

Response to Crises: Global Development

*“Only a fool
confuses value and price”.*
Antonio Machado

Of all of the crises foreseeably resulting from a globalization that has replaced justice and sound political policies with the laws of the marketplace, the most serious one that is capable of mobilizing large sectors of people is the food crisis. Longer-term approaches may be used to address economic and environmental crises –although with serious irreversible consequences in the case of the latter– but the food crisis is directly related to the highest of all human rights: the right to life.

Since this affects the capacity of survival of many people –almost 1,000,000,000 people lack minimum nutrition- hunger results in disturbances and irrepressible social unrest. A minimum level of nutrition must be guaranteed. This is our common challenge and a threat for the stability of nations. Change will be unstoppable if in addition to the financial crisis there are shortages of food and water, because basic necessities mobilize not only those who suffer those crises directly, but also citizens all over the world who, aware of the situation, urgently appeal for a transformation from the present economy of war and dominion to an economy of development, with heavy investments –which will also provide excellent business opportunities and increase “customers”– in

infrastructures for producing large quantities of energy at affordable prices, producing and transporting drinking water, obtaining food for all, providing transportation and heating and refrigeration systems that consume progressively less fuel... and decent housing.

The knowledge to achieve this already exists. We must be capable of applying it. It is unquestionable that what is presently urgent is to enable all peoples to enjoy the benefits of that knowledge. We can envision islands, even artificial ones, with energy sources from the wind, sea or sun... producing large quantities of energy and drinking water. Global challenges require global solutions that, in turn, require cooperation on a worldwide scale. Research must now be devoted to increasing the production of food using minimum amounts of water and fertilizer. In that regard, the transfer of the nitrogenase system, which captures atmospheric nitrogen directly in legumes, cereals and especially in rice, would represent a giant step not only with respect to the increased availability of food, but also in the reduction of the environmental impact of fertilizers.

Instead of reducing the furious pace of weapons production, it has been accelerated for reasons of global economy. To current military spending we must also add the price of antimissile shields on both sides, and the recent end-of-term decisions of the Bush Administration with respect to its Pacific strategy (Robert Gates just announced 15,000 million dollars to upgrade the Guam military base), and to “guarantee the maritime security” of South America the Pentagon has resuscitated the U.S. Navy’s IV Fleet....

Through a world emergency plan we must cease to depend on fossil fuels, whose price has doubled in the last three years, and turn to what the large oil companies have for decades either criticized or blatantly concealed: the

contribution to be found in renewable energy sources, nuclear (fission and fusion), hydrogen... The production of biofuels must be strictly regulated so that it does not affect the availability of food. Cultivation practices must be improved everywhere, especially with respect to the use of water, avoiding unnecessary transportation and fertilizers that can have a negative environmental impact and, above all, the subject of subsidies and other protective measures must finally be addressed.

Global development could provide a solid solution and replace the present system that is desperately being kept in place using “patches” involving investments in the “new opportunities” that Asian or Gulf countries offer or in food stuffs! The scandal of corruption in developing countries is continuously highlighted, without mentioning the corruptors. Speculation in natural resources, oil and basic food stuffs has risen to intolerable levels. The G-8 countries are re-nationalizing what they had previously privatized (as was the case recently with banks and financial institutions), while seeking to prevent the nationalization of their own multinational companies located in poor countries, while ensuring that their exploitation can continue in its present conditions.

The current economic system must be changed. Joaquín Estefanía has warned that it is impossible to simultaneously block the free entry of exports from African countries and entry of citizens from those countries who are fleeing from poverty. To meet the present challenges, at the International Conference to Review the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development to be held shortly in Doha it is crucial to once and for all apply currency transaction taxes which, according to the Secretary General of the United Nations, will not affect how the market functions.

With communications technology that enables distance participation and with the increased participation of women (now limited to only 5% world wide), I believe I can safely predict that in 10 or 15 years genuine democracy can be achieved at all levels, ushering in a new era: the era of the citizen. And a great transition will have been made from subjugation and dependence to full citizenship; from a culture of imposition, violence and war to a culture of dialogue, conciliation and peace. Countries will have joined together at the regional level (the United States of North America, the European Union, South America, Africa) and the United Nations will have been re-founded and endowed with the human, financial and technical resources necessary in a “global democracy”, having replaced the present plutocracy in which, moreover, its member states’ have lost a great deal of their national and international authority and capacity for action, while much of the real power is wielded by large supranational corporations. The results are immediately apparent: with international institutions incapable of regulating different aspects of world government, economic, technological and media power has been progressively concentrated in what, together with the war industry, can be considered a “great dominion”.

This was recently evidenced at the FAO Conference that, as was unfortunately to be expected, concluded with the most prosperous countries determined not to permit even the slightest change in an unfair and arbitrary system, clinging to policies that allow them with short-sighted eagerness to continue to exploit the natural resources on which their prosperity has, until now, been based. But it won’t be for long.

No nation is exempt from responsibility: it is unacceptable to transfer “to the marketplace” the moral and political duties that are the responsibility of

democratic leaders. It is urgent to establish worldwide codes of conduct within the legal and ethical framework of a duly-reformed United Nations.

The world has changed and fortunately there are many leaders and peoples who have ceased to be obedient, submissive and to yield to pressure –I know it well– from those with the most power. Corporations, communications media, NGOs... will join together in a movement that in a few years will give “citizen power” a new dimension.

The diagnosis has been made. It is now imperative to apply the appropriate treatment before it is too late. In moments of great historical change, moral support is more necessary than ever. A new era is dawning. As in 1945. Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics said recently that the state rather than the marketplace must be responsible for the welfare of citizens in developing countries. To prevent the revolution of hunger by activating the evolution towards a new worldwide economic system. The difference between revolution and evolution is the “R” of “responsibility”.

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