

Speech of Federico Mayor (former President of UNESCO)
Humanity in a Changing Social Context

Mr. Chairperson, first of all I would like to offer my congratulations to you and the Ku Leuven for this endeavour because today more than ever, we need ethical guidance. I think that your initiative is very timely, as we have already heard from the previous speakers, who represent different institutions which are devoted to these principles and ethical values, that should guide, the world, particularly now in the present turmoil of our times, instead of leaving the destiny of humanity in the hands of the so-called “market”. Therefore I wish to express my gratitude to you all for your commitment to developing an ‘ethical sense’.

I am a European, a citizen of the world and I have been a member of this parliament in 1987. And I think that we must act from Europe to the world, in the fostering of values and principles.

Europe has a network of hundreds of universities and we are in a moment in which we must raise our voices: we have been too silent in the public forum. I give the example of Joseph Stiglitz, in his very important recent book, after his experience as an economic advisor to the US government and as vice-president of the World Bank, he can say, perhaps better than we, that we must now raise the voice and take advantage of high-tech in order to promote a higher ‘human touch’. High tech or high touch ? We must take advantage of the very powerful networks that we have today, such as the Internet, in order to promote humanity and to give a voice to the voiceless, world wide.

Each human being is unique, and this is our hope. There is endless diversity. I am a bio-chemist and for 26 years lead an important group in a Centre of Molecular biology and I was fascinated as a scientist by the uniqueness of the biology of each human being. But afterwards I was even more fascinated by the unique intellectual capacity of human beings to create, which goes beyond the reach of experimental sciences. Each human being has the ability to think, to create, to invent. These are the distinctive capacities of each human being. They are our hope. For this reason we must remain constantly awake, committed and involved in order to avoid losing will and devotion, and to become puppet on a string. We cannot rest a single moment, we don’t have time to rest, because education is vital to our humanity and to becoming oneself.

By the Commission which was chaired by Jacques Delors, we were given four pillars of education: learn to know, learn to live together, learn to be, learn to listen. We must learn to think for ourselves and not to be guided by ideas that come sometimes from very far platforms of mediatic power. So we need time to think and to be ourselves. Education is to be able to argue in favour of our own views and of our beliefs, to reach in our long life-process what I call 'personal sovereignty'. We are always talking about national sovereignty, but we must learn ~~about~~ this capacity to be ourselves.

Families, the mothers and fathers, first of all, are really crucial to the education process of humanity. Books and schools, technology and audiovisuals come next. They are important but they only transmit information, not knowledge. There is only one true pedagogy, and that is the pedagogy of example. We have a saying in Spain: «it is much better to have one good example, than to have one hundred sermons. »

What we must realise, is that we cannot try to educate if we say one thing in the school and then the exact opposite is lived out, immediately afterwards, in the environment of the home. Otherwise we will not have this 'personal sovereignty' through education. Those who have access to the new technologies, which are wonderful tools, if adequately used, risk also becoming screen-driven. Progressively, they only do what they see on the screen – the screen of the Internet, the screen of the television, the screen of videos and electronic games. They have no time to think or reflect, no capacity to argue or to defend their own views. Progressively, we learn without points of reference, without compass. We are without compass ... and compassion. And compassion is essential to fostering the ethically- driven world, which is our dream.

More than ever before, especially in light of the events of 11 September, 2001, we feel the need for ethical principles at all levels in our everyday behaviour, at the public and professional level, in the media and environmental issues. We have laws at the national level, but at the level of the supra-national, the global village level, there is no justice, there are no codes of conduct, there is the 'jungle' of traffic of all kinds: of arms, of drugs, of capital and of *people*, with complete impunity. After the cold war there is a growing contradiction between democracy at national level and oligarchies, or if you prefer, plutocracy at the world. The United States **scalr**. I expected to be the leader of human rights not only fail to follow the United Nations conventions and agreements but is trying to obtain by all means immunity for themselves before the international courts of justice. It is therefore urgent to have this unique ethical frame at

the worldwide level and to avoid this impunity, to reform the United Nations system, the only existing ethical and legal frame at world scale, that instead of being strengthened it is being progressively weakened, in the last twenty years. In these times of turbulence, the European Union, which is still more an “economic community” than a “union”, appears to be in general, unprepared to be friendly and fair at the same time with the US. They do not dare to tell their friends, their allies, what are their plans and their thoughts. These alliances cannot work without common principles or shared values. And the allies must behave as good partners and not as servants. Only a good friend of yours will dare to tell you what he or she really thinks. This is a good friend or partner. And to dare is necessary to believe.

I remember many years ago, at the end of the 50s, how impressed I was by the phrase of *Albert Camus*, ‘I disregard them because they can, but they do not dare’. When I was in Oxford, and working with a Nobel laureate, a fantastic personality, not only in the scientific sector but as a human being, *Professor Hans Krebs?*, I remember when I first arrived in Oxford as a young professor, noticing the emblem of Oxford, ‘You must dare to know’(*sapere aude*). After some years in Oxford, I was also convinced of the opposite, not only must you dare to know, but you must know to dare. You must learn to dare, and we must dare more if we are really friends. If we have ethical principles, then we cannot remain silent. And Europe and the European Union, must dare to tell those with whom they share many principles, to tell them their thoughts and their positions.

An ethical approach, in my view, has two pillars: we must remember and we must compare. We must keep our memory of the past, of all what has happened (for example in the USSR, in South Africa, in El Salvador, Mozambique and Guatemala...). We must take these events into account because five or ten years ago, many people thought that evolution was impossible, that things would never change - apartheid, oppression.. –. We must have memory to be able to defend positions. These countries have changed. So we must have memory of what has happened in Vietnam, in Kosovo, in Rwanda... Memory of the past is necessary in order to drive better towards the future. We must learn the lessons of the past in order to be able to build a better future.

One of the most relevant issues of recent memory is the imbalance between the security and freedom. The security of peace is what we want and not the peace of security. We know very well what the ‘peace of security’ has brought over the years. We want the security of peace. We

want it for all the peoples of the world and not just for the privileged few. All are entitled to live in a 'land of the free and a home of the brave.

We must keep in mind a memory of the past and a memory of the future. Because the future is not yet written. We must not allow anybody to write the future, because this belongs to our children and to our children's children. The only gift we can give to the coming generations, is to give to them our experience, but we cannot change the past. The past has already been written, but we can allow the children to write the future in a different manner. We must not allow anyone to write the future on behalf of our children.

In 1945, the United States was the founder of the United Nations (Breton Woods, San Francisco), and they started the charter with the peoples.... "They were brave and lucid enough to say that 'We the peoples, have resolved to save the succeeding generations from the horror of war'. "We, the peoples" because they realised that we must be together, all the countries, all the voices.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved, a very important ethical horizon for the world as a whole. In 1954 it was very clear that the key is to be able to better share the resources of the world, and the debates on development started in the General Assembly. For many years the question was to define how this "development" should take place. And I remember that in the beginning the debate was about integral development, which means social, cultural as well as economic development.

In the decade of the 1970's the emphasis was on endogenous development. Later on, under the stewardship of Gro Harlem Brundtland, the emphasis was on sustainable development. Finally at the end of the 80's, Richard Jolly, the deputy administrator of UNICEF promoted development with a human face. Up to this moment we were only talking about facets of development, forgetting that human beings are the protagonists and beneficiaries of development. I must tell you that no meetings on social development took place. There was at the initiative of Denmark in 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of UN, that an important Summit on social development took place in Copenhagen. It asked for no more declarations or resolutions, rather for commitments. After some months we had forgotten the commitments and we realised that after 50 year, the meetings of ECOSOC were mostly about economics but not much about social problems. Most commitments were

not honoured. Commitments for example, to promote endogenous development in the poorest countries, were not met.

The gap between the 'haves and have nots' has increased. The United Nations has become more and more overburdened with humanitarian assistance, with political rather than ethical and legal codes of conduct. And the G8 took over world governance and leadership. Instead of 'We, the peoples', now we have 'We, the powerful'. And again in imposition and force. The transition from a culture of force to a culture of dialogue and understanding, needs to take fully into account the following main issues: globality – to have a global vision is crucial to a meaningful sense of common destiny and of otherness. We are more than six billion people on this planet, and we must remind ourselves that they are all our brothers and sisters, human beings with rights and dignity.

Second, complexity – we must accept that reality is very complex and we must adopt a transdisciplinary and interactive approach to problem-solving. In my view it is essential to know in-depth what reality is in order to transform it. We cannot change if we do not know exactly what we are doing, and what is the reality that lies sometimes behind the perception that we have, very superficial. A good example: I have had many, to talks about Africa. I know Africa very well and I admire the wisdom of Africa, particularly of the women who have been suffering so much for so many years. Sometimes the views, often expressed in goodwill by many people, do not reflect a real answer to the question: to whom does Africa belong? Their resources, all what they have, are really of Africa or of the international corporations? It is an important question to answer from an ethical perspective because we cannot expect Africans to transform a reality that does not, for the greater part, belong to them. Humanity therefore links all human beings in the global village and we must learn to view everyone in the village as our brothers.

The third point is anticipation. I think that along with globality and complexity, today we have a predictive capacity and therefore we also have a preventive capability. And in this regard, one of the most important aspects of a university today is to be a *watchdog*, to be on the alert for the whole community and to design the synergies of the future. Prevention is invisible but it is the great victory. We must be able to avoid conflicts as much as possible and it is a humble and unrewarding task because no one will thank you for preventing something happening.

Accountability is the other point, to oneself – one's conscience and to others. And this is one point that I would like to strengthen today, in light of the transfer of responsibilities from decision-makers to the market. I

was astonished, as a scientist, as the Director General of UNESCO, as an intellectual, to hear one of the leaders of the world say, in 1996, that not only must we have a market economy, but a market society and market democracy!. This is a transfer of responsibility. We have voted for our leaders because we thought that they had some principles to guide their actions, yet afterwards they say: “No, it’s the market, we put all this weight on the shoulders of the market”. And this is not accountable. Neither are parents accountable who transfer the full task of education to schools.

There is not ethical leadership if duties and responsibilities are not fully assumed. Decision-making must be oriented by values. How can we accept in business and economy, “creative” accountability?. It’s a contradiction in terms. Accountability goes precisely against creating. To count is to count and to account is to account. You can “interpret”, of course, but we cannot have this immense shock of bubbles being burst because accountability has been substituted by fiction.

And, finally, safeguard and promote human diversity. I think that in a time of globalisation such as ours, we must safeguard diversity. Endless diversity, uniqueness, are our great riches as human beings. United by some values and some beliefs that transcend ourselves, this is our strength.

Just as we should be concerned about human cloning, we must also be concerned about ‘spiritual cloning’. Because we realise that there is a trend of uniformisation which is just the opposite of education and of being a unique human being. As a scientist I have always been concerned by the relationship of science with power. And I wrote a book some years ago, precisely on this issue. I realise that the silence or the capacity of the scientific community to speak loudly in the community depends on the values that we defend. Later on, with a group of others, I co-authored a book on science and values. We have made, since then, what I consider to be some good steps in this direction with the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome, being just one example. I might express here my admiration for the way in which Noelle Lenoir, whom I appointed as the chairperson of the world Committee on bio-ethics was able to reach a consensus. It is one of the very few declarations of the UN that was adopted unanimously. It states very clearly that there must be a limit between the feasible and the admissible. So there are clear limits between knowledge and the application of knowledge. Knowledge is always positive, but we can apply knowledge in a very negative way, even in a perverse way.

Ethics means our daily behaviour, as we are inspired by our own answers to the fundamental questions which are reflected in our deepest feelings and thoughts. It is in the exact mid-point between darkness and light, evolving in many aspects, but remaining always a call that is the spiritual pillar of our lives. It is for this that all human rights are indivisible and the right to live is the pre-condition for the exercise of all the other rights. And therefore it is crystal clear that those who try to impose their views violently, by killing, cannot claim for any other particular rights.

All beliefs are based on love. I remember that in 1994, I convened a meeting of several different religious traditions at the highest level, and there was only one question: "Your religion would justify the use of violence?". The answer was no, they were unanimous. Well, we know very well the answer that transcends this "No": this is the answer given by the gospels.

We will always have people in this world of over six billion, who rage against injustice and we cannot remain silent when we know the invisible genocide of those who die every day of hunger, or when we see children in the street, abandoned, or those living in poor housing conditions, we cannot remain silent.

Our European Union has a role to raise the voice of democracy, to be its watchtower, to pave new ways of early warning of preventative measures based on ethical values and principles.

We need today more than ever, to build a culture of dialogue and peace. We are in a parliament, a word which comes from *parole*, to talk, and we are here for the utilisation of that word. But you know what has happened now, we have added an 's' to that word, so that we have 'swords' instead of 'words'. We prefer the word. We want the parliament to be the place in which the critical issues are discussed. And with dialogue to substitute imposition. And to instil with ethical principles all the decision-making in which the ethical values are taken into account by the decision-makers, in order not to transfer responsibilities in which every human being with his or her own conscience can say: "I have done my best to change and transform our present reality".

Thank you very much.

Johan Verstraeten : The French Philosopher, Paul Ricoeur once said that an ethicist should be an agent of memory, and what you have done is in a

very personal way and with real freedom, brought into memory some basic ideas and values which we risk forgetting. One of them is, as you said, accountability. Also to keep the global village permanently in our minds, and warned us against spiritual cloning, a theme which we have not worked out well in our ethical discussions. Thank you very much for your wisdom.