

## **The role of Higher Education in fostering the culture of dialogue and understanding**

**Opening keynote address, by Federico Mayor Zaragoza, President, Culture of Peace Foundation, Former Director-General of UNESCO, Co-Chair of the High Level Group United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Spain**

Beirut, Lebanon, 5th of November, 2009 - IAU (International Association of Universities) -  
NDU (Notre Dame University)

Prof. Juan Ramón de la Fuente, President of the International Association of Universities.

Father Walid Moussa, President of Notre Dame University,

Director General of Higher Education of Lebanon,

Madame Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary General of IAU

Dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I'm particularly happy to be again in Beirut, where one of the founding General Conferences of UNESCO was held, where many lessons were learned, and have been learned afterwards. All the city claims for dialogue instead of confrontation - The word instead of violence. Beirut is the symbol for the future in which we dream, the transition from force to word.

Let me start reading the first paragraph of the Earth Charter: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations."

At the end of the Charter, in "The Way Forward", it is said: "As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning... This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility... Our culture diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision... In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life".

A new beginning!

The key word to achieve this is education. Education to build peace, to foster dialogue, understanding. "To build peace in the minds of men"... as it is enshrined in the UNESCO's Constitution, through education, culture, science, communication.

Education is much more than information, formation and training... Education is to be oneself, is to behave according with our own reflection... is to choose according to our own decisions. To be educated is to be able to feel free of any kind of dependence, of submission, of fear. It is

to be able to create, to think, to imagine, to dream... the distinctive capacities of the human condition.

According to the Jacques Delors' Commission that I appointed in 1992, as Director General of UNESCO, there are four pillars in the education process:

- learn to know
- learn to do
- learn to be
- learn to live together.

And we can add: learn to dare. And learn to share!

For many years UNESCO's Programme of Education was "literacy and basic education". At the request of President Nyerere Mwalimu (teacher) of Tanzania, we were able, in a joint venture with UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank, to establish in the World Congress held in Jomtien, in Thailand in 1990, to turn it in "education for all throughout life".

Higher education is the higher level of the educational process throughout life.

Higher education institutions have the capacity and the social responsibility to advise Society, Governments, Parliaments, Municipalities...

And, even more, as it was emphasized in the World Conference on Higher Education, that took place in 1998 in UNESCO Headquarters, to be a *watch tower*, to anticipate, to prevent!

It is only with this kind of higher education that we can envisage to promote a culture of dialogue and understanding. The universities can overcome the immense power of the media that prevents or reduces substantially the dissemination and impact of our declarations, recommendations and resolutions.

For instance, recently, UNESCO celebrated the ten years of the World Conference on Higher Education...and there was not a single reference in the newspapers, and in the media at large. We are not news...because we often disagree and, also, because we are too silent too often.

Higher education is necessary to face the danger of progressive *uniformization*. To be all different, all unique in each moment of our life, is our richness. To be united by universal values is our force. Let us be permanently aware of our infinite cultural diversity, all together with the same ethical references of a Humanity committed to its common destiny.

Dialogue means to fully express our views (as expressed in Article number 1 of the UNESCO's Constitution) and to listen to the others. Dialogue is to respect the views completely opposite to our own ideas, to interact with all partners, with only one exception: fanaticism, dogmatism, imposition, violence.

All different, holding hands, joining our voices, as a demonstration of brotherhood, otherness and fraternity, so lucidly established in the Article number 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*All together, all educated, all committed with the future generations.*

Higher education to tirelessly favour intercultural and interreligious dialogue: encounter, conversation, conciliation, alliance.

Let us recover the United Nations basic principles: "We, the peoples... have resolved to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war". We, the civil society, have governance capacity, through a genuine democratic system, to "avoid war", this means, to build peace. And how to build peace? The answer is found in UNESCO's Constitution, approved in London only four months after the Charter of the UN was adopted in San Francisco: "As war begins in the minds of men it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be built". Building peace through education, culture, science and communication, in order to provide all humans with free wings to fly in the unlimited space of the spirit.

In UNESCO's Constitution, the key concept of *equal human dignity* is one of the basics pillars of the "democratic principles" of justice, equality and solidarity - "intellectual and moral solidarity" – that are established in UNESCO's Constitution, in order to be able, as established in Article number 1, to ensure that educated human beings are "free and responsible".

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948, provides all the ways to behave to respect the equal human dignity. It is indispensable, therefore, to *better share*, not only material goods but knowledge and experience. Not only knowledge, but wisdom. In order to better share, the concept of development was progressively discussed in the United Nations: in the sixties, it was decided that development must be not only economic but social, must be integral; in the seventies it appeared that it must be *endogenous* as well, and in October 1974 an agreement was reached by which the most prosperous countries should provide the 0,7% of the GNP to the development of the countries in need; in the eighties, the Commission chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, introduced the concept of sustainability and, at last, in 1989, the publication by Richard Jolly, Deputy Administrator of UNICEF, author of the book "*Development with a Human Face*" (1998), emphasised the main feature of development: it must be *human*, because human beings are not only the beneficiaries but the main actors of development for equal quality of life.

Regretfully, today's societies favour States instead of "peoples"; Loans instead of aids; Exploitation instead of cooperation; Plutocracy (G-7, G-8...) instead of democracy; Market laws instead of values.

Even if marginalised and weakened, the United Nations System has been permanently a guidance aiming at promoting understanding and conciliation, at facilitating the transition from a culture of imposition, domination, violence and war to a culture of dialogue, alliance, peace. A transition, in summary, *from force to word*.

Oui, de la force a la parole...

Les Recommandations, Déclarations, Résolutions et Initiatives du Système des Nations Unies ont été nombreuses. Je considère important de présenter un résumé de ses contributions depuis 1990, parce que durant tout le période de la « globalisation », pendant laquelle les « ploutocrates » ont essayé de se substituer à « Nous, les peuples... », le Système de Nations Unies nous a fourni quand même des grands points de repère :

- 1990 : Education pour tous
- 1992 : Agenda 21 pour l'Environnement
- 1993 : Education pour la démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme
- 1993 : Conférence de Vienne sur les Droits de l'Homme
- 1994 : Dialogue interreligieux et culture de paix (Barcelone)
- 1995 : Déclaration sur la tolérance
  - Déclaration pour développement social (Copenhague)
  - Femme et développement (Beijing)
- 1998 : Déclaration sur le dialogue des civilisations (AG-NU)
- 1998 : Décennie des Nations Unies sur l'éducation pour une culture de paix et de la non violence (AG-NU)
- 1999 : Déclaration et programme d'action pour une culture de paix
- 2000 : Objectifs du Millénaire (AG-NU)
  - Charte de la Terre (Amsterdam)
- 2001 : Déclaration sur la Diversité Culturelle (UNESCO).

Au sommet des Nations Unies en 2005, les Chefs d'État et de Gouvernement ont décidé unanimement de mettre en œuvre la Déclaration et le Programme d'Action de la Culture de la Paix, le Plan d'Action du Dialogue des Civilisations et ont souhaité la bienvenue à l'Alliance des Civilisations.

Récemment, les Nations Unies et les grandes Institutions du Système, ont aussi contribué avec des recommandations de grande importance :

- A/Res/63/113 on a Culture of Peace, 26 Feb. 2005.
- Charter for a World without Violence (2009)
- European encounter of Religious Leaders  
Lille Declaration on a Culture of Peace, 27/05/2009
- Adopting a consensus resolution, the General Assembly affirms mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue as important dimensions of culture of peace. G.A./10784, 13 /Nov. 2008.
- 13 Nov. 2008, Department of Public Inf. GA on interreligious dialogue.
- The Hague Agenda on City Diplomacy, 13/05/2008.
- ECRL Interreligious Declaration on a Culture of Peace (2007)...

C'est pour vous dire que nous avons déjà toutes les Résolutions. Déclarations.... Maintenant, il est temps d'agir sans plus tarder.

Nous avons tous les diagnostics... et désormais il faut donner le traitement adéquat et à temps !

Le Monde de la « globalisation » a conduit à une situation de crises multiples (financière, environnementale, démocratique, éthique, alimentaire...) extrêmement grave. Sans régulation, avec des paradis fiscaux... les « globalisateurs », les ploutocrates, ont amené le monde à une situation de déchirement social et pauvreté extrême. Ils nous ont, en plus, menti pour envahir des pays, pour augmenter encore plus la gigantesque industrie belliqueuse : le résultat est qu'aujourd'hui, chaque jour, les dépenses en armement sont d'environ 3 milliards de dollars quand, chaque jour, au moins 60,000 êtres humains meurent de faim, la plus part d'enfants ! C'est une honte collective insoutenable !

Toute crise peut être une opportunité de changement.

Yes, all crises can be an opportunity of change, of radical transformations, particularly when there is an in depth reaction to the incoherent behaviour of world governance: for instance, there was no money in the year 2000 for the Objectives of the Millennium, for food, for AIDS treatment... but suddenly, hundreds of billions of dollars have appeared to “rescue” the same institutions that – “because their greed and irresponsibility”, in the words of President Obama – led to the present situation.

Now, we can not remain silent, obedient, indifferent... anymore.

No longer spectators, but participatory actors.

No longer receptors but aware, committed, involved citizens.

No longer dormant but very alive!

We have been submitted until the point of offering our life to the power's designs.

Now, for the first time in history, we have the possibility of distant participation (SMS, Internet...).

The universities, the scientific community, the intellectuals and artists, the writers... must lead this new era of freedom, of emancipation, of genuine democracy.

They must be at the forefront of the citizenship mobilization to ensure the transition from force to dialogue and understanding.

A new era can start. A new beginning!