

## THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY, THE CENTURY OF THE PEOPLE

### **Civil society and solidarity**

In the introduction to one of the most inspiring documents of our time, the Constitution of UNESCO, created in London in 1945, "to construct peace in the minds of men", it is said " That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”.

Up to now, if we look back carefully, we note that people have never been the focus. We have been submissive; ploughing other people's furrows, fighting for causes frequently opposed to our own. Now the moment has arrived to get involved, to be taken into account and to be full citizens.

The moment has arrived born of the solidarity encouraged and exerted by civil society, on the basis of the brotherhood that proclaims Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Infinitely different, - each human being is unique - but fundamentally equal, without preeminence of any order, united by essential values, accepted by all. "Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security” states the Universal

Declaration of UNESCO on Cultural Diversity. And, still, too often, in democratic systems citizens have been counted, at elections and opinion polls, but have not been truly taken into account.

It was at the end of a particularly horrible world war, characterized by repulsive acts of killing, genocide and by the number of victims and the depth of the suffering, that the Charter of the United Nations, sent to the world from San Francisco in 1945, conveyed a great message of hope: "We, the peoples of the United Nations have resolved to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". It constitutes a preventive decision, adopted by all and having as a point of reference the commitment to future generations. In order to achieve it, which is essential to turn that dream, the deepest wish of people since the beginning of times into reality, it is necessary to look ahead, to build the bastions of peace, to transil from a secular culture of imposition, dominion, force and violence, to a culture of dialogue, conciliation and peace.

To speak out in order to participate, to contribute to the establishment of genuine democracies, where education is the key to generating attitudes of reconciliation, understanding, listening and love. Education as "personal sovereignty", for "directing consciously our own life", according to the definition of Francisco Giner de los Rios. Education that neglects the perverse *adagio* "if you want peace, prepare for war" and promotes the construction of peace. If you want peace, support its construction with your daily conduct. If you want peace, demonstrate your solidarity by better sharing part of your time, your means and resources and your knowledge.

Solidarity for Development. Development that must be integral, endogenous, sustainable... and human!. In 1974, the United Nations General Assembly recommended that the most prosperous countries donate 0,7% of their GDP to less advanced countries, in order to promote their internal development in such a way that the inhabitants of those countries could, at least, contribute to the exploitation –with better benefits for all- of their own natural resources. Unfortunately, it did not work out like that (with the exception of the Nordic Countries, to which tribute should be paid). The donations became loans, granted on such conditions that the “donors” became the beneficiaries instead of the receivers, whose external debt continued to increase.

Loans instead of aid... and prices instead of values. "It is of fools to mistake value and price", warned Antonio Machado. At the end of the Cold War, "We, the peoples" was replaced by "We, the powerful ones", and the market replaced the moral principles of reference. They were not "all", but a few. The promises not honoured, those, who no longer hoped but were still waiting stretched hands instead of raised, when seeing themselves marginalized and deceived, frequently followed a process characterized by progressive frustration, radicalization, antagonism and resentment, ... ending frequently in migratory flows of desperate people, manifestations of violence and aggressiveness, etc.

In spite of everything, the United Nations, doggedly, continued to give points of reference: in 1990 the World Declaration on Education for all; in 1992, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; in 1995, the World Summit on Social Development and, the same year the Declaration of

principles on tolerance.... But the world leader, the same one that promoted the United Nations system and the Declaration of Human Rights is no longer supportive: the Kyoto Protocol, already very diluted, is not implemented in the United States because it does not comply with the short-term interests of the great North American industries, is a sad environmental example. States weakened by a process of excessive privatization contrast with the limitless influence of big multinationals. Impunity is vividly demonstrated by the collective shame represented by tax havens, keepers of all kinds of trafficking (drugs, arms, people...) with no limits to it. At the same time, the gap between the most and the least advanced countries increases. Each day more than fifty thousand people die of hunger, while the subsidies of the richest countries for agricultural production amount to one billion dollars a day.

Europe, united in its diversity, can become the watch tower so badly needed at this turbulent dawn of the XXIst century. With its immense creative capacity could be, before long, at the forefront of the “intellectual and moral solidarity”.

The Heads of State and government, meeting in the United Nations in September 2000, solemnly declared that they would make an effort to achieve the goals in the Millennium Declaration: I: Values and principles; II: Peace, security and disarmament; III: Development and poverty eradication; IV: Protecting our common environment; V: Human rights, democracy and good governance; VI: Protecting the vulnerable; VII: Meeting the special needs of Africa; and VIII: Strengthening the United Nations. It will soon be five years since this solemn declaration. Again, unfulfilled commitments.

Again a culture of might, imposition, and violence prevails over a culture of dialogue, understanding, listening and peace.

However, things may change. The societies, the nongovernmental organizations, the peoples of the world are not going to keep quiet. No longer will they stay "passive and docile" as Jesus Massip reproached in his poem "Of the hours". The mass media, even if sometimes over influential, can now help raise awareness and show our dissent or our conformity, our applause and our revulsion. They can become, through the internet and, in particular, through mobile information and communication technologies, the best expression of the voice of the peoples and solidarity on a global scale.

Civil society now has, in addition to an undeniable leading role in the share of international solidarity, the possibility of being not only heard, but also listened to. For the first time in history, it is not a question of localized manifestations, - with the possibility of being violently dissolved - but of the pacific and firm expression of the citizens. To achieve the Millennium objectives, to eradicate poverty, to conciliate the sleep without thinking of our brothers who lack the minimum resources for subsistence, to make sure that the voice that we owe to the new generations is heard and listened to. The moment is approaching when people will count, the moment of real democracy. The dream of the calm emergence of people on the scene. The Twenty First Century finally can be the century of the people. Of us. Of everyone.

Federico Mayor

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