



The global path of humankind towards unity

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The Global Path of Humankind Towards Unity.

Let us talk about the title of this first session: the Global Path of Humankind towards Unity.

Here too we touch on one of the key characteristics of everything that we do as Sophia University Institute, namely our conviction that the world is, despite appearances, on a path towards unity. If one looks only at what is happening on the news, we might have the opposite impression. One might easily deduce from what we hear on the news that the world is tending towards disunity. Everywhere we look it seems that things are getting worse. 2023 is a year characterized by wars, conflicts, ecological breakdown, political crisis, social unrest, increasing inequality and injustice etc. Ever new and ever more serious challenges. We frequently speak of crisis and crises, and there seems to be little reason to think that the world is tending towards unity.

In order to see why we think the world is tending towards unity, we need to adopt a broader perspective.

If we look back at the whole history of humanity we notice that it begins with a small concentration of humans in Africa, and from that small group, by a process of population growth and migrations, almost all areas of the planet are occupied. We can think of this process of population growth and migration in terms of a centripetal movement. From a single starting point in Africa, humanity spreads to the whole world.

The time scale is vast: at least 200,000 years. In that period humans adapt to the many different environments in which they find themselves. Those who settle beside lakes on the seas develop fishing and navigation. Those who find themselves in fertile lands develop agriculture, and domesticate animals. Those who were able to survive by hunting and gathering continued to do so. Those who found themselves in places with cold and extremely cold weather had to develop different kinds of housing compared to those in warmer climates. Depending on the various situations in which they found themselves, some peoples developed complex societies, political structures, others in simpler social structures. Linguistic diversification led to the development of thousands of languages.



Over long periods of time the physical appearance of peoples changed. In some places, darker skin turned out to be most advantageous, in other places lighter-coloured skin proved better for survival. And so on.

All of this diversification also led to the situations where the various peoples no longer knew much about one another. Remember that we are talking about a history of at least 200,000 years. When, around 500 years ago, European explorers came into contact with the native peoples of the Americas, and found people who looked different, dressed differently, spoke an unknown language and so on, they had no way of knowing that these people were their long-lost cousins, and that they had all shared the same ancestry. This obviously led to problems. conflicts for land and other resources, wars, slavery, exploitation.

Nevertheless a page was being turned. For all the difficulties linked in part to not recognizing one another as members of the same family, peoples who had been separated for much of the long history of humanity were now in contact. The human family which was one at the beginning was now beginning to interact with all of the cultural diversity that had been accumulating over the intervening period. The question now became: how will the many peoples of the earth treat one another.

If we try to trace what has been happening over these last 500 years or so, I think we can see gradual but definite signs of improvement. There is, of course, much still to do. At the level of collective consciousness, various convictions that were taken for granted for centuries are no longer so firmly held. It is no longer commonly, as it was 500 years ago, held that cultural difference should be understood in terms of superiority and inferiority. It is no longer widely held that war is the best way to solve conflicts between peoples. While slavery still exists, it is no longer widely accepted. And so on.

On the other hand, it is increasingly understood how intimately connected we all are. The rise of various and increasingly rapid forms of communication tends to increase the understanding that people are basically the same. We all face common problems (even if in differing ways). Over the course of the 20th century a series of international organizations have worked to improve cooperation between peoples, stimulated to do so by various threats not just to one people but to the world community of peoples - threats such as Nuclear war, global pandemics, threats to climate stability, the challenge of regulating the rise of artificial intelligence and so on.

It is, of course, always possible to point to flaws in the workings of organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union etc.



My point is not that the world is already one, that humanity has already solved all its problems. or that everything will necessarily always work out for the best. My point is that human understanding is changing for the better. More and more people understand that the future of humanity requires us to work together, build bridges, find shared solutions that depend on recognizing one another as brothers and sisters. The need for good relations between peoples, built on respect and justice is ever more clear and widely accepted.

Wisdom has brought us here today

What has all of this to do with us here in these days?

I invite you to think about what we are today beginning to do. First of all, notice that although we are not physically together, we have managed to connect people from many nations. Even within the single national groups new friendships will be forged between peoples. As far as I know all of the nations involved are made up of various ethnic groups, and I know that that is reflected in the composition of your national groups. In many nations ethnic diversity is closely related with tensions and even conflicts. But we have come together to participate in Together for a New Africa, and will work together on how to face the concrete problems that touch on all irrespective of ethnic identity.

The same is true of Religious diversity. In your national groups there are represented a variety of religious identities, which can sometimes lead to division, and in some places even to conflict. Despite this we have come together and will have an exceptional chance over these three years to work together recognizing all of this variety as a resource for the building of a new Africa and a new world, rather than a cause of conflicts.

Furthermore, we are connected with people of various nations, each of which has its own history, challenges, potentiality. And Together for a New Africa is not just an African reality: we will be connected not just among African but also with people of other continents: both those of us who are involved on behalf of Sophia, but also those who are involved through the AFRESH programme.

None of this would have been possible 100,000 years ago, or 1000 years ago, or 500 years ago.

I believe we can take our being here today as a sign that the world is tending towards unity. In a certain sense all of the problems that we constantly hear about on the news, the crises that we are facing, can be taken not as proof that the world is tending towards fragmentation and disaster, can be read as the precise reason that bring us together.

