

LIVING SUSTAINABLY

The role of sustainability in creating a culture of peace

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‘I am hopeful for three reasons.

For the first time we have a global conscience, because we know world realities. So we can realistically work for the equal dignity of all human beings.

The second is that citizens can make their views known. New communications technology gives us the chance to participate in ways that previously were difficult.

And third, women are reaching positions of decision-making. The culture of peace needs women.

This can be a time to move from diagnosis to treatment. That is why I am grateful for the Caux Call to Action.’

UNESCO’s Constitution is a very enlightening text. It was written after a terrible war from 1939 to 1945 – a war with unbelievable practices of massive extermination, genocide, holocaust. At the end of this war it was said by the Roosevelt team that in the United Nations ‘We the peoples’ – not ‘We the states’ but ‘We the peoples of the world’, every single person – we are responsible. It is up to us to have an active participation in the governance in the world. We the peoples have resolved to save the succeeding generations from the horror of the war.

This means that we must build peace instead of being prepared for war.

It is for this that I am so happy that we have a Call for Action. Because it is time for action. It is really time for action. It is time for radical change. This is another thing that I like very much. Initiatives of change. This is exactly what we need today.

We have the possibility for the first time. We have a global conscience that some years ago we had not. And we realise that this feeling is something more than a possibility. It can lead to the equal dignity of all human beings.

This is exactly what was written by a North American poet Archibald MacLeish in the Constitution of UNESCO. That this is the basic concept, the core concept – the equal human dignity of all human beings. And all human beings are able to create. This is our hope, because we

can invent our future. We can really be creative ourselves. We are all different. But whatever is our colour of skin, our sex, our ideology, our beliefs, we are all equal in dignity.

And it is from this concept that in 1948 – three years later after the United Nations’ foundation in San Francisco – it was realised that if we put into practice the human rights that are all basic to equal human dignity, then we can have a world in which brotherhood can be a reality. This is the Article 1 that normally is not mentioned. ‘Fraternity’ is the word that is utilised. We are all brothers. But normally we say we are free and we are equal. Very well. But then we follow. And at the end of Article 1 it is said ‘in this end we will become all brothers’. This kind of brotherhood is our dream, no doubt. It is the possibility for all to live in peace and have this word that is crucial – “sharing”.

But normally we are living under threat. And we are living under fear. Again, in the Preamble of the Declaration of Human Rights it is said: ‘to save the humanity from fear’. Because we must not fear. We must be brave enough to dare. We must dare. In the Preamble of the Declaration of the Human Rights it says that ‘in this way we will be free’.

Therefore, when we talk about sustainability we are talking about this fantastic, progressive realization of good development. At first, in the 1950-60s, development was economic development. But then it was said ‘No, we must also have social development’ because there

is no point in economic development unless people also feel upgraded socially. Therefore, we must have integral development. And later on it was said that we must have endogenous development. We must not only give, we must share knowledge. For example, to enable countries to utilise their own natural resources without being always depending on countries that are – from the development point of view – in a higher degree.

And then Gro Harlem Brundtland in the 1980s said that the development must be sustainable, that we must always take into account the succeeding generations. We cannot give the legacy of a world that from the capacity of living resources is degraded. As it says Paragraph 1, we the people, we have resolved to save for succeeding generations. They, our children, their children – this is what really matters.

If we realize that the power at the world-wide level and at the local level are not following this, taking into account the citizenship, then we must very clearly participate. Be active. Not be spectators, not be only receptors. We must say no, we cannot accept this kind of governance.

When I was a rector of the University of Grenada in year 1968 it was a very difficult time. Every ten days or two weeks I was going to give a class of biochemistry, because this is what I was. We had a blackboard. And I wrote: 'revolution'. And the students were very surprised. You can imagine, at that moment, to see 'revolution'. And then I took out the 'r'. And the result is 'evolution'. And they said, this is the lesson of nature, the creation is 'evolution'. Evolution what means? It means that we keep some things and we change some things.

If would not evolve then comes – and I put again the 'r' – 'revolution'. And the difference between 'revolution' and 'evolution' is the 'r'. The 'r' of 'responsibility'. Then we are responsible. Those that belong to the intellectual community, to the academic, to the scientific community particularly – all of us, we have this kind of responsibility.

In 1999 it was announced that I was leaving UNESCO and I went to the United States in Atlanta. There was the fantastic meeting of the Physics Association. And Professor Jensen was introducing me. And he put only one slide, with only one word. And the word was 'inertia'. And he said, 'This is our enemy'. Because we must invent our future. But we are always trying to apply old formulas for problems that we have today. We must invent. We must create. This is our hope, he said.

I always remember President Kennedy. In his speech to Washington International University in June 1963 – only some months before he was assassinated – he said something that I consider that we must keep in our minds. He said, 'I am told that this is not feasible – I think that it is feasible. I am told that disarmament is impossible – I think that it is possible'. And he concluded saying, 'There is no challenge beyond human creative capacity.' We can imagine new ways. Then we can make the evolution without asking for revolution. It is a violent way and therefore it is not a good way. Normally the results are not good.

My dear friends, I think that it is a moment in which we need to have radical changes. Because we must, at this very moment, try to make a rapid transition from a traditional culture of force, of imposition, of violence, of war. We must make a transition to a culture of conversation, of conciliation, of understanding, of listening the others, except violence. We must change this immense machinery of warfare. The reality is that at this very moment every day more than three billion dollars are military and armament expenditure. Every day. And every day we have more that seventy thousands persons dying of hunger.

It is for this that I think that President Obama has made a very important step – and he has been daring a lot – because now he has announced a new strategy for defence in the United States. We need security for the present problems of the world to protect us from the enemies. The real enemies – not the enemies that we create because we need them to have in order for the machinery of the war working on.

At the same time, progressively, at the end of the Cold War when we were waiting for the peace dividends. I remember that we were told, 'Now that the arm race is going to end, we will have peace dividends'. We have not had peace dividends. No money for the struggle against poverty, no money against AIDS. I have a foundation with Professor Ruth Montane for AIDS in Africa – we have no money for this. But there are three billion dollars per day for all this immense machinery for war.

When the Millennium Objectives requested some funds for World Fund against Poverty and Hunger – no money. And suddenly, to rescue the banking institutions then we had a lot of money – billions and hundreds of billions of dollars. We must change, starting by saying that we do not accept a plutocracy system. 'Democracy' – that means all the people. But we are now accepting a plutocracy – where the leaders are the richest countries in the world. At the beginning there was G-6. Then, Canada went in – G-7. Then Russia – G-8. Now, G-20. But always the richest countries. We must have a system of governance in which we are all involved, not only the richest countries.

And it is for this that I am so happy that we have a Call for Action. Because it is time for action.

And first we must be sustainable ourselves. We cannot accept what is happening now with the spills. You cannot make extractions of oil at one kilometre and five hundred metres if you are not prepared for an accident. We cannot accept that oil carriers wash their tanks in the middle of the ocean. They produce a monolayer of oil, and this makes the life of phytoplankton impossible. And then, we have not only more CO2 than we should have, but the oceans that are the lungs of the earth cannot work properly.

But how can we request the British Petroleum to be sustainable if we, the citizens, are not? If the reaction is then so mild because, well, we accept that this happens and that happens only at the governance level. No. Therefore, the first thing is to have a sustainable behaviour.

It is impossible to accept this. We cannot accept that there is no money for making all these people able to have the minimum conditions for living in dignity. And therefore we now must try the Caux Call to Action.

There are three reasons why I am quite hopeful at this very moment. Some forty-fifty years ago we were living in a very territorial, reduced space. It was very difficult for us to know exactly the reality in the world. Scientists that say that only we can change reality if we know the reality. Therefore, the first thing that we must realise today is that for the first time we know the realities around the world.

And if we know we can compare. And when we can compare we can have the expression of solidarity, because suddenly we realise that one billion people have no access to water for example, or to sanitation.

The second is that for the first time we can express our views. We have mobile telephones. We have the Internet. The new technology of communication gives us the possibility of having a participatory role that until now was very difficult.

And third we have women reaching positions of decision-making. In 1996 it was only five percent. Now it is ten percent. In five-ten years we will have already around twenty percent and things will change. Because women are absolutely different in their behaviour concerning the usual biology. President Nelson Mandela said to me, 'The culture of peace needs women'. Women can at least postpone the utilization of violence. They are more able than we men to bring this very important change at the worldwide level.

This change can represent a new beginning. And this new beginning, this action, this change, is feasible if we are today able from the diagnosis to start applying the treatment. And I would like to congratulate the Caux Forum for the contribution you are providing for this new beginning. Thank you.

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Federico Mayor was the Director-General of UNESCO from 1987-1999. He is a member of the Honorary Board of the International Coalition for the Decade for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence. He created, and is President, of the Culture of Peace Foundation. He has previously served as Co-President for the High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations and Chair of the European Research Council Expert Group (ERCEG). He previously held several ministerial posts in the Spanish Government.