

## **MAKING OURSELVES “PEACE-READY”**

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**“Let the sun rise quickly...!”**

**Vicente Aleixandre in “Ámbito”, 1928**

“If you want peace, prepare for war” says the proverb that is as old as it is perverse. The result is obvious to all: war after war, confrontation after confrontation. Peace is merely the time elapsed between two wars. We do what we have been taught to do: wage war. We use force, not dialogue, the sword and not the word. We keep ourselves “combat ready” (*en pie de guerra*) which, according to the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language refers to “armies that in times of peace are equipped and prepared to enter into battle”..., an expression which “applies to any nation that arms and equips itself with everything necessary to wage war”. An immense war machine has gradually been set into motion with such inertia that any attempt to restrain or redirect it so that it can fulfill its functions without jeopardizing all others appears futile. To do so it is necessary to prepare for peace, to work each day for a radical change in the present tendencies, whether they be economic, social, environmental, cultural or moral. Instead of

always preparing for war, we must diligently endeavor to work for peace.

Today the drums of war are heard throughout the world which, for the first time, could benefit from its globalization, from being that “global village” that McLuhan envisioned. Only now are we able to follow the events of the world in real time, to see what people do, how they live and behave, how nature develops, how cultural identities evolve, to observe to what extent they reflect universal values and guidelines. But our newly-achieved global perspective has not resulted in a foreseeable and desirable détente among the world’s “neighborhoods”, in a greater capacity for sharing, bringing us closer together, increasing intellectual cooperation so that together we can predict and take preventive measures, with an increased awareness of what is really needed to build a brighter future for the generations to come.

Since our sources are fewer than we expected and the information we receive is generally less independent than required to reflect the world around us with any clarity, we are not even able to see what is hidden, to be aware of those who are invisible, who struggle to survive and then die in obscurity behind a barrier of shallow news items and high-profile scandals, ...while those who are excluded from all of the world’s stages, frustrated, radicalized and wrought with despair, attempt and on occasion even risk their lives for a few moments in the footlights. Others, more deeply wounded and less patient, seek opportunities for vengeance. And in the end, since no one hesitates at that point, all lose. With its immense loss of lives and suffering, the 20<sup>th</sup> century

witnessed the failure of the culture of war and an economic and social system based on discrimination, which increases inequality rather than reducing it. The failure of the short-sighted perspective, which in an interactive world without borders leads to the artificial isolation of a minority that seeks to consolidate its position, exploiting with its scientific and technological advances the natural resources of the countries comprising the needy majority.

Entire peoples devastated by all kinds of disasters... and we, the privileged, believing that we can appease our conscience, our indifference, our “nothing can be done” attitude with a little charity: “What can I do? That’s the way things are”. If I insist on the inherent danger in these situations it is because I have had the occasion to see how these people live and die and to hear what is being said in many places in that 83% of the world that resides beyond the fortified walls of the prosperous. And the only thing that practically all peoples on both sides of that imaginary line desire is to fully enjoy each moment of the mystery that each life represents. When we observe the generosity, dedication, good will and good faith of so many people, we are filled with hope and convinced that another world is possible. The world that was conceived in San Francisco in 1945: “We, the Peoples”...endowed with some points of reference –the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948– and determined to better distribute the fruits of the earth (United Nations development programmes, 1954). A world that would build “peace in the minds of men”, in the words of the UNESCO Charter, through education, science and culture, through “intellectual and moral solidarity with mankind”. Only then, through education –knowledge,

values, attitudes, creativity— can we overcome today what they sought to overcome then: the catastrophic cultural and spiritual imbalance of the end of the century and millennium.

The great project of 1945 has not become a reality. First, due to the confrontation of the great superpowers. And when the Soviet Union fell in 1989 —because supposedly based on equality, it had forsaken liberty— history offered a great opportunity to the other superpower that was likewise in great difficulty because based on liberty it had forsaken equality. And both forgot fraternity. Instead of leading a worldwide movement toward democracy, as it did at the end of World War II, this time it only chose to lead a group of the most powerful countries (G-7 or G-8). There was a simultaneous, risky and undue transfer of responsibilities to the market, while large private conglomerates emerged at the supranational level. The lack of any code of conduct lead to excesses and trafficking (in weapons, money, drugs and persons) with complete impunity. On many occasions I have underscored the damaging contradiction of the existence of democracy, which provides a solution at the national level, and oligarchy at the international level. With no opportunity to express their frustration, the majority of countries —including some previously considered “developed”— have found themselves doomed to form a part of the multicolor group of stragglers (indebted, technologically and financially dependent), their sense of hostility being heightened by so many broken promises and by ever-increasing inequalities that generate breeding grounds for resentment and aggression.

And secondly, due to the role played by Europe, much more silent and submissive than was to be expected. When after the clear-sighted commencement and a long process the “Economic Community” decided to become a “Union”, the short-term objectives have prevented Europe from exercising its influence as a great ally. Allies, friends are those who give advice and say what they are thinking. To-date, secondary factors –principally of a commercial and economic nature– have prevented the emergence of a Europe that is destined to play a relevant role if the Atlantic continues as a principal nexus. China, Japan, India, Brazil ...wield too much influence for us to think that, no matter what, all new roads will pass through our territory.

We have a duty to remember. To have a memory of the past and, above all, a memory of the future. We must constantly seek to foresee the possible scenarios of tomorrow, so that we can fulfill our responsibility to choose what is best for our children, even though this may require many changes.

We likewise have a duty to look to the present, so that events such as those that take place daily in the Middle East can immediately be stopped. No one should have carte blanche, especially when invoking human rights... The living –and the dead– are worth the same, and it is not fair to count only those on one side.

Recent experience has shown that we know well when and how wars commence, but we never know when and how they will end.

Let us all take sides for “preventive peace”. Let us prepare for peace by:

- Preventing violence in our homes, our cities, our communities, countries, and in the world.
- Retaking control of government at the global level and subjecting the market to universal ethical principles.
- Achieving, in a great worldwide movement, the eradication of hunger in the world, taking specific actions in favor of those who today, in Ethiopia and in other countries, are dying of hunger and neglect.
- Efficiently coordinating actions that will prevent children and adolescents from being subjected to illness, oppression, ignorance, and diseases that today can be prevented and cured.
- Promoting scientific research, especially to be able to combat the diseases that still today decimate a large part of humanity living in deplorable unsanitary conditions, improving access to preventive, curative and palliative health systems.
- Making protection of the environment and observance of the Earth Charter daily commitments in the lives of all of the world’s citizens, municipal authorities, parliamentarians and government leaders, ensuring the availability of appropriate means and

mechanisms for coordination, to enable us to react in the face of natural or man-made catastrophes.

- Rapidly strengthening the United Nations, providing it with the human and financial resources needed to establish the required worldwide codes of conduct, through (environmental, cultural, economic and ethical) Security Councils and to ensure compliance with them on behalf of all nations.
- Incorporating into domestic law the most relevant Declarations and Recommendations of the “Summits”, which during the 1990s addressed different dimensions of education, science, social development, the participation of women, tolerance and the respect for and conservation of nature, etc.
- Implementing the International Criminal Court, with all of the necessary guarantees that its actions will be effective and with all of the mechanisms required to ensure its democratic operations.

Being “peace-ready” means supporting:

- Security forces equipped with the human resources and technological means to ensure compliance with the laws emanating from democratic states, to thus reduce with those means the sources of violence and terrorism.

- Endogenous development on a worldwide scale, with investments and technology transfer that would eliminate the present inequalities.
- The establishment, with the collaboration of universities and research institutes, of prospective institutions, which at the national and international level would enable us to anticipate phenomena and potentially-irreversible processes.
- Means of expression through which citizens the world over can overcome the formidable barriers of the present communications media, to enable their voices, proposals and protests to be heard by government leaders and parliamentarians.

To become “peace-ready”, to accelerate the popular non-violence movement, so that intellectual, academic and humanitarian organizations and communities of all persuasions do not remain silent, but rather that their voices may be capable of prompting the changes required to brighten the dark horizons that we presently have to leave for our children.

We know the price of war and it is much higher than the price of peace. Let’s prepare for peace as we have in the past prepared for war. We have lived, combat-ready, in a culture base on force. Let’s change the old saying to “if you want peace, prepare for it with your actions each day”. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, let us “beat our swords into

ploughshares”. Let us work toward a culture of peace, dialogue and understanding, and become “peace-ready”.

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