

The Crime of Silence

The Bush administration has supported the enactment of a law –although it is to be expected that the Supreme Court will prevent this atrocity– that excludes certain detainees from habeas corpus protection, which is one of the greatest conquests of mankind and one of the pillars of democracy And silence. Contrary to what could have been expected, there was no immediate severe response from so many people or institutions who should have reacted and, particularly, from the European Union. Their response was silence. Guantanamo, “secret” flights... Silence. How many dreadful events could be prevented if we would only speak up immediately! As Martin Luther King once observed, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”. And Spaniards from the past, Quevedo –“I will not be silent...” and Garcilaso de la Vega –“I could no longer remain silent”..., expressed the obligation to speak out. On many occasions I have explained that from my experience there is a silence that is worse than the silence of those who have been silenced, those who do not speak because they cannot or do not know how to. It is the silence of those who choose to remain silent, those who remain silent but who can and have the duty to speak out. And thus, “the voice that could have been the remedy, out of fear was nothing”.

The worst silence is the silence of our institutions. The silence of entities which by their very nature are aware of the issues and should not miss the opportunity to make themselves heard. The universities, the academies, the scientific community... should be particularly alert, especially with regard to issues that may lead to irreversible situations. Doctors, molecular biologists and social pathologists, etc. are quite aware that not only is an

adequate treatment required, but also it must be applied before the process that it seeks to heal has reached a point of no return. Then even the best corrective treatment is totally ineffective.

We are too distracted, excessively absorbed with urgent matters that are secondary, preoccupied with news that with progressive frequency provides an incomplete and exaggerated, if not biased perspective of reality. The net result is that we become “receivers,” passive spectators resigned to waiting to see what happens, what the others are doing. In view of the present conceptual confusion in a world suffering from the consequences of having replaced universal values with the laws of the marketplace and in which inequalities in all areas continue to increase, it is urgent to peacefully promote a popular outcry which, being so widespread and strong, will be able to correct the present tendencies that darken the horizons for the future generations, to whom we owe our supreme commitment.

And this outcry must prompt the European leaders to express themselves clearly, emphatically and convincingly, because for many reasons today Europe must play the role of lighthouse and watchtower. The United States needs friendly, independent voices to make it understand that the days of unilateral foreign policy decisions, determined to dominate by force those deemed “enemies,” are over. That neither Europe or Latin America are going to blindly follow arbitrary economic, military or cultural policies that entail dominance or subjugation.

And in response to the growing poverty generated by the process of globalization promoted by the wealthiest nations: silence. In response to the delocalization of manufacturing to the east and of management to the west: silence. Faced with the huge challenges of China and India’s entry in the

growth of the planet: silence. Silence with respect to dictatorships under which people labor in deplorable conditions, because they benefit the market and war economies that we support. How much do we spend daily on armament? How many thousands of million of dollars have been spent on weapons (including cluster bombs) by countries, some of them glaringly poor, in the last five years? To whom does Africa belong? Who ultimately benefits from exploiting the natural resources of countries whose citizens don't have even a few crumbs to put on their plates? When will we do away with the tax havens so that we can achieve some semblance of success in the fight against trafficking in weapons, people and drugs, which causes such devastation? When will we finally apply the United Nations Millennium Objectives, proclaimed in 2000 and repeated in 2005, to fight hunger, AIDS, and to build housing instead of missiles and instruments of war? Someone must take the initiative in this new era to speak up instead of imposing. And this someone should be Europe and its institutions, its centers of higher education, its artists and inventors... who initiate this new historic road toward intellectual rearmament that the world so desires.

Let us unite our voices to achieve a United Nations that is really representative of "We, the peoples", as stated in the first paragraph of the Charter. A United Nations which, with all of the institutions it represents, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, can guarantee on an international level compliance with economic, social environmental, cultural and ethical conventions. And where, all together, the great challenges of humanity can be met with the appropriate prospective vision: energy, water, nutrition, health... .

A United Nations capable of confronting the transgressors who today occupy the supranational space with total impunity, frequently under the shelter of multinational corporations whose greed knows no limits.

A United Nations capable of practicing efficient multilateralism, in which security emanates from justice and the diligence required to transform force into dialogue.

Against inertia, the will to change. At the dawn of this century and millennium it is more urgent than ever to be vigilant, with the perseverance to prevent defenselessness and the excesses of policies based on peace and security. The “legitimate fight against terrorism has been used as a pretext to deprive or revoke human rights,” declared Koffi Anan before the General Assembly in September of this year.

And for the European Union to regain its lost credibility, the “western” countries cannot continue to be “proud spokesmen.” The Millennium Objectives are not being met, especially in Africa. The immense tragedy of the sub-Saharan immigrants who arrive in desperation on the coasts of abundance is due to the inhuman conditions in which they live in their countries. They come to us because we have repeatedly failed to fulfill our promises to them, while at the same time exploiting their natural resources: oil, gas, fish stocks, fruit, minerals... . Please, the walls are already many and high, without the need to build others. And the wounds are deep. The problems of the future will not be resolved by forgetting, but by remembering.

We are coming upon an era of massive participation in which via Internet and mobile phones (SMS) people will begin to participate actively in public

affairs. I believe that the time for resignation and silence is, fortunately, coming to an end. For this reason it is especially important that Europe assume the lead in this already unstoppable movement.

So that the generations who are one step behind us cannot accuse us of silence when our voice is so necessary: together in peace, tireless in our resistance in favor of authentic democracy. So that no one can ever say, “We listened for your voice, but it was never heard.” Silence can become a crime.

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