

III. "Time for Action"

Tomorrow may be too late. or Time what is time? I say, "...Time is a crook!" or Hamlet: Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, time wends its way in petty pace from day to day..." So Hamlet dies, Ophelia dies, his friends die and Denmark dies.

On August 3, 2007 the White House announced a World Meeting on Climate Change for 27-28 September. President Bush's motives may be good, but like so many previous committees, panels, etc. the new meeting may also provide yet another excuse for postponing the decisions that are vital for mankind. No more delays! No more reports! No more meetings to agree upon what was already agreed years ago! Meetings to decide additional practical aspects, yes. But the enough of the diagnostics have already been made, and are scientifically accurate. Most of the credit should go to the United Nations that, despite being ignored by the superpowers, from the 1990s to the present, has pushed for excellent action programs, including the Year 2000 Millennium Objectives, reiterated five years later at the September, 2005 Summit. For this reason, when new meetings are scheduled to discuss what has already been decided, when putting into practice what has been decided is constantly put off, when the lack of political will is disguised by conducting additional studies, we must say: Enough! The international community, and especially intellectuals, scientists, academics... must speak out loudly against these maneuvers and demand that governments face up to their responsibilities. Many physical and social phenomena on our blue planet may soon reach the point of no return.

This is the “ethic of time”: the duty in any potentially irreversible process to take action before the situation (pathological, climatic, behavioral) reaches the point of no return. In consequence it is necessary that the institutions and persons prepared to do so promote the capacity to anticipate, to foresee, to take timely action. It does not suffice to merely know the appropriate course of action, but rather it must be implemented in a timely fashion. Based on my experience in diagnosing postnatal disorders that may cause irreversible mental defects, in 1987 I published “Tomorrow may be Too Late”, to lend to all decisions the urgency that they require to prevent irremediable situations.

To take timely action... learning lessons from the past, while constantly bearing in mind that the past may and should be described as accurately as possible, but that it has already been written. What the upcoming generations should be able to freely write is the future, their present. But in order to look toward the future, knowing from whence we come and what we have left behind, it is necessary to relieve ourselves of the burdens and encumbrances that prevent us from proceeding with dignity. With a sense of urgency and the capacity to distinguish what is important from what is actually urgent, the appropriate institutions must address the great social, economic, cultural, environmental, energy resource and moral challenges... of our era, collaborating to find a solution, as proactive citizens and protagonists who no longer resign themselves to be submissive spectators, passively contemplating with indifference what transpires around them.

It is time for action, to cease to be simple recipients of often biased information, but rather actors who participate, each in his respective area, bearing in mind Burke’s truism that “nobody makes a greater mistake than he

who does nothing because he could only do a little”. Every seed, without exception, is necessary. Every grain of sand. Every drop of water, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminded Dominique Lapierre when the famous writer apologized because his contribution was so small, “like a drop in the ocean”. And Mother Teresa responded that the ocean would miss that drop.

Speaking to the General Conference of UNESCO held in New Delhi in 1956, Pandit Nehru clearly underscored that the highest objective of the United Nations’ intellectual organization is to act as the “conscience of the world”. This is the mission of educators, creators and artists: to remind all of us, in the midst of so much commotion, turmoil and change, what are our real points of reference and the beacons that should illuminate our paths.

To act towards one another in a “spirit of brotherhood”, as stated in the first article of the Universal Declaration, it is essential to share better. And that is the root of one of the great frustrations of the “new world order” that the United Nations has sought to implement. Development for what and for whom? To provide citizens with abilities that will permit them to use their own resources, or at least to collaborate in the use of those resources, ensuring minimum standards of living that will prevent mass migration and the breeding of resentment. To ensure equal opportunities and prevent discrimination based on place of birth, ethnic group, etc. To implement the supreme principle that all human beings are equal in dignity.

It is time for action. Rather than additional studies, diagnoses, recommendations and resolutions, what is needed is action, substantial change based on scientific analysis that will enable military spending to be rapidly

reduced and increase funds available to urgently prevent, as a demand of the global conscience that can no longer be postponed, the death of thousands of persons each day from hunger and the lack of access to adequate treatment to ensure their health and their quality of life.

To address the great challenges of our era we must rely on a strengthened United Nations, endowed with the necessary human and financial resources, and with the authority required to prevent the arbitrary and discretionary decisions that have allowed a plutocracy and even a dominant power to marginalize the United Nations that President Franklin Roosevelt envisioned. Inspired by the dawning of a new century and millennium, the Heads of State and Governments, gathered at the United Nations in September 2000, solemnly committed themselves to comply with the Millennium Objectives: I. Values and Principles; II. Peace, security and disarmament; III. Development and the eradication of poverty; 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.

Almost seven years have elapsed since that solemn declaration and, once again, the promises remain unfulfilled and forgotten. But some things have changed: society, non-governmental organizations, the peoples of the world are not going to remain silent and impassive as they did in the past. The communications media, which distract, daze and often degrade us... may now help not only to educate us and raise our awareness, but also to manifest our dissent and our conformity, our applause and our condemnation. Through modern technology the media may become the best means for expressing

solidarity and for making the voice of the people heard at a global level. Civil society, in its undeniable leading role in humanitarian aid, now has the possibility not only to make itself heard, but to ensure that others actually listen.

The new Prime Minister Gordon Brown just proposed a new world alliance against poverty, strengthening the United Nations. An excellent initiative that, like so many others, must not fall on deaf ears. It is comforting to paraphrase Winston Churchill to beg that we cease to look back at the past and focus our efforts on the future: “If we open a quarrel between the past and present, we shall find we have lost the future”. Before representatives of governments, the private sector and civil society Prime Minister Brown underscored that the time has come to combine forces for a “global alliance for peace and prosperity”. He mentioned John Kennedy’s great project, set forth in 1960, for an Alliance for Progress and Peace Corps, and made his proposal to the new Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon. In that regard, I also recall a meeting of the General Assembly in September 2004 at which former Secretary General Kofi Annan joined hands with Presidents Lula, Lagos and Chirac, and the President of the Spanish Government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who likewise, and to the surprise of many, proposed an “Alliance of Civilizations” to build bridges among different cultures and interaction among different beliefs.

It is time for action, to replace force with words. With Shimon Peres as President of Israel and in the present circumstances (including Gaza), it is now possible to accelerate the peace process in the Middle East, which would signal the beginning of the end for many additional conflicts.

The armies that guarantee democracy, coordinated under the blue flag of the United Nations, must be joined by genuine armies of teachers, parents, scientists and artists. It is imperative to address the great global challenges before any possible solutions are rendered ineffective. The ethics of time! Energy, the environment, health... are the challenges that must be met with solidarity.

A culture of peace, as an ethical and political model, can resolve the present dichotomy that separates and divides, in inhuman levels, the world's rich and poor. In opposition to the reactionaries, we must find or invent new formulas. We must completely renew the concept of democracy: the principal subject of democracy is the citizen, not the State. The people. Will the 21st century be the century of people? To achieve this it is essential to refuse to remain silent, to participate. The voice of the people. And the scientific and academic communities, the intellectuals and creators must particularly make themselves heard, exclaiming as Garcilaso did, "I can no longer remain silent!" Or, inspired by the more recent verse of Rafael Guillén in "Los dominios del cóndor": "There was no place in which to harbor so much silence".

It is time for action.

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