

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Last version

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University of Coimbra
Oration on the occasion of the award of the
Doctorate honoris causa to the Director-General

Sunday 8 February 2009

Magnificent Rector
Illustrious Professors
Esteemed Staff and students
Distinguished guests
Dear Friends

I come as a humble candidate for the Doctorate Honoris
Causa of this august University of Coimbra.

I am deeply moved by the warmth with which you have
received me.

It is inspiring to be amongst you today.

It is a privilege to live, and to feel, in this magnificent
ceremony, the strength and assurance of your traditions.

Thank you for letting me be a part of your respected intellectual history.

Looking at your work, century after century, I am certain that King Dinis would feel very proud.

The University is a stalwart defender of freedom of thought and independence of mind.

And the spaces for thought and action that you create are essential for keeping ideals and human values alive.

From such a tradition come the voices that speak out against injustice and discrimination, dictatorships and tyranny.

Those independent voices questioning the givens and powers of the moment, are fundamental to achieving social, economic and scientific transformations.

In my personal experience of struggle for democracy in my own country, Chile, such voices of support and the hands of friendship that reached out from around the world, sustained us and helped advance our cause for freedom.

As I stand before you today, I recall the solidarity of that time and the journey that has brought me to the present.

That journey brought me and the values that I have long defended, to the International Labour Organization which I am privileged to lead.

Today you also honour the ILO, an institution built on values whose point of departure is that labour is not a commodity.

Work is central to human identity, and to human dignity. In many ways, the quality of work defines the moral quality of a society.

Our founders, Portugal among them, affirmed that “universal and lasting peace could be established only if based on social justice”.

Or as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “everyone has the right to work...to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment...to equal pay...to just and favourable remuneration ensuring...an existence worthy of human dignity...and the right to form and join trade unions.”

Today, we express this mission that binds human dignity, productive enterprises, and freely chosen employment as “Decent Work”. It embraces:

- The value foundation of international labour standards, particularly freedom of association and organization.
- The economic driver of employment and sustainable enterprises
- The solidarity of social protection – and
- The stabilizing role of social dialogue

The ILO is celebrating its 90th Anniversary this year. Much progress has been made along the way. Most labour laws are based on ILO Conventions.

But let's talk about today.

Deep and pervasive injustice in the world is a catalyst of social instability.

For too many individuals, families and communities, insecurity and precariousness has been a way of life. Too many have felt left out and left behind.

The crisis we are facing today shows us how the lack of fair rules governing globalization has made it morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable.

Globalization has been operating in an ethical vacuum.

Indeed, it overvalued markets, undervalued the state and devalued the dignity of work.

This, was already a crisis before the current financial and economic crisis.

We need a new model of globalization with coherent policies to make sustainable development a reality in open economies and open societies.

I am committed to advancing human dignity, decent work, and respect for the environment as pillars of a new global approach.

We need a global rethink.

We do not have today the policy instruments and the institutions for a global response to a global crisis.

We need to create them. And we can. A

Let me stimulate you to deepen you analysis, research, advocacy and institutional rebuilding.

Thinking about the future here in the University of Coimbra, we must reinforce:

- The confidence to build on our roots, accept our history and learn from it.
- The conviction that we must leave the world better than we found it, that social justice is the foundation of peace and,
- The wisdom to instil in future generations a questioning mind that will confront prevailing ideas with a simple....WHY?

Conclusion

I hope that you will confer on me the honour of joining the distinguished family of the University of Coimbra.

And I will strive to be worthy of your trust.

Thank you.