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REFLECTIONS ON PROGRESS, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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Since their appearance on Earth, human beings, like their most distant cousins, have had to affront all the dangers that nature has put in their path. Such enduring/relentless adversity no doubt contributed to the reinforcement and development of the intellectual faculties of humankind. Confronted by formidable challenges to his survival and self-assertion, humanity has progressively found pertinent solutions and transmitted them to future generations to be used or improved upon. It is thus clear that education, that is to say the transmission and perfection of knowledge, is an essential factor of human survival and growth on earth.

The notion of development, associated with that of progress, is naturally seen as the central theme of the epic of modern humanity. However, before proceeding further, the following elements should be borne in mind:

- 40,000 generations¹ or so separate us from our ancestors who first tamed fire;
- 104 from the appearance of monotheism (Hebrew);
- 100 from the birth of Athenian democracy;

¹ In this paper we consider an average of approximately 25 years for a generation.

- 80 from the beginnings of Christianity;
- 56 from those of Islam;
- 12 from the Age of Enlightenment;
- 8 from the start of the industrial revolution; and
- almost 5 generations for the progressive institutionalization of the right to vote and eligibility of women.

It took 80,000 generations for the population of the earth to grow from a few thousand individuals to 250 million; then 72 generations to arrive at one billion, at the beginning of the 19th century; then 6 generations to arrive at 2.5 billions; and, finally, only 2 generations to arrive at 7 billion. While the rate seems to be slowing down, it is predicted that there will be another 2 billion of us in two more generations.

So we can see that development, associated with progress as we understand it, as a constant concern to serve society through research and innovation, was the fruit of 10 generations, based on groundwork done by the preceding 10.

We are concerned here with a much shorter period than the millennia that separate us from our fire-taming forebears, and thus from one of the first signs of their will to escape from their natural state and grow their own food. In other words, if we say that the era of development, in the modern sense of the word, started at the beginning of the 16th century, then it represents scarcely one minute out of 24 hours. Such considerable acceleration has led humanity from the age of the soothsayer/seer/prophet to that of the demiurge, to create new dangers for which he alone is accountable. This change corresponds to a major peculiarity of human evolution that we shall call here a "revolution of pride, or arrogance", a radical transformation of man's relation to nature and, above all, of his perception of his own mission on earth.

We should not, here, go into the perils inherent in humanity's relentless pursuit of power and domination over his fellows, which gave birth to enduring and bloody conflicts, and culminated in the abominations staining a 20th Century we find so difficult to make sense of, analyse and learn from, so close was the despicable to the sublime. But it is clear enough today that the developments of the past two centuries have considerably modified and, above all, disturbed the balance of nature and the environment. We should not go further into this burning issue; suffice it to say that it should have made us realise – late though it is – that we must reconsider our place and our mission on Planet Earth.

According to Luc Ferry, philosopher and former French Minister of Education, the concept of sustainable development has progressively evolved as three-pronged representation of the necessary balance between the environmental (or ecological), socio-economic and cultural fields. In mathematical parlance, this balance represents the attractor of a complex dynamic process closely linked to the notion of progress within a context that is both scientific and cultural.

It would be unrealistic to seek an objective and complete definition of a process that contains the essence of sustainable development. I shall simply state that for development to be sustainable or "durable" as this term has been translated in certain non Anglo-Saxon languages, the dynamics created by progress should at the same time serve individual and collective enrichment, the preservation of the environment and quality of life, the promotion of solidarity and equitable sharing as foundations for global citizenship.

However, and to be more precise, the principle for development to be sustainable could be formulated under the following requirements or propositions:

- Accounting for and addressing the ecological and developmental problems faced globally.
- An effort to distinguish real and fundamental problems from those that result from trends, misinformation or ignorance.
- A scientific and technical endeavour to provide concrete responses to risks of our time and those risks that are foreseen in the near future.
- Searching for new organizational modalities in research that facilitate financing and international cooperation, mobilizing universities, research institutions, as well as public and private sectors.
- Emphasizing quality production that does not limit itself to the requirements of corporations but expands to the communities and individual households.
- A quality based civilization which does not neglect the needs of material development, but also gives increasing importance to immaterial one.
- The promotion of new models of development that allow developing nations to leap-frog from the 19th and 20th centuries into the 21st century.
- The encouragement of philosophical and cultural renewal inspired by philosophers such as Henri Bergson who were capable of giving mankind a "supplement to the soul" which relies on philosophical maxims such as "Science without consciousness is destruction of the soul", "Consciousness without Science does not bring mankind out of poverty" and "Unconsciousness without Science means the return of wild primitive times".

Higher education has a fundamental responsibility to contribute to the points just mentioned above. Higher education can help in humanizing globalization and is uniquely positioned to influence the direction we choose to take as a society.

In seeking to reply to these noble objectives on which our present and future on planet Earth depend, education incontestably reigns as an essential driving force in the dynamic process linked to progress and sustainable development.

In this context, UNESCO is at the heart of various actions reinforced by the programme "Education for All" whose six goals defined during the 2000 Dakar World Forum perfectly

dovetail in support of sustainable development, as well as for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Global Citizenship.

To qualify briefly our affirmation, we recall that new and often abstract knowledge, in most cases originating from university laboratories and research centres, gives birth in the short or long-run to determining advances in all the fields of socio-economic and cultural applications. It is evident that through teaching these advances are imparted to the concerned populations for them to have an impact. The process of transforming this knowledge into transmittable teachings in a generalized or professionalized form represents an essential stage at the service of all forms of development objectives.

Furthermore, once these teachings are elaborated, they should be equitably diffused within a community. In evaluating the quality and pertinence of teaching and training offered to youth and adults, factors linked to the respect and protection of the environment, as well as to life skills contributing to economic and cultural development have to be considered.

In the same light, this knowledge must reach all populations and all countries in order to contribute to their edification and autonomy. Information and communication technologies, which are constantly being developed, represent an essential asset and opportunity for efficient, equitable sharing and solidarity.

Illiteracy is a major obstacle to sustainable development and global citizenship. UNESCO, in partnership with and supported by concerned international agencies and NGOs, is working to counteract this plague with ambitious teacher education programmes, through the establishment of international networks of cooperation, remarkably exemplified by the UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Programmes.

Another essential factor for sustainable development and global citizenship lies in what we qualify as inter-generational solidarity in education. The world population is continuously growing, and with the progress made in medicine and hygiene, living longer. It is imperative that so-called "modern societies" learn to put progress at the service of the vulnerable – children of course, but also the elderly to whom we owe our existence. Countries referred to as "developed" are not spared from this remark, and the 2003 summer heat wave tragedy in Western Europe is a cruel reminder of this.

In this respect, education has to reinforce its civic dimension to achieve a new humanism which is nourished by progress and which will provide us with the opportunity to maintain and reinforce traditional values linked to solidarity and mutual respect.

In a world context, where the number of immigrant populations is constantly growing, mainly towards rich countries, it is crucial for education to play a full role in the processes of integration and social mobility for the benefit of youth, but also for that of their parents. This can have the effect of avoiding crises created by the rift between generations often caused by an education solely centred on modernity and practicality, to the

detriment of family ties and cultural diversity, which are riches to be preserved.

Sustainable development and global citizenship therefore lie in our aptitude to educate to values of responsible citizenry, integrating modern knowledge while at the same time maintaining historical and traditional heritage, which remain particularly preserved in a family environment – so fragile and so greatly threatened.

In conclusion, the arguments developed in this concise presentation demonstrate that sustainable development, progress and global citizenship, efficiently embedded in the context of the Knowledge Society, undeniably participate in the development of the New Humanism promoted by the Director-General of UNESCO, and which we all agree to consider essential for the wealth and prosperity of Humanity in an agreeable, peaceful and friendly common environment.