

DEMOCRACY

In several weeks major events have affected mankind and the place where mankind lives, mankind's own small planet. From the little peddler, with a diploma but without a job, in Sidi Bouzid who burned himself alive after the « *one humiliation too many* » to the earthquake in northeast Japan, from the « *Arab Awakening* », the shock wave of which is spreading in sub-Sahara Africa and Asia, to the accumulation of negligence and disasters bring about a second « *Chernobyl* », it is a whole set of events that make this year 2011 a year « *unlike any other* ». These sudden variations « *outside seasonal norms* » have introduced fractures in our ways of thinking, in our consciousness, in our very paradigms, or have at least accelerated the deep ideological developments already underway. To continue this parallel between the two events, we can play on the word « *tsunami* », which can indeed be applied to both of them. But what we want to stress is above all a fact that an evolution, a maturation, even a revolution in consciousness is taking place before our very eyes in the « *South* » as well as in the « *North* », and that we must become aware of this.

In my view, the demand for democracy is the central point : the demand for dignity, freedom, social justice as well as simple justice now voiced by millions of human beings is a stage in human emancipation, just like the growing awareness that technology, what is called technical progress, is only a tool and not an end in itself. It is urgent that technology be subjected to democratic debate, removed from the competition for « *markets* » and profits, and that it be redirected toward meeting human and environmental needs. The scientism that has been dominant up until now will retreat, and this is a good thing. But we must be careful and make sure that this retreat does not favor anti-science. Our responsibility as scientists, as a network of organizations will become greater because of this situation. This letter bears witness to the challenges and our actions in an « *exemplary* » field, biology and our involvement in social forums in order to open up debate by all citizens on scientific policies and practices.

Jean-Paul Lainé
President

The principle of the respect of human vulnerability and personal integrity : a draft report of the International Bioethics Committee

Article 8 of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights of UNESCO on bioethics and human rights states that « *In applying and advancing scientific knowledge, medical practice and associated technologies, human vulnerability should be taken into account. Individuals and groups of special vulnerability should be protected and the personal integrity of such individuals respected* ».

The draft report deals with vulnerability, providing examples in three contexts : clinics, human experiments, and biotechnological applications. These examples show, in several cases, the existence of a conflict of interests. Thus, « *To solve the problem of a shortage of volunteers ready to supply ovocytes for a program of assisted reproduction, a clinic decides to recruit « volunteers » by offering a free hysterectomy to women who need one and who must usually wait a long time before having this operation. In return for this service, the women are requested to undergo a procedure of ovarian hyperstimulation and sampling of the ovocytes thus obtained for use in the treatment of childless women who are customers of the clinic* ».

The observer of the World Federation of Scientific Workers at the meeting of the International Bioethics Committee (October 26, 2010) proposed that in addition to the corrective measures put forward in the draft report, measures be added aimed at eliminating or neutralizing any conflict of interest when personal vulnerability is at stake. This requires, in particular, the demand for total transparency of action whether it be in clinics, research, or biotechnology.

André Jaeglé
Emeritus president

The Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (UDBHR)

was unanimously adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in October 2005. This document, adopted after an impressive number of declarations and position statements put forward by ethical and political bodies since 1945, constitutes the single normative declaration with a universal value for medical practice and research. The UDBHR firmly establishes the traditional principles of biomedical ethics as part of human rights, as it has become obvious that the non-respect for dignity and the violation of basic rights and freedoms have a harmful impact on health. In new articles concerning social responsibility (article 14) and respect for vulnerability (article 8) the Declaration is addressed not only to doctors and researchers but also to States and all sectors of society. Everyone is called upon to work in solidarity to guarantee that the basic needs of human life be met. Initiatives undertaken in favor of food, water, and a healthy environment fall within the scope of bioethical concern as well as the elimination of exclusion, the reduction of poverty and illiteracy. In this global perspective, the bioethical ideal proclaimed in the Declaration becomes a universal key in assessing research, medical practices, and all situations, economic exchanges, cultural encounters, etc. in which individuals and groups are led to interact.

Gwen Terrenoire

The bioethical news Bioethics : what is its role in the world ? What are the responsibilities involved ?

In France, the scandal of an anti-diabetic anorexi-ant which has killed over 500 people has brought to the forefront the question of conflicts of interest in the process of authorizing medicines for sale. The sale of false medicines produces 25 times more income than that of the heroin trade, according to a report prepared by the Mutualité Française in October 2010. This scandal is reversible. Every 30 seconds a child dies of malaria ! With the help of UNICEF, 11 African countries have nonetheless succeeded in cutting the number of deaths due to malaria by 50 %. Organ harvesting: while Kosovo was under the supervision of the UN interposition force, prisoners were shot by the UCK and were amputated for organ harvesting, according to a report presented to the Council of Europe.

Hélène Carteron

Traditional medicines

The International Bioethics Committee (IBC) has created a working group on « *traditional medicines* » at the request of developing countries. The WHO also calls for discussion on traditional medicines, which are used by 200 million people in the world, 80 % of the population of Africa and 40 % of that of China. African doctors stress that the use of traditional medicines, co-related to poverty, cannot be an excuse to silence the demand to develop scientific medicine in Africa. For the World Federation of Scientific Workers, several of the challenges presented by this working group deserve to be examined. Traditional medicines truly constitute a field of knowledge, an empirical one to be sure, but one which contributes to « *the total sum of knowledge enabling man to adapt to his environment* » according to the WHO definition of health. Traditional medicines are based on proof of efficacy, including control tests, and the mastery of these medicines requires lengthy training. They are rooted in a culture, are accessible and accepted, and they protect the dignity of patients, in particular in the treatment of certain psychosomatic disorders with a cultural component. In a conception of moral equality between systems of thought, with no hierarchy between cultures, this knowledge is part of the common nonmaterial heritage of humanity. The preservation of biodiversity is another challenge. Policies leading to the rural exodus contribute to the disappearance of traditional medicines. Capitalist invasion of lands destroys sacred forests in which medicinal plants grow. This destruction is a loss of a common heritage. Lastly, elements of traditional medicine have been sold to the pharmaceutical industry, which has imposed licenses and patents. If we are to guarantee access to natural substances to all, we must fight against this bio-piracy. Creating the conditions for a true intercultural debate, a dialogue between Western civilization and other civilizations, in a « *philosophy of relationship* » in the words of a Edouard Glissant, who has just left us, should make it possible to define principles for research on traditional medicines based on harmlessness, efficacy, and quality. The guidelines for research of this type has been correctly indicated by the WHO : preserve the health of human beings by working, in a spirit of cooperation, on the complementarity between traditional medicines and Western scientific medicine, for which we must preserve the demand for accessibility to all. The question of the funding of this research is thus clearly raised.

Hélène Carteron

Dakar 2011 – the WSF and the WFSD The World Forum for Science and Democracy

The WFSD was held in Dakar on February 4th and 5th, on the eve of the WSF at the Cheikh Anta Diop University. This second edition marked quantitative progress over the first one in Belém, Brazil in 2009. It was attended by over 300 people from 32 countries, instead of 200 from 18 countries as was the case in Belém, the difference being mainly due to the strong presence of African countries. Nearly 80 organizations were represented. The event also constituted real qualitative progress with its rich debates and broader themes covered in the 10 workshops and four roundtables, and a « *calmer* » discussion between the trade unions and the NGOs.

The word « *education* » was not even mentioned in the declaration that closed the Belém forum. In Dakar one of the four roundtables was devoted to « *Science and Education* ». The president of the WFSD, the « *moderator* » of the round table, opened the discussion by calling for the broadest and most pluralistic approach possible, for example by not reducing education to instruction, or science to technological innovation. The panel as well as the audience highlighted the great gap between proclamations and actual public policies, a gap that cannot be filled by the useful initiatives of NGOs and associations, even though some of them possess the same size and play the same role as failed states. At the « *Science, Responsibility, and Democracy* » roundtable, we stressed the importance of democracy - in research institutions as well as in choices of society with respect to science and technology. Our federation, moreover, led a workshop on « *The Brain Drain* », and participated in a workshop on « *Trade Unions, Alterglobalization, and Sciences* » in partnership with our affiliated organizations in France (UGICT-CGT, SNCS and SNESUP-FSU) and in Senegal (SUDES), and also with colleagues from the Quebec Federation of University Professors (FQPPU).

According to its initial objective of 2007, this Forum is part of a permanent process that brings together and fosters dialogue between organizations, associations or foundations from three different backgrounds. To simplify, we can say the backgrounds are the following : the scientific world (institutions, trade unions of personnel), NGOs and associations engaged in free adult education, and organizations, NGOs and various associations active in general social movements. Dialogue is facilitated by the fact that these three groups are by no means disconnected. They are, however, still hesitant in going beyond mere narration of experiences and juxtaposition of speeches. Between now and the next WSF (and by the same occasion the next science forum), national and regional initiatives are planned to continue our « *march forward* ».

The World Social Forum

A truly impressive set of events, encounters, and discussions took place between February 6th and February 11th ! Which ones were the most significant ? Probably the first and the last acts. First of all, there was the inaugural march. With its 60 to 70 000 participants, this march will be remembered because of the role played in it by the women and young people of Africa. The procession lasted more than two hours. It was compact, and symbolized a humanity in struggle, a humanity putting forward demands about peace, debt, rights to land, access to care, and in particular access to education. Then there was the final ceremony with the speeches of the hosts, the organizers and especially the « *clap of thunder* » in the midst of the afternoon when it was announced that Mubarak had fled. The vigorous, determined and specific speech of the Egyptian representative was the climax at the end of the forum. More generally, the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt provided an impetus and renewed energy to the WSF, far removed from the lassitude announced and hoped for by the « *powers that be* » in the world.

It is always difficult for a small delegation to make a balanced description of the content of the whole WSF given its multiple activities and variety of places. Despite a last-minute « *sabotage* » depriving the forum of much of the premises of the University, the main networks were able, probably thanks to 10 years of experience and construction, to hold seminars and assemblies devoted to « *convergences and struggles* ». In particular, we participated in the « *migrations* », « *Rio+20* », « *Education* » and « *Social Movements* ». Let us keep in mind one important point : the final « *Education* » assembly ended with a clear assertion of the right to education – a fundamental human right – public education (the responsibility of the State), secular and free for all peoples of the world, in the South and in the North, from nursery school to higher education. This World Forum gave representatives from Africa the opportunity to express themselves much more than in Nairobi or Bamako four and five years ago. This was made possible by the decentralized activities in the Dakar metropolitan area, the confluence of caravans that left Benin and crossed Togo, Burkina Faso, and Mali, and also the action of different categories of struggles waged by students or employees. Not only does the « *African Man* »⁽¹⁾ have his own history and knowledge, he also has a present and a future.

⁽¹⁾In July 2007, at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, President Sarkozy delivered a speech which triggered strong emotion in the African continent and throughout the world. In this speech the French president stated that Africa's main problem was due to the fact that « *the African man has not yet entered History. (...) Africa's problem is that it experiences the present in the nostalgia for a lost paradise of childhood. (...) In this imaginary vision, in which everything always begins again, there is no room either for the human adventure or for the idea of progress* ».

Jean-Pierre Bazin and Jean-Paul Lainé

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