

Defenceless against disaster

They are so ready for battle with such huge benefits to be reaped that, when there is no enemy, they have to invent one, as the colossal machinery of war cannot be stopped. Submarines, aircraft carriers, battleships, piloted and pilotless planes, tanks, howitzers, short and long-range missiles, with and without nuclear warheads... .

However, when it comes to defending ourselves from the disasters that are devastating the planet, there is nothing. If they were an infrequent occurrence, it would be understandable. But they are recurrent. And, as they do not form part of conventional “defence”, the security structures –with a very short-sighted view of what “security” means- have not included them in their strategies and they lack the human and technical resources necessary in order to prevent them or, at least, to reduce their impact.

Defenceless, in spite of the fact that the United Nations, throughout the decade of 1989-1999 carried out a thorough study, enlisting the help of top experts, of the measures that should be adopted before and immediately after these events. As Director-General of UNESCO at that time, I had the opportunity to “set in motion” the actions to be undertaken, with the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuellar. At the end of the period

mentioned, the most suitable measures were published – “*Management of Natural Disasters*”- and the General Assembly of the United Nations continued to update this regularly, particularly through UNESCO.

But, as was the case with the recommendations for social and sustainable development, the formulae recommended by the United Nations System were completely discarded by the plutocratic groups of “globalisers” (G7, G8, ...).

The measures to be adopted were established with regard to:

- i) Hydro-meteorological disasters: cyclones, hurricanes (such as Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans, August 2005, and the Cyclone Nargis, which had a devastating effect on Myanmar in May 2008); floods; drought; tornados; extreme temperatures; lightning;... .
- ii) Geological: earthquakes (August 2007, in Pisco, Peru; May 2008, Sichuan, China; April 2009, L’Aquila, Italy; 12 January 2010, Haiti; February 2010, Chile; April 2010, Qinghai, China;); volcanoes (Eyjafjalla, Iceland, April 2010); *tsunamis* (Indian Ocean, December 2004); landslides; glaciers...
- iii) Environmental and technological: fires (August 2007, Greece; summer 2007, Canary Islands; August 2008, Los Angeles, United States...).

The four key objectives of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) are: to increase public awareness to understand risk, vulnerability and disaster reduction globally; to obtain

commitment from public authorities; to stimulate interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships; and to improve scientific knowledge.

One of the most important recent contributions is the European Union GAP project (Guard, Anticipation and Prediction) relating to the threats to “global health”, which groups natural disasters together with nuclear disasters, large epidemics, industrial hazards and terrorism.

Today, the effects of climate change, global warming, greenhouse gases and, in particular, carbon dioxide emissions, can be included in the issues to be addressed by a “Security Council” with a broader scope of competence. The issues requiring armed forces would be entrusted to the “blue berets” and, in line with Nicole Guedj’s proposal, the establishment of the “red berets” should be encouraged as a supranational, exclusively humanitarian force, to act specifically in response to natural or man-provoked disasters. In Spain, the Military Emergency Unit, UNE (*Unidad Militar de Emergencia*) was established in 2005 and has already demonstrated its ability to act (fires, etc.).

The “black tide” has now been added to the proven inefficiency and inability to react in the form of rescue and rehabilitation in the case of earthquakes, floods, etc., due to the massive oil spills, resulting from the unforgiveable greed of a deepwater oil company which did not have the resources available to allow for any faults. President Obama is unduly expected to shoulder the blame which should be assumed by the British oil company alone. A spill of this nature is not a hurricane.

In the early 1990s we set up the GOOS (Global Ocean Observing System) in order to be able to give early warning of *tsunamis* and to denounce the oil carriers that wash the bottom of tanks offshore instead of using the appropriate port facilities.

How much longer will the majority of the world's population continue to remain impassive, allowing things to happen "as usual"? I don't think that it will be for much longer, because new communication technology is enabling people, who are spectators today, to become gradually more involved, and they will begin to form a worldwide network which both globally and locally will strengthen true democracy, the transition from a culture of imposition, violence and war to a culture of dialogue, reconciliation and peace; from a market economy to a sustainable global economy, from an exclusively regional security strategy to a security strategy in terms of food, health, against disasters; ...

Yes, a new concept of security is urgently needed on a worldwide level. People's conscience, moved by disasters, can collaborate effectively to achieve this.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

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