

Academic Solidarity and Peace

By
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Abstract

Educators treat peace as a supreme universal value. The founding fathers of UNESCO had the merit of reflecting it in its Constitution, pointing out that peace must be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

Building bridges for peace demands a great variety of activities for strengthening dialogue and trust and finding the best modalities for conflict resolution. Academic solidarity can bring its valuable contribution to making genuine peace a reality during the irreversible process of globalization. Academics should offer visions of positive alternatives and realistic solutions, as well as sound inspiration for strategies to deal with global issues and to combat planetary vulnerability. Education for peace is a responsible, humanistic process which aims to give peace a chance.

There is a UNESCO Appeal to develop a worldwide Network called Global Mega University Net (GMUNET) to promote mutual understanding and academic solidarity and explore ways and means of cooperation between mega-universities.

The university volunteers concept is based on the belief that through the very nature of their activities and endeavours academics are driven by the spirit of academic solidarity and are ready to contribute to finding solutions to global issues facing the world today.

Universities are strongly invited to stand in academic solidarity with other academic institutions throughout the world, as well as in their own country. Programmes for peace education, conflict resolution, human rights and democracy, should be supported by academic institutions and by public and private donors.

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In the spirit of academic solidarity universities are invited to take specific action to support institutions of higher education in the least developed parts of the world and in regions suffering the effects of conflict or natural disasters.

*There are reasons to expect a strong display of academic solidarity after the tragic natural disasters in Asia on December 26, 2004. The assistance in the academic field demonstrates the power of human solidarity. European universities are expected to be more inclined to welcome students from the affected regions and to offer scholarships. In the medium and long term, this will cement both economic and cultural relationships. If solidarity and moral responsibility become the guiding light of academic cooperation, that would bring a direct contribution to the promotion of national, regional and universal peace. There is a legitimate hope that the concept **opus solidaritatis pax** (peace is the fruit of solidarity) will receive further visibility and tangibility in conformity with the aspirations of all peoples.*

1. Preliminaries

In the current globalizing world no academic institution of higher education can survive and develop within its strict geographical boundary, without solidarity and cooperation with academic communities from similar institutions. The concept of solidarity is inseparable from the very notion of community and should be treated in a universal context, having in mind that nowadays the duty of solidarity is an imperative prerequisite of the irreversible process of globalization and is indispensable for a philosophy of morality and politics. (1)

Solidarity is a universal value reflected in a union of interests, purposes or sympathies. It is also defined as caring for others, respecting and sharing their feelings. It exists wherever people work together towards a common goal. Solidarity is a complex concept and cannot be reduced to a reactive manifestation of vague compassion for the misfortunes of other people. It is a firm, permanent and persevering determination to commit oneself to the collective good. Moreover, "The concept of solidarity, in addition to embodying altruistic sentiments held in common, includes that of cooperation so necessary to forestall obstacles which may prejudice the maintenance of that principle, or the reestablishment of harmony when weakened or disrupted by the adoption of measures contrary to the dictates of international law and morality". (2)

For the purposes of the present study we may define some other fundamental notions on the basis of existing international documents. In this spirit, "academic community" covers all those persons teaching, studying, researching and working at an institution of higher education. Such institutions may comprise universities, other centres of post-secondary education and centres of research and culture associated with them. The concept "academic" may also be interpreted in a more restrictive way and relates to the inputs originated only by the university community and research and does not encompass joint student activities.(3)

The Statement on Academic Freedom, University Autonomy and Social Responsibility proposed by the International Association of Universities (1998) recalls inter alia that one of the indissociable principles for which every university should stand is the obligation to promote, through teaching and research, the