening elsewhere in the world will dramatically shape all of our lives in new ways. Because the walls have come down, there are 2 billion more new people on the planet; ideas have travelled which are leading people to live longer and healthier lives; infant mortality has plummeted and life expectancy has increased by at least 15 years over this period of time. Part of this has come through simple ideas such as: washing our hands prevents contagious diseases, smoking kills, wearing a safety-belt saves lives; and of course, through more complex ideas like new cures for cancer and new vaccines. And with the spread of ideas comes a new extraordinary thing, the ‘release of genius’, the release of talent from the slums of Mumbai, Shanghai, Soweto and other places that were previously constrained. So when we think about the global ideas space and what will shape our lives, let’s think about the Einsteins, Mozarts and Shakespears that will emerge in new ways from new streets.
Short biography

Ian Goldin is the Oxford University Professor of Globalisation and Development, the Director of the Oxford Martin Programme on Technological and Economic Change and the founding Director of the Oxford Martin School.

Ian previously was World Bank Vice President and the Group’s Director of Policy, after serving as Chief Executive of the Development Bank of Southern Africa and Economic Advisor to President Nelson Mandela. Ian has served as Principal Economist at the EBRD and Director of Programmes at the OECD Development Centre.

Ian has a BA (Hons) and BSc from the University of Cape Town, an MSc from the London School of Economics, and a MA and DPhil from the University of Oxford.

Ian has been knighted by the French Government and has published 21 books, including Age of Discovery: Navigating the Storms of Our Second Renaissance; Development: A Very Short Introduction; The Butterfly Defect: How Globalisation Creates Systemic Risks and What to Do; Divided Nations: Why Global Governance is Failing and What Can Be Done; Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped our World and Will Define our Future; and, Is the Planet Full?

He has been a non-executive Director on numerous boards, the Senior Independent Director on CDC, is a Trustee of Comic Relief and the Chair of CORE-Econ initiative to modernise the teaching of economics.
More information about his work is available here: https://ianguidin.org/ and https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk

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