



World Context and Implications for Higher Education Systems and Institutions: Globalization, Trends and Drivers of Change

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Abstract

For the first time in history, thanks to digital technology, human beings are able to express themselves freely and participate: from passive spectators to actors. They know what is happening on planet Earth as a whole, and are thus becoming world citizens. Women, the cornerstone of the new era, are able to progressively take part in the decision-making process. In this context, universities will not only efficiently contribute to being, to knowing, to doing, to living together and to undertaking, but they will also be at the forefront of the general mobilization needed to pave the way for the transition from a culture of force to a culture of word. In order to develop human capacities exclusively (thinking, imagining, discovering, anticipating, innovating, etc.), the philosophical, humanist and artistic dimensions of higher education are crucial. We should bear in mind the need for a dignified life (food, water, health) and sustainable development for all. To face the main challenges of our times— social inequality, extreme poverty, environmental deterioration, immigration, global citizenship— and make the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace feasible, the world needs higher education of excellence that makes human beings free and responsible in order to reverse present trends. This article points out the main characteristics of globalization and the drivers of change that will have a global impact on society and higher education in the years to come.

1. Introductory Remarks: The Future is to be Invented

Each human being is unique and capable of creativity. This is the great hope for humanity. Until recently, individuals were seen merely as specks in the trajectory of a mankind dominated by absolute masculine power, in which people were invisible, anonymous, silent, fearful, submissive... But now, for the first time in history, humankind has a global conscience, is able to contemplate planet Earth as a whole, in all of its dimensions, and has realized that the future is yet to be written.

Confined both territorially and intellectually, the world's inhabitants have always lived and died in extremely limited spaces. And they have lived in fear, without referents, without the capacity for comparison.

The first phrase in the UN Charter, written in 1945, was extremely lucid in articulating, then and today, the synthesis of how to face the most pressing challenges: 'We the Peoples'.

It does not mention states or governments, but rather ‘Peoples’—peoples who have decided to ‘save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war’. This means that they assume that supreme commitment—so often evoked by President Nelson Mandela—to future generations. *It is the duty of each generation to take the next one into account.* And, once and for all, to enable peace to prevail over war, and words to prevail over force. From the beginning of time, national powers have always followed that perverse adage: ‘If you want peace, prepare for war’. And thus, at the end of World War I the Republican Party prevented the United States from joining the League of Nations which President Wilson had created to implement his ‘Covenant for Permanent Peace’.

“It is the duty of each generation to take the next one into account.”

President Roosevelt’s magnificent plan at the end of World War II placed ‘the Peoples’ at the forefront of history. Moreover, the Constitution of UNESCO, as the United Nations’ intellectual institution, proclaimed that the educated people must be free and responsible, and that they should be guided by the democratic principles of justice, equality and intellectual and moral solidarity. But these ideals, as well as those of the free flow of ideas by word and image, were all too soon ignored and forgotten by the great powers, which invariably had security as their supreme concern.

Three years later, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, asking all member states ‘to publicize the text of the Declaration and to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories’.

The Preamble reads:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the ‘equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family’ is the foundation of justice and peace in the world... the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and ‘freedom from fear and want’ has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people...

In its article 26 the Declaration states that ‘higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’. The reference at this point is to adult citizens, and obligatory or compulsory provisions are excluded. The basis is merit, with respect to all members of the academic community, both professors and students—the merit, dedication, effort and imagination required in order to be fully ‘free and responsible’.

The second paragraph of Article 26 reads:

Education shall be directed to the ‘full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

The excerpts from the Universal Declaration quoted above are especially pertinent at this time when it is quite possible to find rather biased definitions being offered by institutions that specialize in other areas, such as economics, and which should not be interfering in education to promote their own interests.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the buzzwords were ‘sharing’ and ‘international cooperation’. Sharing what we have with others and distributing wealth appropriately were the essence of those ‘democratic principles’ that had to be observed in order to put an end to an era of absolute power. ‘Union makes strength’, and it was necessary for all countries to unite (*United Nations*) to achieve the overall and proportional development that would enable peaceful coexistence at the national and international levels. I recall incessant deliberations about the nature of ‘development’: it should be integral, that is, not limited to merely economic aspects but instead, and most importantly, include social and cultural factors; it should be endogenous; it should be sustainable, according to the definition put forward by the committee chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland; and in the late 1980s—at the behest of UNICEF’s Assistant Administrator, Richard Jolly—development should above all be *human* (Development with a Human Face).

There are some other crucial references to be taken into account: in December 1993 after a very important meeting held in Montreal, Canada, the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy* was adopted. I would like to emphasize to whom it was addressed:

The World Plan of Action is addressed, among others, to: individuals, families, groups and communities, educators, teaching institutions and their boards, students, young people, the media, employers and unions, popular movements, political parties, parliamentarians, public officials, national and international non-governmental organizations, all multilateral and intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations Organization, in particular its Centre for Human Rights, specialized institutions of the United Nations System, in particular UNESCO, and States.

Two years later the World Summit on Social Development was held in Copenhagen to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, together with the summit in Beijing on ‘Women and Development’† and the ‘Declaration of Tolerance’‡ by the General Conference of UNESCO. Approval and implementation of the eight commitments should have been widespread, but, regretfully, this was not the case in a neoliberal context.

Particularly relevant is the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 1999.§ Its article 1 states that:

A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based, among others, on:

* http://www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/342-353.HTM

† <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html>

‡ http://www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/124-129.HTM

§ <http://www.un-documents.net/a53r243a.htm>

- Respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation;
- Full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts;
- Efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations;
- Respect for and promotion of the right to development;
- Respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men;
- Respect for and promotion of the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information;
- Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations.

In order to put these aims into practice, the measures to be adopted in regard to such matters as education, development, freedom of expression and gender equality are provided in the programme. The ‘new beginning’ as proclaimed in the Earth Charter* would be the transition from a culture of oppression, violence and war to a culture of encounter, dialogue, conciliation and peace. ‘The transition from force to words’ is the main goal of humanity at present. Such immense funding is devoted to military expenditure and armament when the majority of humanity is living in extreme poverty.

I would also like to mention the Alliance of Civilizations UN Programme.† The report of the High Level Group was presented to the UN Secretary General on 13 November 2006. Its main fields of action are in education, youth, migration and media.

Here again, the importance and urgency of using these highly relevant documents as guidance for everyday behaviour is clear. Also crucial is the inspirational role of the scientists, political leaders, philosophers, teachers and others who have provided timely warnings for humanity and guidance for action. Taking just the 20th century into account, some particularly relevant figures include Wilson, Roosevelt, Kennedy (‘There is no challenge beyond the reach of the creative capacity of humanity’), Gorbachev and Mandela, among others. The crucial role played by these figures will be highlighted later in this article.

In addition, I consider it important to highlight the intellectual leadership of Aurelio Peccei, the founder of the Club of Rome, which published *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), following the publication of *The Chasm Ahead* (Peccei, 1969), three years earlier. Peccei was particularly skilled in his ability to foresee the future, advocating a position of permanent watchfulness in order to anticipate and prevent calamity.

Also of note are scientists like Albert Einstein (‘only imagination is more important than knowledge’), Bernardo Houssay (‘there is no applied science if there is no science to apply’), Hans Krebs (‘research is to see what others can see and to think what nobody has thought’)

* http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_a/img/02_earthcharter.pdf

† <http://www.unaoc.org/>

and Severo Ochoa ('knowledge to avoid or reduce human suffering'), as well as philosophers such as Edgar Morin, who enlightened us with his wise educational directives (Morin, 1999).

In the early 1990s I commissioned European Community President Jacques Delors to produce the report *Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*,* which was drafted by a committee of prominent professors at all levels, as well as educators, sociologists, artists and philosophers, among others. The report defined the four principal pillars of the educational process: learning to know; learning to do; learning to be; and learning to live together. Among these four, I would like to underscore the principle of 'learning to be'. A century ago Francisco Giner de los Ríos affirmed that 'education is the capacity to sensibly manage one's own life'; indeed, we might say, learning to use the distinctive and infinite powers of the human species: thought, imagination, foresight, creativity. To the Delors Committee's pillars I added 'learning to undertake', since—and I have mentioned this many times—I remember that after a long stay at the Biochemistry Department at Oxford University, whose county coat of arms reads 'Sapere aude' (dare to know), when I returned to Spain I thought that *while daring to know, one must also know how to dare*, since risk without knowledge is dangerous but knowledge without risk is useless. Learn to dare, learn to undertake, to innovate, remembering those mountaineers who once said, 'we did it because we didn't know it was impossible'.

It is time to reflect and to act accordingly. We must ensure that education is available for all throughout life, and be mindful of the social and physical environment in which it operates.

2. Globalization and Present Trends

At the end of the Cold War, when many important events were taking place—for instance, the end of apartheid, the fall of the Soviet Union, the success of various peace processes—the neoliberalism imposed by the US Republican Party, with the support of UK, led to a system based on market laws, the marginalization of the United Nations System and the weakening of the Nation State. This lack of solidarity on a global level formed the basis of the present social disparities.

In fact, the debates in the UN at the time concerning the nature of development were already being overshadowed by the arms race of the super powers, raising the stakes to stratospheric levels. I recall with horror the 'star wars' in which the United States and the Soviet Union were then engaged. 'Star wars!', while most of the rest of the world were engaged in 'starvation', as I saw it written in large letters in a New York street. International cooperation became exploitation; subsidies and loans were granted under draconian conditions; the nation state was progressively weakened in favour of large multinational corporations. At the same time it was the educational institutions, research centres and universities that kept the flame of human progress and ethical values alive.

To endow the current inhabitants of the Earth with the strength they require, now that they may finally cease to be invisible or anonymous, and to provide the stimuli to enable them to work tirelessly for equal human dignity and world governance, encompassing all human

* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001166/116618m.pdf>

beings and not only a privileged few, it is essential to keep in mind the episodes that I have experienced or witnessed, either personally or from the perspective of the university: the Ku Klux Klan and racial segregation in the United States; the lack of freedom and excesses of power in the Soviet Union; apartheid in South Africa; the abominable practices of ‘Operation Condor’ in Latin America; the economic and technological colonialism imposed without hesitation in so many countries in Africa; the craving for domination of the Republican Party led by Ronald Reagan and seconded by UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who replaced the United Nations with groups of plutocrats, and democratic principles with the rules of the marketplace. Although it would appear unthinkable, based solely on their wealth and military power, both leaders intended that a handful of six, seven or eight countries should govern the other 180 countries or more existing at that time. Unthinkable, but true.

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However, the unexpected happened. *The unexpected is our hope.* The unexpected is the best that can be expected of human beings endowed with creativity. Suddenly, a dark-skinned prisoner called Nelson Mandela appeared after 27 years of incarceration without seeking revenge. On the contrary, he emerged with open arms, and, in complicity with another great figure, President Frederik de Klerk, in a few months he ushered in the downfall of apartheid to become the first black president of South Africa, marking the course of a new beginning in that country and in the African continent as a whole.

Also unexpectedly, thanks to Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev’s radical change in the manner of exercising power, and with the symbolic breach of the Berlin Wall, the vast Soviet empire fell, while its members formed the Commonwealth of Independent States and could thus commence their long march towards building regimes based on public liberties and pluralism.

A system that was based on equality, but which had forsaken liberty, had finally fallen. But the alternative, based on liberty but forsaking equality, failed to learn its lesson. Just the opposite, it intensified and imposed rules and standards of conduct on the West in a very peculiar manner.

Nevertheless, in the late 1980s everything pointed to peace. For example, following the end of the Cold War and the racist regime in South Africa, thanks to initiatives supported by UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar, in a few years peace finally came to Mozambique with the wise intervention of President Joaquim Chissano and the Community of Saint Egidio; the civil conflict in El Salvador was resolved at Chapultepec; and the peace process was renewed in Guatemala. Indeed, the late 1980s witnessed a popular demand for peace, a demand that was ignored by those who thought that the moment had come to achieve their dreams of dominance.

The West, particularly Europe, is experiencing the collapse of a system based on an economy of speculation and the delocalization of production—which, above all, has converted China into a huge communist capitalist—and war, whose tragic balance may be summarized by more than 3 billion dollars that are invested daily in military spending and weapons while at the same time at least 20,000 people die of hunger and neglect daily, the majority of whom are children under five years of age.

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However, beyond the confusion gripping Europe, the effects of emerging citizen power are being felt. Latin America, Africa and a few Arab and Asian countries—including India, both qualitatively and quantitatively—are taking a new course and applying original models.

Only twenty years ago it was unimaginable that institutions using socially responsible policies could decisively influence the attitudes and lives of the majority of people. But now, with a global conscience, the growing participation of women in decision-making processes and the new digital technologies, it is possible to initiate the great transitions capable of transforming this era of change into a change of era.

Thanks to digital technology, for the first time in history human beings are able to express themselves freely and participate in events—moving from passive spectators to actors. They are no longer silent, obedient and fearful. They know what is happening on planet Earth as a whole and are becoming world citizens. Above all, women, who form the cornerstone of the new era, are able to progressively take part in decision-making. After a secular male absolute power, every human being, with the distinctive capacity for creativity, will contribute to inventing the future—a future in which humanity will be guided by democratic principles, as enshrined in UNESCO’s Constitution, the only context in which human rights can be fully exercised.

3. Drivers of Change

Citizen participation has always been very weak and the voice of the people, generally barely audible, was neither listened to nor heard. In contrast, today there are many who are capable of making the transition from subjects to citizens, becoming visible, identifiable, bold and unbound. The fundamental mission of universities is to pave the way for this new era, the era of the people.

Higher education means being fully—and at a higher level—free and responsible, as so masterfully defined in Article 1 of the UNESCO Constitution. Free and responsible! This means empowering people who act on their own reflections and not on the dictates of others; who are aware of their rights and obligations; and who fully apply democratic principles at the personal, local, regional and global levels, which is the only context in which human rights may be freely exercised.

During the 1990s, as Director General of UNESCO, I had the opportunity of organizing global conferences on higher education, which provided me with first-hand knowledge of the

sector's essential characteristics and those that must be maintained as our principal reference: the values that are common to all universities in the world. This process culminated in the World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris in 1998,^{*} the conclusions of which are still entirely applicable as models for the foremost academic institutions at the dawn of this new century and millennium.

It was underscored that **'it is essential that we all be autonomous, while being interrelated and interactive'**, so that universities may play their role as intellectual, academic, scientific and cultural leaders, enabling them to achieve universal recognition and to implement human rights within a genuinely democratic framework.

In effect, **universities must tirelessly promote justice, gender equality, sustainability and democracy.** The adequate provision of and investment in lifelong higher education that is accessible to all citizens from the age of emancipation is, as it was so lucidly defined in the Declaration of the Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, **'an irreplaceable element for social progress, the generation of wealth, the strengthening of cultural identities, social cohesion, the struggle against poverty and hunger, the prevention of climate change and the energy crisis, as well as for fostering a culture of peace'**.[†]

Concerning universities as a vital process, point C.6 of the Declaration of the 2008 Regional Conference on Higher Education[‡] is quite significant:

Moving towards the goal of generalized, lifelong higher education requires demanding and providing new content for principles of active teaching, according to which learners are individually and collectively the principal protagonists. Active, permanent, and high-level teaching is only possible if it is closely and innovatively linked to the exercise of citizenship, active performance within the workplace, and access to the diversity of cultures.

We must read and re-read the Declaration because it contains essential recommendations, particularly in Chapters D (Social and Human Values of Higher Education) and E (Scientific, Humanistic and Artistic Education and Comprehensive Sustainable Development).

In order to achieve *a socially responsible university*, among the major questions to be addressed, I would like to highlight the following:

- The policies and perspectives of higher education for a socially responsible university.
- The educational and teaching challenges in training highly-qualified professionals who are committed to society. Universities should demonstrate socially responsible management of the environment, energy and sustainable development.
- The use of information technologies to support the social mission of universities.
- Improvement of the training of educational and health professionals as an expression of socially responsible universities.

^{*} http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm

[†] https://www.iau-hesd.net/sites/default/files/documents/declarationres_ingles.pdf

[‡] Ibid.

- Food security: the responsibility of universities towards society within the contemporary context.

At this point I believe it would be interesting to examine what were considered the great challenges facing higher education 25 years ago and the solutions that were proposed at that time, looking at some of the points that I addressed and the recommendations made at the Europe-Latin America University Conference held in 1987 in Buenos Aires:

- **The genuine wealth of a country has its expression in its capacity for creativity, innovation, and in its capacity to respond to challenges both personally and collectively.**
- The unwavering reason for the university's existence is to bring culture to all citizens.
- New dimensions and change require an attitude of permanent learning.
- **Universities can and must play a fundamental role in providing an accurate analysis of the present and in predicting the future.**
- The quality of its teaching staff is the indisputable essence of a university.
- If you really believe that higher education institutions are the motors of society on whose actions future progress depends, then new national priorities must be established so that education and science receive the financial and social support that they so urgently need.
- **With few exceptions, universities have not fulfilled their role as catalysts for social change.**
- The only requirement for choosing teachers should be their qualifications. And as for students, access to higher education should not be based on their families' economic standing, but rather on their duly accredited efforts and abilities.
- We cannot expect universities to be rebuilt or renewed in a context that is anachronistic and indifferent to any change.
- **Transformation of our universities can only be achieved with the necessary daring and lucid political, social and economic changes.** It is in stimulating and supporting that transformation where universities can play a fundamental role.
- **Universities must become permanent centres for higher learning,** and institutions capable of mobilizing all of their intellectual potential.
- If universities lead the never-ending rebellion against ignorance, and if they still have the strength required to implement the previously mentioned transformations, then universities will be the life blood of all educational activities.

Sonia Bahri rightly quoted from the World Conference on Higher Education, UNESCO 2009*: 'new dynamics [this was the title of the 2009 WCHE] are transforming' higher education functions to 'lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges' and

* UNESCO, World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research For Societal Change and Development (2009)

promote ‘critical thinking and active citizenship’ which ‘would contribute to sustainable development, peace, wellbeing and the realization of human rights’. And she added that:

[A]t both the national and the subregional levels, universities will need to work in synergy and build bridges between the other stakeholders of the public space: policymakers, whose decisions must draw upon research findings, civil society, industry and the media, and not forgetting local populations. This synergy must ensure complementary and sharing for the sake of greater impact.

Yes, higher education is at the forefront of the priorities that scientists must urgently address in close cooperation at the global level*:

- Food. Food production using agriculture, aquaculture and biotechnology and the preservation and suitable distribution of food, promoting as far as possible the local raising of crops and livestock are key to development.
- Water. The appropriate use and management of water resources, agriculture adequately supported by technology, water production through desalination, etc. are essential aspects for ensuring the welfare of all of the Earth’s inhabitants.
- Health. This will undoubtedly become the most important field of scientific research in the next few years, given its increasing focus on the individual. Much progress has been made, but, given that each life is a wonder that must be nurtured with the utmost care, in-depth studies are required in such fields as genetics, epigenetics, autoimmune symptomatology and neurological deterioration due to age. All of these are areas that deserve special attention. Prevention is undoubtedly the top priority, but it is very difficult to find popular support for these areas since they are essentially invisible.
- Environment. For the first time mankind is living in an age in which human activity has a global impact. This is called the ‘anthropocene’ age in reference to the fact that today human beings, given the fantastic development of their creative imaginations, are able to modify parameters that not long ago were beyond their reach. It is now vital that specialists in areas such as energy sources, recapturing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and forecasting the effects of the partial melting of polar icecaps (particularly in the Arctic) should focus their research on adopting measures capable of at least containing or lessening the present rate of environmental deterioration.
- The recent Paris Agreement (12/12/15) is a very important step forward that must now be implemented under the supervision and coordination of the UN System. This is a process in which universities and scientific institutions must play a central role, as its success requires intergenerational solidarity.
- Rapid and coordinated action to reduce the impact of natural disasters (wind, water, fire) is another of the measures demanded by the world’s citizens, alarmed by the immense amounts of money devoted to military spending, while the aid needed to rehabilitate areas devastated by earthquakes or tsunamis and to return the victims to normality is always too little and comes too late.

* Art. ‘Science and Conscience for Radical Change’, *Litoral, Revista de Poesía, Arte y Pensamiento* (2012).

- Education. As is the case with health, water and food, education is a social component of the right to dignity in life—and thus there should be no limitations on access to education at any age. Through learning and studying, human beings are empowered to act on their own reflections, rather than under the influence of ideological or religious dogmas or the dictates of others.
- Peace. In the transition away from a secular culture of war, oppression and violence, the perverse adage ‘if you want peace, prepare for war’, must now be replaced by ‘if you want peace, work to build it each day in your daily lives’. Here again, to achieve a re-founded United Nations and competent world governance, scientists must endeavour to contribute to the development of mechanisms capable of rapidly resolving the inevitable conflicts, using appropriate and modern materials, without threatening life as a whole, as is currently the case with nuclear weapons.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are the great objectives that universities should pursue, using all of their influence and capacity for mobilization, both in the classroom and in cyberspace:

1. A re-founding of the United Nations System, making ‘We, the Peoples’ a reality in a General Assembly—as is already the case in the International Labour Organization, that relic of the League of Nations—in which 50% of the delegates would be representatives from the member countries and 50% from civil society. This would be augmented by a Security Council in which veto rights would be replaced by weighted votes and the addition of an Environmental Council and a Socioeconomic Council.

This has all been well planned: it is now a matter of ensuring that they (especially the Republican Party in the United States) realize that the time for silence and a passive citizenry in the world is over. It is essential to return to the concept of a ‘United Nations’ so that all of us, together, may achieve the great transformations previously mentioned, with particular emphasis on the ‘power of the word’ to demand equal dignity for all human beings.

2. Nuclear disarmament. It is madness for the world to continue under the sword of Damocles represented by nuclear weapons. No excuses can be made concerning reasons of security since nuclear weapons contradict all the norms of a civilized society. Thus, the use of these weapons must cease immediately. If the great majority of the world’s universities were to demand that we usher in a post-nuclear era in situations of conflict, this would be a giant step towards creating that other world which we all desire.
3. Strengthening genuine democracy is the only context in which it is possible to implement human rights to achieve socially responsible universities in the short term. In this respect, universities should familiarize themselves with and contribute to the project for a Universal Declaration on Democracy,* drafted with contributions from Karel Vasak, Juan Antonio Carrillo Salcedo, Mario Soares and others who have distinguished themselves for their knowledge in this field. The institutional support of higher education for this document would be particularly important in order to achieve its consideration and approval by the United Nations. In addition to covering ethical, social and cultural factors, this Declaration also includes economic and international aspects.

* http://www.fund-culturadepaz.org/democracia_eng.php

In terms of organization, there are already multiple associations of higher education institutions at the global and regional levels. But especially now that new digital technologies are bringing us even closer together, despite any physical distance, it would be wonderful if we could collaborate so that higher education institutions become not only places for lifelong learning (especially important given our present rates of longevity), but can also take action to support or reject options that would ultimately and rapidly usher in the previously mentioned transformations, including fulfilling our obligations to future generations, both from a social perspective as well as with respect to protecting the environment. In that regard, it is also interesting to consider the World University Consortium, a project of the World Academy of Art & Science* whose members include the International Association of University Presidents and the Inter-University Center.

In my opinion, one of the current activities related to the World Academy of Art and Science that is particularly relevant is the **'new paradigm', which seeks to formulate alternatives to the present neo-liberal system** and in which the Green Cross Foundation, the Club of Rome and the Foundation for a Culture of Peace, among others, are now participating.

I emphasize that **at this moment in time there is the risk of reaching points of no return**, particularly in terms of social and environment issues. This represents an essential concern because certain measures cannot be postponed. For this reason, the following Joint Declaration† has been launched:

We, individuals and institutions that are profoundly concerned about the Earth's present state, particularly by potentially irreversible social and environmental processes, and about the lack of an effective, democratic multilateral entity respected by all that is essential for world governance at this extraordinarily complex and changing time,

Urge you to adhere to this joint declaration in order to contribute to the rapid adoption of the following measures:

3.1. Environment

The current tendencies, resulting from a deplorable economic system based solely on making fast profits, must be urgently reversed to avoid reaching a point of no return. Both President Obama 'we are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it',—as well as Pope Francis—'...intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us', have with wisdom and leadership warned of the immediate actions that must be taken concerning climate change. We must invent the future. The distinctive creative capacity of human beings is our hope. As Amin Maalouf has highlighted, 'unprecedented situations require unprecedented solutions'.

We live in a crucial moment in the history of mankind in which both population growth and the nature of our activities influence the habitability of the earth (anthropocene).

All other interests must be subordinated to an in-depth understanding of reality. The scientific community, guided by the democratic principles so clearly set forth in the UNESCO Constitution, should counsel political leaders (at the international, regional, national and

* <http://www.worldacademy.org/>

† <https://jointdeclaration.wordpress.com/>

municipal levels) concerning the actions to be taken, not only in their role as advisors, but also to provide foresight. Knowledge to foresee, foresight to prevent.

It is clear that accurate diagnoses have already been made, but they have not led to what is really important: the right and timely treatment.

Communications media and social networks must constantly strive to achieve a resounding outcry, a sense of solidarity and responsibility, adopting personal and collective resolutions at all levels—including radical changes in institutions—capable of halting the current decline before it is too late.

3.2. Social Inequality and Extreme Poverty

[As I have already emphasized above,] [i]t is humanly intolerable that each day thousands of people die of hunger and neglect, the majority of them children between the ages of one and five, while at the same time 3 billion dollars are invested in weapons and military spending. This is particularly true when, as is currently the case, funds for sustainable human development have been unduly and wrongfully reduced. The lack of solidarity of the wealthiest towards the poor has reached limits that can no longer be tolerated. For the transition from an anti-ecological economy of speculation, delocalization of production and war to a knowledge-based economy for global, sustainable and human development, and from a culture of imposition, violence and war to a culture of dialogue, conciliation, alliances and peace, we must immediately abolish plutocratic groups (G7, G8, G20) and re-establish ethical values as the basis for our daily behaviour.

3.3. Elimination of the Nuclear Threat and Disarmament for Development

The nuclear threat continues to pose an unbelievably sinister and ethically untenable danger. Well-regulated disarmament for development would not only guarantee international security, but would also provide the necessary funds for global development and the implementation of the United Nations' priorities (food, water, health, environment, lifelong education for all, scientific research and innovation, and peace).

For these so relevant and urgent reasons *We propose calling an extraordinary session of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the necessary urgent social and environmental measures and, moreover, to establish the guidelines for the re-founding of a democratic multilateral system [as suggested above in the objectives that universities should pursue]...*

In view of the poor progress made toward fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, given the present lack of solidarity, increased social inequality and subordination to the dictates of commercial consortia, no one believes that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be adopted in September will actually be implemented [without the leadership of a multilateral democratic system].

The solution is an inclusive participative democracy in which all aspects of the economy are subordinated to social justice.

Jose Luis Sampedro left a fantastic legacy to young people: 'You will have to change both ship and course'.

Now ‘the Peoples’ can raise their voices and actively participate. But it is up to the scientific, academic, artistic and intellectual communities to mobilize them, to be at the forefront in the movement towards a better world. As the Earth Charter,* one of the most lucid documents from recent decades, states:

We stand at a critical moment in the 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...

We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impact on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world.

Now that the voice of the people can be heard, we must ensure that everyone understands that **implementing human rights benefits all of us equally**. It must be universally accepted that accumulating immense fortunes adds nothing to an already comfortable life. I would like to repeat a simple observation that I read one day in a small chapel in the south of France: ‘*Les linceuls n’ont pas de poches*’ (‘funeral shrouds have no pockets’). Whether we are born into wealth or poverty, death is the great equalizer. Thus, it is essential that universities, aware of the emergency the world is facing, become protagonists in the radical changes that cannot be postponed, and achieve now what in 1945 was impossible: cooperation and working together, in a context of democratic principles, towards peaceful coexistence marked by social justice and the conditions inherent in a dignified life for all human beings.

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