

**The Meaning of Peace and Nonviolence in
the Present Moment. The World March.**

Silo

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A march is crossing the world. The March for Peace and Nonviolence.

It is as the founder of Universalist Humanism and the inspiration behind the World March that I would like to speak briefly to the forum. The March has galvanized numerous initiatives and activities, such as the symbolic journey of a team of enthusiasts who, having begun on October 2nd in Wellington, New Zealand, are traveling for three months through a number of countries until the conclusion on January 2nd, 2010 at the foot of Mount Aconcagua in Punta de Vacas, midway between Argentina and Chile.

The March was launched at the Symposium of the World Center of Humanist Studies, at the Park of Study and Reflection in Punta de Vacas on the 15th of November 2008, one year ago, with the clear intention of creating awareness of the dangerous global situation in which we are living, which is marked by, an increased probability of nuclear conflict, by the arms race, and by violent territorial military occupations.

This proposed social mobilization is galvanized by the Humanist Movement and its organizations. In only a few months, the World March has the support of thousands of people, groups supporting pacifism and nonviolence, various institutions working for human rights, and important figures who are sensitive to the urgencies of the moment, from the worlds of science, culture, and politics. It has also inspired an enormous number of initiatives in over 100 countries, forming a rapidly growing phenomenon of cultural diversity. In this vein I must report that the initial core team has been joined by another that is travelling through various countries of the Middle East and a third that is doing the same in Central America...

We know very well that in all latitudes the current situation is critical and characterized by poverty across vast regions, by the clash of cultures, and by the violence and discrimination that contaminates daily life for

large segments of the population. Today there are armed conflicts in numerous points, and simultaneously a profound crisis in the international financial system. On top of all this is the growing nuclear threat, which is certainly the greatest emergency of our time. It's an extremely complex situation. To the irresponsible interests of nuclear powers, and the madness of violent groups with possible access to compact nuclear weapons, we must also add the risk of an accident that could unleash a devastating conflict.

All of that is not the sum of individual crises, but rather a picture that reveals the global failure of a system whose method of action is violence and whose central value is money.

To avoid the nuclear catastrophe that appears to threaten the world in the more or less immediate future, we must work, starting today, to surpass social and personal violence while we call for:

1. Global nuclear disarmament.
2. The immediate withdrawal of invading troops from occupied territories.
3. The progressive and proportional reduction of weapons of mass destruction.
4. The signing of nonaggression treaties between countries, and
5. The renunciation by governments of the use of war as a means to resolve conflicts.

The most urgent task is to create awareness of Peace and disarmament. But it is also necessary to awaken a consciousness of Active Nonviolence, which allows us to reject not only physical violence, but all forms of economic, racial, psychological, and gender violence. Of

course, we hope that this new sensibility can take root in and inspire social structures, opening a path to the future Universal Human Nation.

The World March calls on all people to join forces and to take into their own hands the responsibility to change our world, overcoming personal violence and supporting the growth of this positive influence in their immediate environment.

During this time many cities and towns are holding marches, festivals, forums, conferences, and other events to raise awareness of the urgent need for Peace and Nonviolence. And throughout the world the campaigns of endorsement of the March are spreading this signal beyond what had been imagined until now.

For the first time in history an event of this magnitude has been put in motion by the participants themselves. The true strength of this impulse is born in the simple act of one who, out of conscience, joins a dignified cause and shares it with others.

During the March and until January of 2010 when the Humanist Movement will be restructured, Rafael de la Rubia, representative of the humanist organization World Without Wars, and the spokespersons for each continent – Michel Ussene for Africa, Sudhir Gandotra for Asia, Giorgio Schultze for Europe, Tomas Hirsch for Latin America, and Chris Wells for North America – have taken on the task of receiving from the Nobel Peace laureates at this Berlin Summit, the “Charter for a World Without Violence” with the commitment to disseminate it in all the countries through which the World March passes.

Precisely in this charter are embodied the principles to which people of good will in all latitudes can subscribe.

Without dwelling too long on this I would like to highlight the ninth principle of the Charter, which says: *“We call on the United Nations and*

its member states to consider means and methods to promote a meaningful appreciation of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the multi-ethnic national states. The principle moral for a non-violent world is "Treat others as you want to be treated."

This moral principle goes beyond all policies and all legalities to establish its preeminence in the human terrain, through the register of our collective recognition that surpasses all calculation and all speculation.

This principle, known since antiquity as the "Golden Rule" of coexistence, is one of the thirteen considered in this wonderful document, which must be widely disseminated.

In addition, we must not let pass some topics that will allow a greater understanding of our activities in the field of Nonviolence. It is evident that the negative preconceptions towards us were born and developed in South America during our sustained, nonviolent struggle against the military dictatorships there. It is clear that the discrimination we suffer in various fields stems from the systematic disinformation and defamation to which we were subject for decades in our home countries, including Argentina and Chile. The dictatorships and their organs of "disinformation" were spinning their web since the times when our activists were prohibited, imprisoned, deported, and killed. Even today, in different latitudes one can examine the persecution we suffer, not only at the hands of fascists but also at the hands of the "sanctimonious pundits" of some sectors. And it should be noted that as our activities have developed, many who recite the word Peace have thrown up their hands in horror, demanding our silence and even lashing out at any group or individual who mentions us publicly.

Even though these insults are a thing of the past, today they continue denigrating nonviolent action, arguing that beyond making declarations nothing more can be done in the face of the "real" powers that determine world situations. To illustrate, let's look at some cases.

The first concerns the campaigns against mandatory military service carried out a few years ago by Humanists in Argentina.

At that time some maintained that it was impossible to change the law that made military service obligatory. Especially after one and a half million signatures, gathered during a year of activity, were rejected without justification. Then, the Executive Power launched a publicity campaign about how misguided this project was, which would "leave the nation defenseless against possible aggression from neighboring countries." However, public opinion had been so sensitized that this debate (without mentioning the authors of this project) came to light and the media was its echo. Finally, there came a moment when the President of the Republic signed a "decree annulling compulsory military service," replacing it with voluntary military service. At the time it was said he had taken this measure because a soldier had died in a barracks due to maltreatment. OK so that's how things are. But it became clear that the long campaign and mobilization of the humanists was not in vain because this arbitrary law was laid to rest.

The other, more recent, case occurred in the Czech Republic.

The so-called "Missile Defense Shield" had been planned since 2002 without the knowledge of the people of the Czech Republic or the European Union. In June of 2006, the Humanist Movement started to promote an alliance of grassroots social and political organizations, which made it clear that 70% of the population was against the missiles. And at the same time that they demanded a referendum, they also asked that the project be suspended given its dangers. Two humanists began a hunger strike, and the protests began to receive the support of nonviolent peace organizations. This kind of protest was maintained for over a year, engaging artists, scholars, scientists, and mayors. Finally, the protest spread to the European Parliament. In March 2009 the government fell, through a confluence of several factors, but popular protests and parliamentary opposition delayed ratification of the treaty

between the Czech Republic and the USA. In September 2009, Obama gave up the star wars shield in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Let us now consider two subjects whose social impact is not yet understood.

As we all know, the themes of ecology and environmental protection have taken root in our societies. While some governments and certain stakeholders deny the dangers of neglecting the ecosystem, they are nonetheless being obliged to take progressive steps because of the pressure of a population increasingly concerned about the deterioration of our common home. Even our children are becoming more aware each day of the dangers of the situation. Through the media, and even in the humblest schools, attention is paid to issues of preventing environmental deterioration, and no one can escape these concerns.

But we are considerably behind this when it comes to concern over the issue of violence. What I mean is that the defense of human life and the most basic human rights have not yet taken root at a global and general level. It seems we are still apologists for violence when it comes to arguing that it is for defense, or even "preventive defense," against possible aggression. And even massive destruction of defenseless populations doesn't seem to horrify us. Only when violence touches us in our civic life through violent crimes do we become alarmed, but we still do not stop glorifying the bad examples that poison our society and children, starting in earliest infancy.

It is clear that neither the idea nor the sensibility that would provoke a profound repudiation and moral disgust that would move us away from the horrors of violence in its various forms have yet to take hold.

For our part, we will make every effort to install in the social environment the validity of the themes of Peace and Nonviolence, and it is clear that the time will come when both individual and mass reactions will be produced. That will be the moment of a radical change in our world.

To conclude my brief remarks I wish to again consider the "Charter for a World Without Violence," proposed by the Nobel Peace Laureates and Nobel Peace Organizations, in order to promote their proposals during the World March for Peace and Nonviolence. We are honored to share its principles in concrete actions of social activity that will surely lead us towards this new world we have mentioned.

Nothing more, thank you very much.