Action and reform of the United Nations, before it is too late

Let us look into the eyes of our descendants, of the children and of the needy, and firmly take action against those who, in the present chaos of irresponsible economic policies, may lead humanity toward an untenable situation from all points of view. Both Pope Francis in his Ecology Encyclical –“...now is the time for action”- and President Barak Obama -“we are the first generation to feel the effects of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it” (!)- have alerted us to the risks of this situation and future perspectives, urging that measures be adopted.

It is particularly urgent to take action on education at all levels, to raise awareness of our current responsibilities, to cease to be subjects and become full citizens and to gain the foresight now available through digital technology; and to achieve full gender equality, the true cornerstone of this new era. This should be the important mission assigned to the United Nations through UNESCO: to provide our schools, parliaments, town councils and governments with “educated” people, that is, people who are “free and responsible”, as underscored in Article I of the UNESCO Constitution. Education to be, education to learn to be, rather than to have, as reports such as the PISA surveys urge us to be, being produced by strictly economic and commercial organizations. We should be guided by the ideas of Paulo Freire or Edgar Morin...
which are those who promote self-esteem, creativity, and the full exercise of the distinctive talents of the human species.

What we see happening globally (so little aid for Haiti and Nepal..., neglect of refugees and immigrants, decrease in subsidies for development, the nuclear threat, impunity for trafficking of all kinds worldwide...) can only be solved through a re-founded United Nations with the full respect of all countries.

The war in Syria, Yemen, Somalia,... the situation in Ukraine,... the reaction against the so-called Islamic State (that requires strong concerted action on a worldwide scale instead of a lack of transparency in actions such as providing aid to terrorists for “intra-religious” reasons) are absolutely indefensible realities. In other respects, an efficient United Nations and appropriate “watch towers” would have made the outcome of the Arab spring quite different from what it is today.

On several occasions the United Nations has debated and approved international strategies to reduce natural disasters (1989, 1994, 1999, 2005, 2012...). They have been used as topics of discussion, but the recommendations have always fallen on the deaf ears of the “market society”. What we should bear in mind is that throughout the world between 2002 and 2011 there were 4,130 natural disasters in which 1,117,527 people died...
During the last two decades, for the first time in history human beings have ceased to be invisible, anonymous, silent and obedient..., confined both territorially and intellectually to very limited spaces, and the “We, the Peoples” principle of the United Nations Charter is progressively becoming a reality... It is now possible to re-found the United Nations system, based on representation from civil society, on representation from member states as well as from the population at large. Yes, it is now possible to achieve the transition to an economy of solidarity based on knowledge for global sustainable and human development.

The major priorities established by the United Nations worldwide (food, access to drinking water, health, protection of the environment, universal education, peace) cannot be achieved without genuinely democratic international governance. In addition, upon eliminating nuclear threats, it would be advisable to guarantee security through pertinent alliances entered into under the guidance of a Security Council with weighted composition and functions and, if possible, to likewise implement a major project sponsored by the International Peace Bureau in Geneva: disarmament for development. To do so it would suffice to cut present military spending by 35% in order in a few years to achieve that great social transformation worldwide. Today it is now possible to achieve the transition from a secular culture of imposition, violence and war (“si vis pacem, para bellum”) to a culture of dialogue, conciliation, alliance and peace. Today it is now possible to achieve that great transition from force to words, through voices
united in a great popular outcry the world over, so that the 21st century may at last be the century of the people. Voices united to promptly eliminate the current contradiction between democracy at the local level and groups of plutocrats that dominate international politics and in which the major powers refuse to recognize, or only occasionally recognize both general and specific international courts.

James A. Paul, founder of the ONG Working Group on the Security Council, recently wrote an article concerning the 70th anniversary underscoring that the time has come for the people to take energetic action and that “rather than waiting for disaster to arrive in full force, citizens should demand now a functional, effective and strong world body, democratic and proactive, protecting the environment, advancing peace and working in the people’s interest”.

Professor Juan Antonio Carrillo, a major defender of International Law and whose works continue to guide the paths that we must promptly follow, had already warned in 1998 that: “it is essential to contribute to achieving an international order based on equality, solidarity and the notion of international community. These goals, reminiscent of those expressed in Article I of the United Nations Charter, may seem naïve and Utopian. But they are the basis for my firm conviction that each human being and each human community has the positive obligation to be his brother’s keeper in this unjust, chaotic and convulsive world in which we are destined to live.”
Obviously, the historic realization of these ideals would require an institution embracing the international community as a whole, that is, the transition from an international order based on the independence of sovereign states to one of interdependence based on the *totus orbis* of the international community. It is clear that references are not lacking. There have been many lucid alerts, initiatives and proposals. The problem is that until now the “peoples” remained silent. But they can now speak up and they are going to do so. There are radical changes on the horizon.

Several weeks ago I sent President Barak Obama a letter ([http://www.fund-culturadepaz.org/doc/Carta-BarackObama.pdf](http://www.fund-culturadepaz.org/doc/Carta-BarackObama.pdf)) in which I expressed my conviction that, particularly together with Pope Francis, he could promote a rapid worldwide movement in favor of holding an *Extraordinary Session of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the appropriate measures to avoid points of no return with respect to both environmental and social processes*. At that same session a “roadmap” would be approved to as soon as possible *re-found democratic multilateralism*, with a United Nations capable of making the “We, the Peoples” principle of the UN Charter a reality by creating a General Assembly of 50% representatives from member states and 50% representatives from institutions of civil society. A Social Economic Council and an Environmental Council would also be added to the present Security Council. Vetoes would be replaced by weighted voting. In specialized areas, scientific opinion would be taken into account. Thus, in environmental matters the findings of the
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) would be considered.

At present, together with the Spanish Chapter of the Club of Rome, the World Academy of Art and Science, the International Peace Bureau, the World Political Forum and former President Mikhail Gorbachev’s Green Cross Foundation, and with support from the artistic, scientific, educational and university communities, we are drafting a proposal to implement a United Nations system that would guarantee adequate world governance.

Soon thereafter we then would submit to that General Assembly the final text of our Universal Declaration of Democracy as the only context in which human rights may be exercised and equal dignity for all may be achieved. This would be the “new beginning” proclaimed in the last section of the Earth Charter. This would represent to save the succeeding generations from these horrible and bloody images of children, women and men abandoned to their own, and from the Earth conditions deterioration for a dignified life. Cooperation and not conflict... This would be a 70th anniversary celebration that would mark the commencement of the historic transition from force to words.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza
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