



UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE WORLD FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

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Opening Session Address of

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My dear Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, Brothers and Sisters all, We, the representatives of States and Governments of the world, are meeting at the United Nations because we are going through a most singular moment in human history when our common future is at stake. We are citizens of different nations, and the same time, we are citizens of the planet; we all have multiple and interdependent relationships with each other.

NOAH'S ARK THAT SAVES US ALL

At this critical moment, we must all join our efforts to prevent the global crisis, with its myriad faces, from turning into a social, environmental and humanitarian tragedy. The challenges of the various crises are all interconnected and oblige us all, as representatives of the peoples of the Earth, to declare our responsibility one to another, and that together, with great hope, we will seek inclusive solutions. What better place than this United Nations General Assembly Hall to do so. This is the hall of world democratic inclusiveness par excellence, the Headquarters of the G-192. Obviously, each State has the option of determining its level of participation, in accordance with the importance it attaches to the topic of each meeting.

It is neither humane nor responsible to build a Noah's Ark only to save the existing economic system, leaving the vast majority of humanity to their fate and to suffer the negative effects of a system imposed by an irresponsible but powerful minority. We must take decisions that affect us all collectively to the greatest extent possible, including the broad community of life and our common home, Mother Earth.

OVERCOMING THE PAST AND BUILDING THE FUTURE

First of all, we must overcome an oppressive past and forge a hopeful future. It must be acknowledged that the current economic and financial crisis is the end result of an egoistical and irresponsible way of living, producing, consuming and establishing relationships among ourselves and with nature that involved systematic aggression against Earth and its ecosystems and a profound social imbalance, an analytical expression that masked a perverse global social injustice. In my opinion, we have reached the final frontier. We seem to have reached the end of the road travelled thus far, and if we continue along this way, we could arrive at the same destiny which has already befallen the dinosaurs.

Therefore, controls and corrections of the existing model, while undoubtedly necessary, are insufficient in the medium and long term. Their inherent ability to address the global crisis has proven to be weak. Stopping at controls and corrections of the model would demonstrate a cruel lack of social sensitivity, imagination and commitment to the establishment of a just and lasting peace. Egotism and greed cannot be corrected. They must be replaced by solidarity, which obviously implies radical change. If what we really want is a stable and lasting peace, it must be absolutely clear that we must go beyond controls and corrections of the existing model to create something that strives towards a new paradigm of social coexistence.

From this perspective, it is essential to seek what the Earth Charter calls "*a sustainable way of life*". This implies a shared vision of the values and principles promoting a particular way of inhabiting this world that guarantees the well-being of present and future generations. As great as the danger we all face from the convergence of these various problems is, the opportunity for salvation that the global crisis is helping us or forcing us to discover is even greater.

We have built a globalized economy. Now is the time to create globalized policy and ethics based on the many cultural experiences and traditions of our peoples.

MOTHER EARTH AND GLOBAL ETHICS

A new ethic assumes a new way of seeing. In other words, a different vision of the world also creates a different ethic, a new way for us to relate.

The viewpoint that comes to us from the so-called earth sciences, that the Earth is contained within a vast, complex and evolving cosmos, must be incorporated. This Mother Earth, the term approved by the General Assembly this past 22 April, is alive. Mother Earth regulates herself, maintaining the subtle equilibrium among the physical, chemical and biological in such a way that life is always favoured. She produces a unique community of life from which the community of human life — humanity — emerged, as the aware and intelligent part of the Earth herself. This contemporary concept agrees with the ancestral vision of humanity and of the native peoples for whom the Earth always was and is venerated as Mother, Magna Mater, Inana, Tonantzin, as the Náhuatl of my country, Nicaragua, call it, or Pacha Mama, as the Aymaras in Bolivia name it.

There is a growing awareness that we are all sons and daughters of Earth and that we belong to her. As President Evo Morales has reminded us many times, she can live without us, but we cannot live without her. Our mission as human beings is to be the guardians and caretakers of the vitality and integrity of Mother Earth. Unfortunately, because of our excessive consumption and wastefulness, Earth has exceeded by 40 per cent her capacity to replace the goods and services she generously offers us.

This vision of the living Earth is attested to by the astronauts who, from their spacecraft, acknowledged in wonder that Earth and humanity constituted a single reality. They were experiencing what is known as the “overview effect,” the perception that we are so united with the Earth that we ourselves are the Earth: the Earth that feels, thinks, loves and worships.

This perspective gives rise to respect, veneration and a sense of responsibility and care for our common home, attitudes that are extremely urgent in the face of the current general degradation of nature. From this new perspective a new ethic is born. A new way for us to relate with all those who live in our human abode and with the nature that surrounds us. Today, ethics are either global or they are not ethics.

AXIOMS OF AN ETHICS OF THE COMMON GOOD

The first affirmation of this global ethic consists in declaring and safeguarding the common good of the Earth and humanity. We will start with the assumption that the community of peoples is simultaneously a community of common goods. These cannot be appropriated privately by anyone and must serve the life of all in present and future generations and the community of other living beings.

The common good of humanity and the Earth is characterized by *universality* and *freedom*. That is to say, all persons, peoples and the community of life must be universally involved. No one and nothing can be excluded from this global common good. Furthermore, by its nature, it is freely offered to all and therefore, cannot be bought or sold nor be an object of competition. Moreover, it must be continuously available to all, otherwise the common good would no longer be common.

What are the fundamental goods that constitute the common good of humanity and the *Earth*? The first is undoubtedly the Earth itself. Who does the Earth belong to? The Earth belongs, not to the powerful who appropriate its goods and services, but to all the ecosystems that make up the whole. It is a gift of the universe that arose out of our Milky Way from an ancestral sun which disappeared long ago which was at the origin of our sun around which the Earth revolves as one of its planets. By virtue of the fact that it is alive and generated all living beings, it has dignity (*dignitas Terra*). This dignity demands respect and veneration and endows it with rights: the right to be cared for, protected and maintained in a condition where it is able to continue producing and reproducing lives.

We still need to recognize that the globalized means of production, in their industrial voracity, have in large measure devastated the Earth and thus have also damaged the common good of Earth and humanity. We must urgently seek other paths that are more humane and more favourable towards life: the paths of justice and solidarity which lead to peace and happiness.

Next we have the Earth's biosphere as the common heritage of all life, with humanity as its guardian. It belongs to the common good of humanity and the Earth, as stated at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment: “the natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems.”

Water, oceans and forests in particular belong to the common good of humanity and the Earth. Water is a natural resource that is common, essential and for which there is no substitute, and all have the right of access to it independent of the costs involved in its collection, storage, purification and distribution, which will be borne by governments and society. Therefore, the eagerness to privatize it and turn it into merchandise that can bring in plenty of money is of great concern to us. Water is life, and life is sacred and should not be traded. This Assembly wishes to support efforts to conclude an International Water Covenant for collective management that will guarantee this vital resource to all.

The same can be said of forests, especially tropical and sub-tropical forests, where the greatest biodiversity and humidity necessary to Earth's vitality are concentrated. The forests prevent climate change from making life on the planet impossible

by capturing major amounts of carbon dioxide. Without forests there would be no life and no biodiversity. The oceans serve as the great repository of life, regulate the climate and balance the physical and chemical base of the Earth. Forests and oceans pose questions of life, not just the environment.

The Earth's climates belong to the common good of humanity and the Earth. General Assembly resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988 on "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind" recognizes that climates are a common concern of mankind since "climate is an essential condition which sustains life on earth." The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, best known by its English acronym IPCC, believes that "climate change affects humanity as a whole and should be confronted within a global framework of shared responsibility."

But the greatest common good of humanity and the Earth is humanity as a whole. It has supreme intrinsic value and represents an end in itself. It is part of the kingdom of life, highly complex, capable of consciousness, sensitivity, intelligence, creative imagination, love and openness to All. In all cultures the clear perception exists that humanity bears an inviolable dignity. Those who wage war and build instruments of death that can eliminate human life from the face of the Earth and severely damage the biosphere are committing crimes against humanity.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, we must wait no longer. We must proceed without delay to the complete abolition of nuclear weapons, not simply their reduction or non-proliferation. A standard of zero tolerance for nuclear weapons must be established urgently and decisions in this area can no longer be deferred. We are living at a propitious time for this and we must not fail to take advantage of it. Neither can the world continue to tolerate the obscenity of ever more astronomical arms spending while offering absurdly low amounts to lift half of humanity from inexcusable levels of poverty that, furthermore, are a time bomb against all societies. Violence creates violence, and keeping people hungry and at sub-human levels of existence is the worst form of violence.

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING THE CRISIS

At this time in history, with the global crisis and for the sake of the common good of the Earth and humanity, we must take collective short- and medium-term action to keep society functioning on the one hand, and to set a foundation for new forms of sustainable living on the other. Five essential elements could give coherence to new initiatives that seek to construct alternatives and to guide the many practices that will be discussed over the next few days in the General Assembly.

First: the responsible and *sustainable use* of limited natural resources. This means moving beyond exploitation and strengthening a relationship of respect and synergy with nature.

Second: putting the *economy* back in its proper place in society as a whole by abandoning the reductionist vision which had made it the main focus of human coexistence. The economy should respect values but not be a source of values; it should be seen as the activity that lays the foundation for the physical, cultural and spiritual life of all human beings on the planet, while respecting social and environmental norms.

Third: to spread *democracy* to all social relations and institutions. It should not only be applied and strengthened in the political arena, with a new definition of the State and of international organizations, but also extended to the spheres of economics, culture and the relationship between men and women so that it becomes a universal value and democracy is permanent.

Fourth: to build a *minimum ethos* on the basis of multicultural exchange and the philosophical and religious traditions of peoples, so that they can participate in defining the common good of humanity and the Earth and in developing new values.

Fifth: to strengthen a *spiritual vision* of the world that does justice to man's search for a transcendent meaning of life, of the creative work of human beings and of our brief appearance on this small planet.

Personal, social and planetary well-being can only be achieved if these five essential elements are made real. This is made possible by an economy that makes sufficient and decent provision for the whole community, where human beings live in harmony with each other, with nature and with the Whole of which we are a part. These are the foundations for a *biocivilization* which gives a central role to life, the Earth and humanity, whose citizens are sons and daughters of joy rather than of need.

FOUR FUNDAMENTAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

All these challenges cannot be adequately addressed unless we change our minds and our hearts and create space for the emergence and development of other essential aspects of the human being. The exclusive and excessive use of instrumental analytical reasoning in modern times has made us deaf to the call of the Earth and insensitive to the cries of the oppressed who constitute the vast majority of humanity. In the innermost part of our human nature we are beings of love, solidarity, compassion and sharing. This is why we must enhance our analytical reasoning with sensitive, emotional and heartfelt reasoning, which is the source of the values mentioned.

The common good of humanity and the Earth is a dynamic reality that is constantly evolving. Four ethical principles are important for keeping it alive and open to further development.

The first ethical principle is *respect*. Every being has intrinsic value and can serve the good of humanity if guided not by purely utilitarian ethics, such as those which predominate in the current socioeconomic system, but rather by a feeling of mutual belonging, responsibility and conservation of existence.

The second is *care*. Care implies a non-aggressive attitude to reality, a loving attitude which repairs past harm and avoids future harm and, at the same time, extends into all areas of individual and social human activity. If there had been sufficient care, the current financial and economic crisis would not have occurred. Care is intrinsically linked to maintaining life, because when there is no care, life weakens and disappears. The oriental expression of care is *compassion*, which is so needed these days when much of humanity and the Earth itself are being battered and crucified in a sea of sufferings. In a market society which is driven more by competition than cooperation, there is a cruel lack of compassion towards all suffering beings in society and in nature.

The third principle is collective *responsibility*. We are all dependent on the environment and interdependent. Our actions can be beneficial or harmful for life and for the common good of the Earth and humanity. The many crises now occurring are largely the result of a lack of responsibility in our collective projects and practices which has led to a global imbalance in markets and in the Earth system.

The fourth principle is *cooperation*. If we do not all cooperate, we are not going to emerge stronger from the current crises. Cooperation is so essential that in the past it enabled our anthropoid ancestors to make the jump from animality to humanity. When they had food, they did not eat individually but brought everything to share with everyone in the group in cooperation and solidarity. What was essential in the past is still essential in the present.

Lastly, there is a belief which pertains to the common good of humanity, a belief that comes from spiritual traditions and is affirmed by contemporary cosmologists and astrophysicists, that behind the whole universe, every being, every person, every event and even our current crisis, there is a fundamental energy at work, mysterious and ineffable, which is also known as the nurturing source of all being. We are sure that this nameless energy will also act in this time of chaos to help us and empower us to overcome selfishness and take the action needed so there is no catastrophe, but an opportunity for creating and generating new forms of coexistence, innovative economic models and a higher sense of living and living together.

CONCLUSION: THIS IS NOT A TRAGEDY BUT A CRISIS

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my deep conviction that the current scenario is not a tragedy but a crisis. Tragedy has a bad outcome, with an Earth that is damaged, but can continue without us. Crisis purifies us and forces us to grow and find ways to survive that are acceptable for the whole community of life, human beings and the Earth. The pain we now feel is not the death rattle of a dying man but the pain of a new birth. So far we have fully exploited material capital, which is finite, and now we have to work with spiritual capital, which is infinite, because we have an infinite capacity to love, to live together as brothers and to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and the human heart.

As we all have our origin in the heart of the great red stars where the elements that form us were forged, it is clear that we were born to shine our light and not to suffer. And we will shine our light again — that is my strong expectation — in a planetary civilization which is more respectful of Mother Earth, more inclusive of all people and with more solidarity with the poorest, which is more spiritual and full of reverence for the splendour of the universe and which is much happier.

With these words, our discussions at this very important Conference on the world financial and economic crisis have begun. In providing a context for these issues, I wish to emphasize that we will have to set aside all selfish attitudes if we are to take advantage of the opportunities that the current crisis offers. Such attitudes only seek to preserve a system which seems to benefit a minority and clearly has disastrous consequences for the vast majority of the inhabitants of the planet. We must arm ourselves with SOLIDARITY and COOPERATION in order to make a qualitative leap forward to a future of peace and well-being.

Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to conclude this reflection with the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, for this Conference:

"I invoke upon all of the Conference participants, as well as those responsible for public life and the fate of the planet, the spirit of wisdom and human solidarity, so that the current crisis may become an opportunity, capable of favouring greater attention to the dignity of every human being and the promotion of an equal distribution of decisional power and resources, with particular attention to the unfortunately ever-growing number of poor."

Thank you very much.