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Editorial

Only one solution: ambition

The strength of the speech delivered by Rafael Correa in front of the United Nations comes from his approach. Instead of exhausting oneself to obtain a consensus on living minimums, the international community should, according to the Ecuadorian president, reverse priorities.

We must reach social maximums. So as to say loudly that the only acceptable objective, for the poorest, is the ambition to get out of the misery in which they are stuck in.

The other bet which Rafael Correa stands up for is collective action. The reading template is here as well reversed: while individual success and competition between nations are nowadays systematically put forward, his speech in New York suggests to attack the reign of financial selfishness head on. There as well, the strength of the argument comes from his refusal of the "system": lets dare emancipate ourselves from it, affirms the Ecuadorian head of state, following the example of the Sri-Lankan Jesuit Paul Caspersz whose article we published last April.

We will put forward, the multiple socio-economic obstacles, and above all, the difficulty for human nature to liberate itself, in modern days, of the sacrosanct individualism dictated by the Occident. With no doubt. But it is fascinating to read that in Latin America, like in Asia, voices are raised to say no.

It is our mission, as fascinated observers and actors of development, to listen to them. And to pass it on.

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Latin America and the Millennium Objectives The Example of Ecuador under Rafael Correa

By Pablo Guerra*

The political panorama of Latin America has radically changed these last few years. After the 1990s which were dominated by ideas inspired by the wrongly named Washington Consensus, new progressive tendencies appeared. The will that appears is limpid: finding renewed and alternative doctrinary and ideological frameworks compared to those which prevailed previously and which contributed very little to the happiness of our people.

According to Pablo Guerra, Rafael Correa, the current president of Ecuador, represents this new generation of political leaders. His speech, made in front of the United Nations last year, offers according to him, a unique opportunity to decipher his propositions.

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In the first part of his speech, made in front of the United Nations last year, Rafael Correa throws back into question the Millennium Goals¹ and proposes a discussion that takes into account, and determines as an objective, to achieve a life more dignified for all. In his most brilliant section, he strikes out at the tendency which insists on certain living minimums, not adapted according to him for the search of a more equitable society, respectful of the collective good.

I share the Ecuadorian president's opinion when he attacks institutions as powerful as the World Bank, prompt to brandish the fight against poverty, but incapable to question the excessive wealth concentrated amongst very few hands.

Another important point raised in his speech is the necessity to incorporate a humanist and internationally responsible vision, the only one capable to attend to the protection of the environment, to a better respect of indigenous people's rights and migrants' rights.

The Millennium Goals establish a useful diagnosis

Here I would like to dwell on the Millennium Goals. Generally speaking, I perceived two big trends in the public and political opinion in relation to the initiative taken by the United Nations. Some see in this undertaking a major and concrete effort to move forward in a convincing way in the struggle against some of the principal troubles from which the world suffers and especially the developing world. Others, on the other hand, consider that they are "miserable" objectives, and in the end there will not be any big change in the social panorama of our people.

As for me, I have a different opinion: even though some of these objectives are obviously contestable (how can we set the aim of reducing, within 15 years, only by half, extreme poverty while millions of people will continue to starve to death?), I believe in the virtue of these commitments seen as a general tool to put the social themes at the core of the nation-states and international community's agenda. The probability of achieving the proposed objectives, even if they are minimalist, is doubtlessly for the moment very low, taking into account the present indicators and the perspectives for the future. But it is important to stay on the track in an evolving international context which has an impact on the axis of discussion.

Example: we are all witnesses of the greater importance accorded to the fight against terrorism than to the fight against poverty. It is our angle of view of society that must also change.

The axis around which the decisions are made must, because of this, be refocused on the enormous socio-economic challenges that we are confronted to in our Latin American continent. Challenges emphasized by the ethical questions raised by the president Rafael Correa. With his speech pronounced in front of the United Nations, the numerous social, cultural, political and of course academic movements dispose of an additional tool to deepen the debate and emphasize on the grave debts that are ours in terms of human development.

A fairer distribution of wealth remains the key

One of the priorities is to replace the battle against poverty, which scandalizes, back in its context. Because this battle has another face: the battle against wealth which also scandalizes.

There is no doubt that in Latin America, one of the main problems in achieving the Millennium Goals comes less from the difficulties to create wealth than from the inequalities of distribution of the existing wealth. The Inter-American Development Bank estimates that since a long time, our region has been the continent which distributes its wealth in the worse way. It points at some countries in particular².

¹ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): in 2000, the 191 member states of the United Nations agreed on eight essential goals to achieve between now and 2015. For example there is the reduction by half of extreme poverty but also primary education for all and the stopping of the propagation of HIV/ AIDS.

² *Facing up inequalities in Latin America*, IDB, Washington, 1998. Brazil and Paraguay were then at the head of the list in the statistics concerning the absence of equity in the distribution of revenue in the families.

A recent work of the ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) analyses this situation through two scenarios. One with a "historical" character, extrapolates economic growth and the dynamic of inequality in each country during the 1990s. The other one, alternative scenario, simulates the changes which would bring each country closer to a "regional ideal" (called "Maxiland" in the report), at the same time richer and more equitable than any of today's Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The worrying conclusions arise from simulations based on the historical evolution established by the ECLAC's experts. If the 18 countries of the sample continue to act as they have done during the 1990 decade, only 7 of them will achieve in 2015 their objectives of poverty reduction. These countries are Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Panama, Dominican Republic, Uruguay. But we can notice that two of these countries (Argentina and Uruguay) have suffered from the year 2000 because of crises which made their poverty rate explode.³

An alternative scenario, which would imply a larger progressiveness in the distribution of revenue, would lead to a completely different result: almost the totality of the countries could as a consequence achieve the poverty reduction objective by combining the average annual growth rates of the gross domestic product per habitant of 3% or less, with cumulative reductions of inequality inferior to 4%.

The sapping of inequalities is a devastating work

Two of the reports' conclusions in particular deserve to receive our attention. The first one lingers on the burden of inequalities:

"The results of the efforts to reduce poverty carried out recently in Latin America and in the Caribbean have been discouraging, mainly because it had not been possible to control the high levels of inequality in the region, affirms the document. It is in rare situations, where poverty has declined that the biggest profits have been obtained as regards to poverty reduction".

The second conclusion underlines this sapping of inequalities:

"There is no proof that, economically speaking, economic growth and reduction of poverty substitute each other, continues the text, on the contrary, in general everything indicates that a high level of inequality in the region represent an obstacle to a more dynamic economic growth"⁴.

As a consequence, the Ecuadorian president injects a sane optimism when proposing a new vision of development and encouraging us to dream through collective, conscious and democratic actions.

We must attentively follow the course of these various Latin-American experiments which do not give up in believing, as the World Social Forum says, that "another world is possible".

Address by Mr. Rafael Correa, President of the Republic of Ecuador

Mister President, Heads of State and Government, Representatives of the Governments of the world, Excellencies,

Allow me to begin my statement today by reflecting on the commitment to fight against poverty in force since September 2000 when 189 countries signed the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals. Due to this agreement, we committed ourselves to fulfill until the year of 2015, several basic goals in the road towards Human Development.

³ In six other countries, the impact of extreme poverty will continue to decrease, but in a slower way. These countries are Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua. In practice, the level of poverty in the five remaining countries – Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela – may rise, either by an increase of inequalities, by a decrease of revenue per habitant or by the combination of these two reasons.

⁴ Idem.

The limits of the Millennium Goals

Today, from a Government that has declared in Ecuador a citizens' revolution, one that is democratic, ethical and nationalist, we wish to set out some critical thoughts with regard to the very concept of the MDGs, their limitations and the dangers that minimum programs of that nature entail, in particular with regard to the profound social and economic inequalities that exist on the planet.

The first limitation of the MDGs is that they constitute a minimum as a poverty-reducing strategy. Our goal is to go much further than such minimums by going into greater depth on those objectives and incorporating others. The fact that we focus exclusively on minimum needs, such as that presented in the MDGs, carries a high risk that in seeking to satisfy our consciences we limit the aspirations for social change.

I think it is fair to say that there are two thresholds by which we can characterize the lives of people. The first has to do with the indispensable abilities of human beings to survive within a society and without which life could not be called human. The second refers to the capacities that allow each individual to be fulfilled within that society. We are speaking not only about subsistence, but of the right to enjoy a life that is worthy of being lived.

No to minimalist objectives

We believe that to have the goal of living on \$1 plus 1 cent per day – in order to supposedly overcome extreme poverty or to avoid dying prematurely, as one might deduce from the MDGs – does not lead to a dignified life.

The development of public policies in a country that is attempting to bring about radical change – as is the case in Ecuador – cannot be satisfied with those minimum objectives. Obviously, avoiding the premature death of girls and boys or of pregnant women is an objective that nobody would question. However, if we base ourselves only on that, we run the risk of agreeing that human life is simply a process of resistance, the aim of which is to extend someone's existence by a few more hours.

Common objectives concerning social maximums

What we propose therefore are common goals, not only with regard to living minimums but with regard to social maximums as well. For example, we feel that it is possible to draw on diverse identities, to build and restore public areas, to guarantee access to justice and to have work which enables people to enjoy the right to support themselves and to have time for contemplation, artistic creation and recreation – goals that are already contained in the national development plan that is being implemented by the Government of Ecuador.

Accordingly, we renounce the idea of a historically inevitable present to which we must surrender by simply looking for minimums that are clearly basic.

Furthermore, to be satisfied with the minimum also means legitimizing the reality that we experience because the minimum will not alter the distance and power relationships between individuals and between societies. Hence, we also favor the recognition of equal dignity for all human beings.

Granting some people certain minimums must be an initial and temporary goal and must never be considered a *modus operandi* of public policy. For that means that the "beneficiary" is placed in a position of inferiority compared to everyone else. In other words, it means that their dignity is not recognized as equal with everyone else's. In fact, it is no accident that international bureaucracies such as the World Bank always suggest producing poverty reports, but never consider publishing inequality reports.

For this reason, perhaps the best way to reduce poverty with dignity is to reduce social, economic, territorial, environmental and cultural gaps. One of my Government's main goals is thus to reduce inequality in an endogenous development framework of economic inclusion and socio-territorial cohesion, domestically as well as within the global system.

Human rights and universal values against social programs which fragment society.

And along the same lines, we in Ecuador are seeking to apply the rule of human rights and universal values. On the other hand, the long and sad neoliberal night proposed, from an existential perspective with its consequent absolutism of the market, the long sad neo-liberal night, in its privatizing and exclusive efforts, forgot that said universal values and human rights, and by

advocating for a staunch defense of the market, it proposed social programs that ended up fragmenting society in as many parts as there are social groups – social programs that ended up by breaking up society into as many parts as there are social groups.

However, a national project and a change in the power relationships within a society does not mean an addition of fragments pretending that, by some twist of fate, these will acquire meaning and coherence and will assemble themselves like the pieces of a puzzle – even if some of the pieces are missing.

It is indispensable to draw a shared project that must be constantly redesigned and whose goal must be that we all want to be part of it.

That is why, in Ecuador, we are creating our National plan for development in a democratic fashion because we think that without public participation of all citizens in fundamental decisions of our society, no country could legitimize and turn efficient these political decisions.

In other words, we must change a political practice applied by the traditional sectors, with their technocracy and elitism, to return the voice and action to those who should be the owners, actor and beneficiaries of public policies.

I would like furthermore to point out that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) offer a vision of development tied to consumption criteria and a strategy linked to economic liberation processes. Our view on development is very different from that. We understand development to be the attainment of a; good standard of living for everyone, in peace and in harmony with nature, and with the indefinite extension ;of human cultures.

Ecuadorian proposal for the CO₂ reduction: leave the oil under ground

In that respect, we are extremely happy to see that the Assembly has widely debated the devastating and unjust effects of climate change. Ecuador has submitted a specific and innovative proposal to contribute to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and to the preservation of biodiversity: our Yasuni-ITT proposal.

It involves a commitment not to extract some 920 million barrels of oil, thereby avoiding the emission of approximately 111 million tons of carbon that would come from the burning of this fossil fuel. However, that will mean that we will have to forgo significant investments of around \$720 million each year, a very significant amount for the economy of Ecuador. We are prepared to make this huge sacrifice, but we also ask for shared responsibility on the part of the international community, particularly on the part of developed countries, the planet's main predators, and for a minimum compensation for the environmentally generated goods. That would be an extraordinary example of global collective action, setting aside rhetoric in favor of concrete facts and practical actions: not only would it reduce global warming for the benefit of the whole planet, but it would also inaugurate a new economic logic for the twenty-first century, where the generation of value is compensated, not just the generation of goods.

Declaration of rights of the indigenous peoples

Speaking of cultures, we are also very happy to see that the General Assembly recently adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (resolution 61/295), which was sponsored very actively by Ecuador. The Declaration is an instrument that had to wait more than 20 years to be adopted and that will be the fundamental charter for the protection of human rights of our indigenous peoples.

For Ecuador, there are no illegal human-beings

Finally, the good living that we are talking about presupposes that genuine individual freedoms, opportunities and real potentialities are enhanced. In this sense, An immoral paradox arises here: at the world level, we are promoting the free movement of goods and capital, looking for the highest profitability. But, on the other hand, we are penalizing the free circulation of people who are looking for decent jobs. That is quite simply intolerable.

For the Government of Ecuador, there are no illegal human beings. There is no such thing, and the United Nations must insist on this point. There is no such person as an illegal human being. It is not permissible to think in that way. We are working actively to bring about changes in the shameful international migration policies, bearing in mind obviously that our great responsibility is to build a

country that offers guaranties for a worthy life as a mechanism to prevent migration caused by poverty and exclusion.

There is no end to history and ideologies

Mr. President, Excellencies,

We must not be misled by those who proclaim the end of ideologies, the end of history. Conservative sectors want to make us believe that we live in the best of all possible worlds and that we have to abandon any attempt to change, any attempt to build our own individual and collective identity, any attempt to build our own history.

In front of such mean and self-satisfied worldview, we say that it is possible to have a collective action that is both aware and democratic, in order to direct our lives and organize world society in a different way with a more human face. Our understanding of development obliges us to recognize one another, understand one another and appreciate one another, so that we can move towards self-realization and the building of a shared future.

Ecuador would like to invite you all today to build this world, this dream.

Thank you very much.

Rafael Correa Delgado

Economist and university professor,
President of the Republic of Ecuador.

A few points

Rafael Correa is the president of the Ecuadorian Republic since November 2006. Former minister of economy and finance under Alfredo Palacio's mandate, he opposes himself, since then, to the "destructive" policies imposed, according to him, by the United States, the World Bank, the IMF and the large oil companies in Latin America. Always credited by 60% of favorable opinion, Mr. Correa is facing, since May, Indian protests demanding a right of control over the mining and oil policies of the country.

Advocating a "pacifist and citizen based revolution in a democratic context", Correa is a central actor of the political and popular left wing movement; which is followed by the major part of the continent. One of his feat of arms has been the expulsion, end of April 2007, of the permanent representative of the World Bank in Quito. A gesture presented as a riposte to the international financial institutions' imperialism.

The president Correa's fetish project is that the Bank of the south wants to incarnate, in the beginning of the 21st century, an alternative to the constraints imposed to the developing countries by the IMF. Sadly the start of the project was paralyzed because of a lack of coherency between the seven participating countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Consequence: the status, the organisation and the financing of the organisation are not final.

Argentina and Brazil want a proportional right to vote according to their financial contribution and a massive investment in the very large projects whereas the other countries want to see the realisation of regional development projects by the public companies of Latin America for food sovereignty. The realisation of this project by the Bank of the south will depend on the ability of its members to make concessions, which are essential for a region marked by centuries of occidental domination.

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