

# THE SDGS AND HUMAN RIGHTS KEY INSTRUMENTS IN THE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FROM THE PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a valuable opportunity to draw a series of important lessons that may be key to turning the tide and laying the foundations to face the new and unprecedented challenges that humanity will face in the coming years. After analysing the differences between this crisis and the two previous ones experienced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a series of lessons that should be considered stand out. Next, the Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights are presented as key instruments to guide the construction of a new model that leaves no one behind and increases our resilience. Finally, it concludes by collecting a series of theoretical reflections that could be used as a methodology and possible content proposals in the design of a new model to face the challenges that the future holds, as well as the response to possible criticisms.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, human rights, sustainable development goals, challenges.

**Summary:** I. THE PANDEMIC AS A CHALLENGE FOR A NEW PARADIGM SHIFT. II. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND HUMAN RIGHTS AS KEY INSTRUMENTS. III. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF HUMANITY.

## I. THE PANDEMIC AS A CHALLENGE FOR A NEW PARADIGM SHIFT

If we could travel to the future and see what future generations will study in their history books, - if the books still exist and have not been replaced by some electronic device or worse still by a brain implant.

We would see reflected in their history books how the beginning of the 21st century will possibly be remembered by interesting events such as 9/11 in 2001, which undoubtedly represented a paradigm shift in the international geopolitical order, (Muzikalia, 2021)<sup>2</sup>;

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<sup>2</sup> Without a doubt it is curious that just after the attack the United States government elaborated and banned a blacklist of songs like "Daniel" by Elton John, "Imagine" by John Lennon, "Black is black" by the Braves, "Wonderful world" in all its versions, "Ob la di ob la da" and "Ticket to ride" by the Beatles, "Have you seen her" by the Chi-Lites, "Mac The Knife" by Bobby Darin, "America" by Neil Diamond, Sinatra's "New York New York", etc. And not just songs: if not, entire bands were censored by name (Rage Against the Machine, Massive Attack) or had to change the title of their albums (Jimmy Eat World's Bleed American). More understandable is the case of The Coup and its album Party Music, set to be released in September 2001 and which featured on the cover an image of the twin towers exploding and burning (tragic coincidence, since the design had been finished months before the attacks). Something less understandable, although it has its perverted logic, is that groups like Anthrax or the World Trade Centre had problems with their names.

the global economic crises that triggered the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008; and recently, since 2020, a health pandemic also on a global scale.

Important historical events (Martínez González, 2000), with a ten-year period to which important advances in the evolution of humanity would surely be added, include:

- In the field of technology, they would surely highlight: the generalization of new information and communication technologies with the extension of broadband and the acceleration of its speed, the democratization and universalization of smartphones, the implementation of 5G and the take-off of artificial intelligence or robotics (Faulconbridge, 2021)<sup>3</sup>.
- in the field of science the following would be mentioned: the decoding of the human genome in 2001 (which opens up an impressive range of possibilities in the treatment of diseases and genetic improvement), the important milestones achieved in the field of neuroscience in relation to the map (Abbot, 2021) and the functioning of our brain thanks to the use of magnets to observe neurons and that have allowed achievements such as the use of electrodes to cure physical or mental illnesses, as well as implants to recover the senses or sensors to read death<sup>4</sup>. One could also mention the recent discoveries in the field of quantum physics led by Spanish scientists such as the measurement of the quantum sequence (Limón, 2021), which open a wide spectrum of possibilities yet to be discovered<sup>5</sup>.
- On the other hand, in terms of the ideological and cultural dimension, the revolution in the media and information should be noted, as well as the attempts to impose a single thought and influence public opinion through the proliferation of new channels of communication information (Couto, 2020)<sup>6</sup>, such as social networks and smart devices that always accompany us in our pockets and allow us to be continuously connected, thanks to which we become selective producers and recipients of information (Castells, 2005). Without a doubt, we are in the information age. And as Hobbes well illustrated us in his famous Leviathan "who has the information, has the power" (Hobbes, 2005). So now we can supposedly instantaneously know, for free (Bonneau, 2012), what is happening in real time in other more remote parts of the planet and meet with anyone by video conference (Ramonet, 2001 and 2002).

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<sup>3</sup>. Recently, the former Pentagon software chief claimed that China had won the artificial intelligence battle with the United States, a battle they have been fighting for years.

<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, the scientific project Human Brain Project, funded by the European Union and aimed at achieving a deeper understanding of the brain at a time of astonishing advances in computing and digital technologies, available at <https://www.humanbrainproject.eu/en/follow-hbp/news/ebrains-selected-for-the-esfri-roadmap-of-european-research-infrastructures/>.

<sup>5</sup>. For a more detailed detail of these advances, see: "Quantum physics", *Nature portfolio*, available at <https://www.nature.com/subjects/quantum-physics>.

<sup>6</sup>. To delve deeper into the issue, you can consult the interesting research carried out by Professor Tatiana Couto in relation to the influence of the media on the Covid-19 narratives in different European countries or in the Brexit referendum. Coutto, T. (2020), "Half-full or half-empty? Framing of UK – EU relations during the Brexit referendum campaign", *Journal of European Integration*, 42: 5, 695-713, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1792465>.

All this, on an increasingly interdependent and interconnected planet thanks to an unprecedented transport revolution. So, it is easier, faster, and cheaper to catch a plane or a high-speed train and get to London than to go to your grandfather's town in Teruel. Not to mention the exorbitant whim of some who have recently set out to get out of the atmosphere and do space tourism (Street, 2021). All this linked to the impact of the planet by other viruses, some of them older and often forgotten, such as hunger and environmental degradation.

Hunger is a scourge that once again hits a tenth of the world's population, the most vulnerable and forgotten, with the worst data in the last decade. These are figures that hurt: 811 million people (FAO, 2021); while another 39% are overweight, 1.9 billion adults, (WHO, 2021a) and 931 million tons of food were wasted in 2019 (UNEP, 2021).

The environment, increasingly degraded, shows us helplessly how nature is destroyed before our very eyes, as is the case of the Mar Menor and an incessant and dangerous rise in temperatures. Despite repeated warnings and to the utter frustration of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), extreme weather disasters intensify, almost always lashing the most vulnerable parts and people on the planet. We have reached a point where there is almost more plastic than fish in the sea and our garbage reaches space<sup>7</sup>.

In short, a series of unprecedented events that decade after decade have shaken the foundations of our world in this 21st century and its political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental organization as we knew it or understood it to date.

## **II. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND HUMAN RIGHTS KEY ELEMENTS OF THE NEW NORMALITY**

Faced with this panorama, which to some may seem bleak and can cause from echo anxiety or solastalgia, to depression; Others prefer to continue as if everything were the same, hypnotized watching their different screens or television series without considering any type of change. However, some, still few, consider that this is a crucial and exciting moment that will mark the future and our survival, and therefore requires our commitment, work, enthusiasm, and urgent action.

The pandemic, which has taken the lives of more than 5 million people around the world and continues to plague us, once again provides us with an excellent opportunity to extract valuable lessons and change the things that we did not see in the previous crises of this new millennium. And this time, believe me, we cannot miss them.

In the last crisis, it was not clear to us that the important thing was to rescue the people and not the banks immersed in a global capitalist system governed by speculation and deception, based on the depletion of natural resources and that fosters growing inequalities. The answer then was the curtailment of our achievements in terms of social

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<sup>7</sup> Recently Google and Facebook have decided to prohibit content denial about Climate Change (La Vanguardia 2021).

rights: in health, education and allowing the evictions of thousands of vulnerable people and a growing job insecurity. Just think of the famous mini-jobs, pensioners, or the situation of the thousands of young people who, past thirty, today, cannot become independent (El Economista, 2021). Although some revealed themselves occupying Wall Street or the Puerta del Sol, shouting that they do not represent us.

But not everything was broken. Companies began to become aware, and an incipient Corporate Social Responsibility began, which was reflected in the beginning of the Global Compact agreed in 2000 (UN, 2000a).

At the international level, under the auspices of the United Nations, States began to cooperate on global issues of common interest such as: the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018 (UN, 2018a; 2018b), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on cooperation (UNCTAD, 2015a), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015 (UNFCCC, 2015) and the approval of the Rome Statute in 2000 and the entry into operation of the International Criminal Court in 2002 (UN, 2000b).

In the first crisis, that of 9/11, terror took hold of us, allowing arrests, torture and a growing Islamophobia, regardless of any minimum guarantee of a rule of law. The execution of Bin Laden or the creation of Guantanamo, among other things, whose principal was recognized with nothing less than the Nobel Peace Prize. Unilateralism was imposed and the United States deployed all its hegemony beyond its borders, normalizing unilateral military interventions, repressive economic sanctions, and a fierce trade war with tariffs. While the world attended the US military incursions undaunted, with the doubts at times of the NATO Allies and the immobility of the United Nations Security Council in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria. His withdrawal from the Paris Agreement or the proclamations of Donald Trump via twitter with his America first<sup>8</sup> and an unprecedented assault on Congress, one of the cradles of modern democracy.

But why is the COVID-19 crisis different from the previous ones? And what lessons should we learn and take advantage of as a great opportunity? How should we proceed? These are the key questions that we will try to answer below.

The crisis generated by the pandemic has a series of elements that make it different from the previous ones, namely:

At first glance it just seems like a health crisis. However, although its origin is still unknown for certain -who knows if one day we will succeed- there are some indications behind it that suggest that it is a zoonosis, in which several hypotheses are considered that suggest that it comes from the sympathetic pangolin or of bats (Diez 2021).

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<sup>8</sup>. A motto that happens to be quite reminiscent of the title of the book *Primero la gente*, by Cernea, M. (1995), México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Zoonoses are not something new, they have been living with us for a long time with diseases such as salmonellosis, tuberculosis or toxoplasmosis, a mandatory and dreaded test for pregnant women. But what is new is its affectation, intensity and virulence that on previous occasions we had managed to avoid as with the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) of 2002-2003 that in China that caused 774 deaths (CDC 2021a and WHO, 2021c), the swine flu (H1N1) in 2009, which the WHO estimates caused more than half a million deaths worldwide (CDC 2021a), MERS in 2012 in the Middle East with 866 deaths (WHO, 2021c) or Ebola in 2014 in Central Africa that between 2014-2016 caused 11,308 deaths in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea and 2,299 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2018-2020 (WHO, 2021c).

We are therefore faced with the proliferation of new pathogens that, as the scientific community indicates, partly come from environmental degradation. Thus, in a recent scientific study, it is pointed out that half of the infectious diseases that occurred in the last century were the result of changes in land use, agricultural practices, and food production (O'Callaghan, 2020).

Before the global explosion of the pandemic in 2020, the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, for the first time in its 15-year history, listed environmental risk among the top positions, including climate change and biodiversity (WEF 2020). And in its 2021 report (WEF, 2021), it indicated among the most likely risks of the next ten years, extreme weather, failure of climate action and man-made environmental damage. And, on the other hand, among the risks with the greatest impact, in the first place, infectious diseases, followed by the failure of climate action and other environmental risks.

So, this pandemic, whose origin is health-environmental, produces therefore an unprecedented social, economic, and political crisis. It is a crisis that affects almost all the countries of the world equally, without distinguishing their level of development and wealth and that, for several months gradually, has remained and persists in some States with their population confined and a large part of their economic, social, educational activities, etc. almost paralyzed (Hale 2021).

Overnight, in Spain on the fateful March 11, 2020, our life changed. It seemed as if time had stopped and many of us listened to the news in amazement. During the following days, we watched the events, and the days unfold with some disbelief. We looked like the unwitting protagonists of the film on Groundhog Day and suddenly we were deprived of something as essential and basic as our freedom of movement and in many other cases, unfortunately, they were deprived of the most asset: life. What follows below, for reasons of space and because to a large extent it is already known and experienced by all, I will not dwell on it and will go on to highlight a brief decalogue of some of the lessons that we could extract from this unusual experience.

1. Social, economic and development inequalities disappeared. The virus did not distinguish between rich and poor, children, young and old, women and men. The contagion was the same for everyone, although later its consequences, lethal or less, were different, depending on some of these conditions and the place where you will find yourself.
2. We realize the power of interconnection and experience in our own flesh the butterfly effect and the theory of chaos (Gleick, 1994). Thus, a distant thing originated in China could and continues to alter the entire world. You cannot raise borders or create walls that protect or immunize us in an interconnected world even though many still strive.
3. Suddenly, we realized who the essential workers are: sanitation workers, cleaners, supermarket cashiers, public transport drivers, media, transporters, caretakers, delivery men, etc., who risk their lives every day to be able to continue forward and to whom it was dedicated with a daily applause. Jobs that are generally not well paid and that do not enjoy great professional stability.
4. Our competitive economic model was transformed, going from fierce competitiveness to collaboration. The companies transformed their production with high doses of ingenuity to help -or who knows- making the difficult situation an opportunity. Automotive companies made respirators, those for alcohol and hydrochloric gel cosmetics, those for pesticides bleach and disinfectant products, and the fashionable face masks. And coincidentally, some of these companies are the ones that contribute the most to environmental degradation.
5. Our individualism and social egocentricity became cooperation and solidarity. Some discovered the loneliness and harshness of the lack of human contact that characterizes us as social animals, as Aristotle argued; Others spoke to their neighbours for the first time, all helping and caring for each other. The cooks, since they could not work and did not want to waste their gender, prepared solidarity meals for those who could not eat, and people created support networks for those who could not go out buying food and medicine for them.
6. We discovered the value of what is important, of the small things that made our day happy and to which we so often do not give importance or do not have time to dedicate: art (music, literature, cinema, etc.), cooking (the yeast ran out in supermarkets to make bread and cakes), the value of company and the pleasure of a good conversation, playing with our children, seeing through our plants how spring was coming, the pleasure of dolce far niente and boredom, etc.
7. We rediscovered the value of nature. The traffic stopped. The streets and highways remained deserted. In the sky there were only clouds and stars and no planes passed by (only sometimes a helicopter to dissuade those who took refuge on the rooftops to breathe fresh air, exercise their body or bathe in the sun's rays). Little by little, we realized in disbelief, how in just a few days, nature was reconquering its space and healing our damages. When they allowed us to go out in the parks and green spaces and we forgot for a while the car and the shopping centres. People dusted off their bicycles to get around and planted gardens on their terraces.

8. Technology became our great ally. It allowed us to keep in touch with our loved ones thanks to video calls and for those who were able to continue working. Teleworking was imposed thanks to the commitment and effort of thousands of people who worked without hours and sometimes assumed the costs out of their own pockets without compensation. We all put our effort and responsibility to move forward to the best of our ability. And for those who could not work, aids in the form of ERTES or minimum income were articulated by the authorities. Even for the first time the UN spoke of the need to guarantee a universal basic income UN 2020a).
9. At the international level, we went from confrontation and unilateralism to an incipient collaboration and multilateralism. States coordinated to share information and even the rulers of the most sceptical countries such as England, the United States or Brazil. After overcoming the virus, its leaders changed their policies, betting on caution and vaccination. Joint purchases of vaccines were organized at the European level and limits were placed on the demands of large pharmaceutical companies with demands for delays and non-compliance, a debate began on the nationalization of patents.
10. Science worked against the clock and achieved, thanks to an unprecedented joint effort, something that until now seemed unthinkable: several vaccines in record time. The scientific community put their knowledge, tireless work, effort, and experience at the service of the pandemic, they experimented with new treatments, the teams collaborated and shared their protocols, the States injected public money into science and innovation, etc.

Thus, it could be concluded that the pandemic forced us, not only to stop but also to change and reinvent ourselves.

Now that it seems that in some parts of the world, we are recovering a certain normality, the question we should ask ourselves is: what new normality do we want?

Faced with this question, we cannot and must not cancel, once again, all the lessons that this pandemic has left us. The circumstances require a necessary and profound change, which until now seemed unthinkable. Personally, we would not like to recover the old normality and we consider that if we did, the consequences for future generations would not be desirable.

In case of advocating a different new normality, the question would be how this should be. For its design we already have at our disposal two tools that, in our opinion, can have an important value and mark the roadmap to follow.

We refer specifically to two powerful and tested instruments such as the Sustainable Development Goals approved in 2015 and Human Rights, which can guide us in building a more sustainable, egalitarian, and supportive world in which there is an equal place for everyone.

The Sustainable Development Goals are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 (UNCTAD, 2015b). An agenda in which, under the title "Transforming our world to face the challenges that humanity faces in the next two decades", an ambitious program is established. This is specified in 17 interconnected objectives articulated thematically around those known as the 5 "Ps" planet, people, prosperity, peace, and partnerships with the aim of leaving no one behind as a leitmotif.

Specifically, these 17 Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter SDG) are: 1. End of poverty. 2-Zero hunger. 3- Health and Wellbeing. 4-Quality education. 5-Gender equality. 6- Clean water and sanitation. 7- Affordable and non-polluting energy. 8- Decent work and economic growth. 9- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. 10- Reduction of inequalities. 11- Sustainable Cities and Communities. 12. Responsible consumption and production. 13. Climate action. 14. Underwater life. 15. Life of terrestrial ecosystems, 16. Peace, Justice and solid institutions and 17. Alliances.

An agenda, which, far from being perfect (Swain, 2018 and Winkler, 2017), constitutes a good starting point for the following reasons:

1. SDG and Human Rights. Many of the 17 SDGs are formulated in such a way that they include the provisions of the main international human rights treaties<sup>9</sup> and a series of important values such as peace, equality, equity, justice, etc. On the other hand, the SDGs cover a wide range of critical aspects of the Human Rights agenda, from the right to water and access to justice, to gender violence and the right to adequate housing, thus collecting traditional Human Rights more consolidated first generation along with more recent and controversial ones such as the Right to Sustainable Development or Peace (Solanes 2018).
2. It is an unprecedented agenda due to its scope, recipients, and adoption process. The SDGs, unlike previous initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000c), have a universal scope that includes not only all States, both North and South, but also exceeds the Westphalian model and has multilevel recipients. Ranging from institutions at all levels, to companies, NGOs and in general, it is aimed at the entire civil society. In addition, its design for the first time had broad citizen participation through a global survey conducted by the United Nations, My World 2025, in which more than 7 million people from 194 countries participated, making it the largest-scale survey ever conducted. until now (UNDP, 2015).
3. Indivisibility. The integral nature of the SDGs is recognized in line with the principle of indivisibility of Human Rights. It is thus recognized that the SDGs must be implemented at the same time according to the resources and capacities of each State in an indivisible and integral way.

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<sup>9</sup>. A comparative analysis of this interrelation can be seen in "The human rights guide to the SDGs" of the Danish Institute of Human Rights available at the following link <https://sdg.humanrights.dk/es>.

4. Specification and follow-up. The 17 SDGs are specified in 169 targets and 232 specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and temporary (SMART) indicators that allow for exhaustive monitoring. In addition, a High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) was created as an international strategic platform for its monitoring and the States report regularly on its progress (UN, 2013).

The second instrument that is fundamental in the design of this new normality is Human Rights. Only 3 years ago, in 2018, coinciding with the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres recalled the transcendental words contained in his Preamble and that it is important not to forget: “Considering that ignorance and disregard for human rights have led to outrageous acts of barbarism for the conscience of humanity, and that it has been proclaimed, as the highest aspiration of man, the advent of a world in which human beings, liberated from the fear and misery, enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of belief” (UN, 1948).

This Declaration constitutes one of the most important patrimonies of humanity of the last century, to leave behind violence and preserve human dignity. A common ethical minimum over state borders, different races or religions, economic conditions and that must become the ethos that guides us. Different balances, without a doubt, can be made of its seven decades of validity (CEFD, 2019) but one thing is uncontroversial paraphrasing the Secretary General of the United Nations “we have a common vision of what makes us human: a set of rights that are at the same time universal and indivisible, that balance the individual and the collective, and that inspire us in our search for a better world for all, including future generations” (UN, 2020b).

Precisely in July 2020, the United Nations published a report entitled COVID-19 and human rights. In this we are all together, in which he insisted on the decisiveness of Human Rights for the response and recovery of this pandemic. Also in 2020, the Secretary General of the United Nations on the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations published another document entitled The Highest Aspiration (UN, 2020b). Call to action for Human Rights. From the joint reading and analysis of these two documents, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Human rights put people at the centre. As the title of the report points out, we are all in this together. Responses that are shaped around human rights and respect them are better suited to defeat the pandemic, guarantee health care for all, and preserve human dignity. In addition, this bill of rights makes us focus on those who suffer the most, the reasons for inequality and what can be done about it. The Bill of Rights now paves the way for us to emerge from this crisis for more equitable and sustainable societies, development, and peace.
2. The pandemic has led to three of the Human Rights being placed at the forefront at this time.

- a) The right to life and the duty to protect it. All states have a duty to protect human life, including addressing general conditions in society that pose direct threats to it.
  - b) The right to health and access to health care. Every human being has the right to the enjoyment of the highest possible level of health that allows him to live with dignity. All people, whatever their social or economic status, should have access to the health care they need, in this way, as the UN points out, universal health coverage (UHC) must become an imperative throughout the world.
  - c) The right to freedom of movement. Restrictions on freedom of movement must be strictly necessary for that purpose, proportionate and non-discriminatory. If there is effective and widespread access to evidence and tracing, and if selective quarantine measures are taken, the need for more indiscriminate restrictions can be mitigated, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as refugees or asylum seekers.
3. The report also highlights six key ideas in relation to Human Rights and the pandemic:
- a) The priority is to protect people's lives. Protecting livelihoods helps us do this. The economic and social repercussions need to be mitigated along with the public health response. Where it is important to prioritize measures that guarantee basic economic and social rights. The importance of the responsibility of governments to protect people by guaranteeing these rights has never been so clearly demonstrated, and how this protection increases resilience<sup>10</sup>.
  - b) The virus does not discriminate, but its repercussions do. The responses must be inclusive, equitable and universal; because otherwise, they will not serve to defeat a virus that affects everyone equally, regardless of status. If the virus persists in a community, it is a threat to all communities, discriminatory practices endanger us all. The virus and its repercussions are disproportionately affecting certain communities, highlighting underlying structural inequalities and pervasive discrimination that need to be addressed. Discrimination should not have a place in our response, inclusion is what best protects us all. In this sense, equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion occupy a central place in this crisis and new challenges arise regarding inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. States have the primary responsibility to counter discrimination and hate speech, but all actors, including social media companies, must play their part.

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples pointed out by the report in this regard are: Providing emergency water to marginal neighbourhood's; Suspend evictions for not paying rent during the crisis; Preserve jobs and wages with specific economic measures, in some cases practically facilitating universal income, and support for employers and businesses; Grant or extend sick leave with pay or unemployment benefits; Guarantee emergency shelter for the homeless; Expand responses to domestic violence for victims of abuse o Provide childcare services to those who work in essential services.

- c) Everyone must be involved in the answer. It requires a form of participation that translates into open, transparent, and responsible responses. In this we are together. To effectively combat the pandemic, we all must be part of the response. To this end, people must be informed and committed to the decisions that affect them, and see that the measures taken are necessary, reasonable, and proportionate to fight the virus and save lives. All of us must do and do our part, but the most effective way to enhance participation is through data, persuasion, involvement, and collective awareness. People need the power of action and voice in every crisis. Now more than ever, governments need to be open and transparent, being responsive to and accountable to the people they seek to protect. Civil society organizations, as well as the private sector and businesses, have a lot to contribute, and it must be made easier for them. The best way to ensure that the public continues to support the measures is for governments in an open and transparent way to count on the people in making decisions that affect them. It is important to be honest about the extent of the threat posed by the virus, and to show that the measures are reasonable, likely to work, and will not last longer than necessary. Whether or not they are met depends on building trust, and trust in turn depends on this. Authorities must be open and transparent when making decisions and be ready to listen to criticism and respond to it. Governments are held accountable to the people they seek to protect. Democratic oversight of the response to the pandemic, especially the use of emergency powers, must be maintained. In this sense, States must respect and protect, among other rights, freedom of expression and of the press, freedom of information, and freedom of association and assembly. The crisis raises the question of how best to counter harmful speech while protecting freedom of expression. In this regard, it is noted that the most effective response is accurate, clear, and information from sources that people trust.
- d) The threat is the virus, not the people. Emergency and security measures, if needed, must be temporary and proportionate and designed to protect people. The pandemic poses a serious public health threat with wide implications for peace and security. Law enforcement has the role of supporting the fight against disease and protecting people. Emergency powers may be needed, but broad executive powers, granted quickly and with minimal oversight, carry risks. Tough security responses weaken the health response and can exacerbate current threats to peace and security or create new ones. The best response is the one that aims to respond proportionally to immediate threats, while protecting human rights within the framework of the rule of law. At this time, peace must reign, so we can focus on defeating the virus. Thus, in this response, justice, moderation, and respect for the rule of law are essential. In this sense, protecting the most vulnerable in humanitarian crises is a priority. This poses new human rights challenges with respect to peace and security and the rule of law.

- e) No country can overcome this situation alone. Global threats demand global responses. International solidarity is essential in the global response. No country can overcome this alone, and some countries are better prepared to respond than others. Similarly, no country can afford to leave people behind. The world is not able to do without any country if it really wants to defeat the virus. We must ensure that all countries are equally effective in their responses. The virus has shown that it does not respect national borders: if one country fails in its efforts to control the spread of the virus, all other countries are at risk. The planet is just as strong as the weakest healthcare system. The international community has joint responsibility for solving this problem. Economically developed states have a responsibility, a special interest, and a moral obligation, to help the poorest developing states. We cannot continue to let our vaccines expire or inject additional doses until they reach every corner of the planet.
- f) When we recover, we must be better than before. A Chinese proverb says, "Don't be afraid of slow changes, just be afraid to remain immobile" and another Nigerian saying states: "in times of crisis wisdom builds bridges and stupidity dikes". The crisis has exposed weaknesses that human rights can help alleviate. How we respond now can help shape our future and that of future generations. We must ensure that we do no harm by focusing on the immediate crisis. It is essential to consider the long term when planning our responses in the short term. The crisis is also exposing certain weaknesses in the way public services are provided and inequalities that prevent access to them. Human rights help us respond to immediate priorities and develop prevention strategies for the future, including our responsibilities to generations to come. The crisis threatens to lose us many achievements in the fields of development and human rights. In the long run, it will also be necessary to draw deeper lessons from this crisis, including on how to avoid a recurrence of the problems we are currently facing by creating protection systems and strengthening resilience. Our ability to learn from this pandemic will determine how effectively we respond not only to future pandemics, but also to other global challenges, the most pressing of which is undoubtedly climate change.

Life sometimes sends us gifts wrapped in trouble. In this way, our response today is transcendental and gives us the unique opportunity to correct our course, knowing that if what we do does not work, we will have to do something different.

### **III. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF HUMANITY**

Saint John of the Cross maintained that "To go where you don't know you have to go where you don't know." A finding that is evident in the current situation and an uncertain future full of unprecedented challenges for humanity.

It is urgent to act, as the United Nations has proposed to us in its recently proclaimed Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, in which it urges us to accelerate plans aimed at meeting development goals in view of the lack of tangible progress in many countries (Guterres, 2019).

In this necessary action, it is essential to regain faith in that concept of humanity that inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more than seven decades ago and to trust the Zen proverb that says, “Move and the way will open”.

In this journey, as the United Nations points out, the condition and human values that we share must be a source of unity, not division. We must give people hope and an ideal of what the future may hold. The human rights system helps us to rise to the challenges, opportunities and needs of the 21st century and to rebuild relationships between the people and leaders. It is about achieving worldwide the stability, solidarity, pluralism, and inclusion on which we all depend. Human rights and the SDGs show us the way in which we can transform hope into concrete actions that have a real impact on people's lives. It should never be a pretext for power or politics because it ranks above both (UN, 2020b).

Collective action is the only answer to the multiple crises that humanity is going through, some even more urgent and profound than the pandemic (WEF, 2021)<sup>11</sup>. We live in a world that offers unprecedented opportunities. The extraordinary technological advances and the global economic advances achieved have lifted millions of people out of poverty and we have an agreed framework of action for the path to follow, which is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2019).

The pandemic leaves us many lessons that this time we cannot waste. A very valuable one is that everything can be changed. Even what, to date, we believed to be immovable overnight. And this time we cannot fail. It is time to reverse the famous phrase of Gatto Pardo, by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and "Change everything, to change everything" because our existence more than ever depends on it.

We need to imagine a new, more sustainable future where people are once again the centre, and no one is left behind. Some will see these words as a utopia or perhaps as the mere goodness of the language of international institutions. But in this sense, it is necessary to recall two well-known slogans from the French May 68 "Let's be realistic, let's ask for the impossible" and "this concerns us all", as well as the words and dreams of people who with their example changed the world, such as They were Thomas More, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and many more.

In this task of imagining a new future, the ideas, as will be pointed out below, we already have them. Now we need to act.

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<sup>11</sup> According to the latest report from the World Economic Fund, among the most likely risks in the next ten years are extreme weather, failure of climate action and human-caused environmental damage; as well as the concentration of digital power, digital inequality and the failure of cybersecurity. And the risks with the greatest impact will be infectious diseases, the failure of climate action and other environmental risks, as well as weapons of mass destruction, the crisis of livelihoods, the sovereign debt crisis, and the breakdown of infrastructure of the information technology. World Economic Fund, “Global Risk Report 2021”, available at <https://es.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2021>.

In this sense, in the construction of this model that can respond to the future challenges facing humanity, the proposals formulated by some academic authors on migration, economic, labour, social, cultural and political issues constitute an important roadmap to be taken into account.

More than ever, we need a Utopia for realists, as Bregman claimed (Bregman, 2017), in which perhaps borders will disappear for people and our *mare nostrum* will no longer become a graveyard. It is convenient to remember that they are the only borders that remain, since those of capital and goods have almost disappeared.

Regarding the workplace, it is necessary to rationalize work, as Skildesky points out (Skildesky, 2012), betting on conciliation and establishing a 15-hour work week or a universal basic income, given the challenges posed by the fifth industrial revolution and the aging of the population.

In economic matters, it is necessary to reimagine capitalism, as Henderson suggests (Henderson, 2020), and replace the maximization of shareholder value with the creation of great products that are at the service of social good. In this sense, it seems that some important businessmen are already working in this line, such as Bill Gates, 2006 Prince of Asturias Award winner, with his Gates Foundation, the largest private foundation in the world, which in 2017 made the largest donation of the century for an amount of 4.6 billion dollars directed mainly to health and education (S.D, 2017). In addition, it has committed to donate 99.6% of its assets valued at 129 billion dollars (Sandler, 2021). Warren Buffet in 2020 distributed 40 billion dollars of his fortune estimated at 73.5 billion to non-profit organizations (Wang, 2020). On the other hand, if we measure the contribution considering the percentage of the net worth, the most generous donor is George Soros. The Hungarian has donated 64% of his original fortune, estimated in 2020 at 8,600 million, has distributed more than 15,000 million to non-profit organizations through Open Society Foundations, an international network of donations that supports the advancement of justice, education, public health, and the independent media. He recently he has made another important contribution of 32,000 million (Más de Xaxas, 2021). But without a doubt, the historical feat has been that of billionaire Charles Feeney who on September 27, 2020, broke the record by achieving the goal of giving away his fortune of US \$ 8,000 million in life and being left with nothing (BBC, 2020). An unstoppable philanthropic business movement (New York Times, 2017), perhaps inspired by figures like Andrew Carnegie and readings like David Callahan's *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (Callahan, 2017).

Continuing in the economic field, it is necessary to rethink the measurement of our wealth and its distribution. From linear growth and the measurement of GDP, which only benefits that 1% that accumulates what the other 99% needs, as Stiglitz points out (Stiglitz, 2016), to the use of other indices, such as the Social Progress index or the implanted happiness index (Happy Index)<sup>12</sup> already in Bhutan, with which Costa Rica turns out to be the happiest country on earth.

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<sup>12</sup> Happy Planet Index, available at <http://happyplanetindex.org/>

In the social and cultural sphere, the objective is to recover altruism, cooperation, and trust - as Bregman warns - as the natural impulse of the human being (Bregman, 2021). It is time, as Han suggests to us (Chul Han, 2012), to wake up society from fatigue and hyperculturality (Chul Han, 2018), to lift our eyes beyond a screen to recover the culture of kindness and to return to rituals to build a more positive, trusting, and confident society. Hopeful (Chul Han, 2013).

To finally build a tailored society and human time, in which we may rediscover, following Schumacher (Schumacher, 1978), how small is beautiful, how education is the greatest resource<sup>13</sup> and nature is part of our own essence. Because in case of not doing so, the alternative would be, as Chomsky warns, extinction (Chomsky, 2020).

To conclude, it can be said that neither the Universal Declaration of Human Rights nor the Sustainable Development Goals are certainly the panacea, but we could apply the idea that Churchill used when he referred to democracy, stating that it was the least bad of the systems. Possible politicians, except for everyone else<sup>14</sup>. This same idea was already embodied by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics when he affirmed that democracy was the least bad of deviations (Aristotle, 2005), -and in Politics, alluding to democracy as the most moderate perversion (Aristotle, 1988).

The values and ideals that inspire the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals constitute, without a doubt, a good starting point for the construction of a future that allows us to seek and achieve the fundamental purpose of our lives, which is not other than peace, happiness, and freedom, as the Declaration of Independence of the United States already stated<sup>15</sup> and more recently, we have been reminded by Pope Francis (Centofanti, 2019) and the Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama 2014).

And how could this long-awaited happiness be achieved, in this Seneca gives us some clue “to be happy you need to eliminate two things: the fear of a bad future and the memory of a bad past” (Seneca, 2016).

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<sup>13</sup> In this sense, according to the conference presented by Professor Vicente Bellver in the Congress "Higher Education, Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals No. 4 (education) in the context of the internationalization of higher education entitled "Human Rights and Higher Education ", one of the essential pillars of that Education would be the inclusion with a transversal character in all levels and spheres of Human Rights education, in accordance with what was established in the II World Congress on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and in the World Program for Human Rights education. Humans in their four stages. For more information, see the United Nations page on these World Programs, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sp/issues/education/educationtraining/pages/programme.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Churchill, W. “Many forms of government have been tried, and many more will be tried in this world of sin and suffering. Nobody claims that democracy is perfect or omniscient. In fact, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, excepting all the other forms that have been tried from time to time”. House of Commons, November 11, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, available at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>

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