

WALKING IN PEACE WITH THE EARTH

Prerequisite for Peace among humans

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"There is no path to peace, peace is the path."
Gandhi

Let us accept, without beating about the bush, that humanity is at a crossroads. If we continue on the same path, at best, only a fraction of its members will be able to survive the ecological collapse. Accepting this fate is intolerable. We need a change of direction, with transitions that simultaneously allow us to alleviate the impacts of the collapse that overwhelms us, while we shore up, build, and rebuild other forms of life limited to ecological cycles in terms of social justice and radical democracy.

To achieve this, let us build alternatives to escape the current civilization of merchandise and waste, as Picasso would do when he painted his great works. The artist from Malaga used to superimpose several different perspectives of the same image until he created a painting where the beautiful and the abstract were masterfully united. Recognizing the complexity of the task, let us use his method to propose multiple options - overlapping, temporal and successive - in the face of the nonsense created by the civilization of capital.

Therefore, today more than ever, it is necessary to multiply efforts to walk in Peace with Nature in Our America, which is pulled by opposing forces, some encouraging more and more destruction and others defending it. In Argentina, the government reinforces extractivism and threatens to dismantle environmental laws, proposing a hunt for environmentalists, and exacerbating inequality and social conflict under an authoritarian regime that prioritizes corporate interests. In Ecuador, a transitional government celebrates agreements with large mining corporations while unleashing violent actions against communities defending their territories, further deepening the exploitation of natural resources. In other countries, even with progressive governments, such as Brazil and Colombia, the expansion of extractivism of all kinds continues. Meanwhile, resistance to protect territories, as spaces of life, is multiplying everywhere.

Against this conflictive scenario, we welcome the Colombian government's commitment to prioritize *Peace with Nature* as a central theme at the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity - COP 16, to be held at the end of the year in Cali, Colombia.

Human Rights and the Rights of Nature, a life duo

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The defense and protection of territories is fundamental for living together in peace. The destruction of Nature affects the very foundations of existence and exacerbates social conflicts. To overcome this path towards self-destruction, we must promote the combined enforcement of Human Rights and the Rights of Nature: a sum of existential rights to guarantee the dignified life of human and non-human beings.

As a starting point, let us accept that there can be no right that permits or encourages merciless exploitation of Mother Earth, let alone its destruction, but only a right to ecologically sustainable coexistence. Human laws and actions must harmonize and agree with the laws of Nature. From this perspective, the validity of these existential rights responds to the material conditions that allow their crystallization and not to a mere formal recognition in the legal field. Their projection, therefore, must overcome the approaches that understand rights as watertight compartments, since their incidence must be multiple, diverse, and transdisciplinary.

The task seems simple, but it is complex. We well know that law is a disputed terrain. The challenge is to overcome the divorce between Nature and Humanity. It is necessary to bring about a reunion, something like retying *the Gordian knot of life* broken by the force of a predatory and unsustainable civilizing conception. In other words, we need to overcome the ideological division between Nature and cultures. By splicing the two, even politics takes on a renewed relevance.

This recognition leads us to see how humans, especially when organized around capital accumulation, are exercising multiple forms of violence, that is, wars against the Earth. It is up to us, then, to overcome so much aberration.

Stop wars against the Earth and all its inhabitants.

It is urgent to stop wars of all kinds. Wars that cause damage gradually or violently, often with deep and irreversible impacts on Nature. These are warlike actions derived from socio-environmental relations that emanate from the greed of capital, as well as from asymmetrical, oppressive, and hierarchical structures, such as patriarchy.

In this war environment, the loss of biodiversity is a constant. The fragmentation, degradation, and even disappearance of jungles, forests, rivers, moors, wetlands, mangroves, salt marshes, and other ecosystems, which affect their ecosystemic functions, are still commonplace. As a result, species are also disappearing at an accelerated rate. Devastating fires, gigantic floods caused by climate change, land desertification by monocultures, agrochemical spraying, oil extraction, and mega-mining, devastate entire territories. The ecological footprint of the human species -which is unequally distributed- exceeds the Earth's biological capacity. Poverty, as well as growing social inequality and the destruction of communities, are also worsening as a result of these suicidal wars unleashed by the greed of capital.

With good reason, at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in 2021, the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, stated that

Making peace with Nature requires understanding that we are facing a triple crisis that intertwines climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss; it is a suicidal war against Nature, for without it, Humanity could not exist on the planet.

To promote the peace called for by Guterres, we must begin by understanding that "*the capitalist way of life exists by suffocating life and the world of life; this process has been taken to such an extreme that the reproduction of capital can only occur to the extent that it destroys both human beings and Nature,*" in the words of the Ecuadorian philosopher Bolivar Echeverria.

Let's face it, the disconnection of human beings with Nature has provoked a fierce war against it. We have not yet understood that Nature has its own cycles, which cannot be affected by humans without it reacting and rebelling. Let us understand that the growing commodification of life in all its aspects is a mined path that leads inexorably to *terricide*.

Overcoming life-stifling civilization

To make peace with the Earth and from the Earth implies, then, to have agendas agreed upon by the peoples for action to overcome the prevailing devices of death. To achieve this, we need to identify all the wars that attack the Earth, in their multiple fronts and forms.

Our civilizational axis is an economic system that systematically overexploits and contaminates our basis of existence. Productivism and consumerism mercilessly bombard Mother Earth. Extractivisms represent brutal invasions of multiple territories. Monocultures and false solutions, such as carbon markets or transgenic seeds, brutally undermine biodiversity. The homogenization of consumption accelerates the rhythms of destruction with enormous environmental impacts due to the distant transportation of food, to mention just one critical point.

In addition to all this, there are the conflagrations themselves: between peoples or against peoples, such as the genocide unleashed by the Zionist State in Palestine, which devastates not only humans but also Nature itself.

At the same time, we must confront those covert wars. We are referring to the ways of perceiving, interpreting, and experiencing Nature, which are based, in particular, on that civilizing assumption that considers humans to be outside and even above it to dominate it. This positioning implies a warlike impulse immersed in epistemic and ontological violence that ends up encouraging climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, as well as all kinds of depredations of Nature, always in the name of "progress" and "development". And all of this with a perverse reverence for the potential of science and technology, which on many occasions also act as weapons of environmental destruction.

These visions lead to the maintenance of a cultural universe, which, in essence, imposes on us the idea that there is only one way of being in the world. By denying the *pluriverse*, biological diversities are made invisible, scorned, violated, or even eliminated, as well as existing cultural diversities. From this arises the standardization of the concept of Nature, closing the door to other visions, many of them carrying powerful transforming elements. For this reason, it is better to speak of Earth in a cosmic key, rather than simply of Nature, a concept that can hold different readings.

In other words, we must take on all these challenges without falling into the trap of simply negotiating limits or patches to continue tolerating pollution and the destruction of the basis of life itself, as has been done in all the COPs so far. This nonsense could be repeated in Cali, no matter how well-intentioned the Colombian government may be, because we know that in the framework of the United Nations, the

will of governments and corporations is imposed, and not necessarily that of the peoples.

Walking with Peace, in the key of the pluriverse

From the perspective of Peace with the Earth, we must accept and respect diversity in all aspects: lives, cultures, thoughts, and, of course, biodiversity. That is to say, the plurality of ways of being with Nature and of being Nature, since we humans are Nature. This acceptance opens the door to understanding the different ways of assuming it as Pacha Mama or Mother Earth, as well as many other ways of relating to Nature coming from the *Indigeneity*: as our friend Aníbal Quijano understood it. Here there is room for some readings that could be understood as derived from Modernity itself, but which, in essence, also point to its overcoming.

All these are not approaches that close horizons to partial visions, but rather, on the contrary, open them by promoting other worldviews, encouraging the *pluriverse*, that is, "*a world where many worlds fit together*," in which all human and non-human beings can coexist and prosper in dignity and mutual respect. No more "one developed world" living at the expense of other worlds, as happens so cruelly in our time.

Having said this, Peace on Earth does not only imply the silencing of weapons. It also demands the halting of all those processes that generate irreversible damage to the environment of which we are a part, damage that affects local communities and humanity, and damage that often constitutes *ecocide*. This task requires building worlds based on reciprocity, relationality, complementarity, correspondence, resonance, and solidarity.

At the same time that the actions of destruction are stopped, we need to encourage the construction and reconstruction of other forms of socially and ecologically sustainable life. All this demands a *Copernican turn* in all orders to leave behind the current civilization, which must be structurally overcome. "*The world must be turned upside down*" because the Earth "*could be healed only with the reversal of established values and the revolution of economic priorities*", concludes ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant.

At present, alternative actions are multiplying in different areas and from different territories. If we pay some attention and - figuratively speaking - become silent, we can listen to the future breathe. There are countless processes attuned to the pluriverse, as well as proposals for structural changes. At this point, visions, values, principles, experiences, and practices such as those of the *Buen Vivir* coming from the native cultures, without idealizing them to the useless level of models or essentializing them ignoring their limitations, represent opportunities to promote profound changes.

Making Peace with the Earth also means recognizing its agency and the network of socio-cultural relations immersed in it. It is a matter of repairing polluted territories and dismantling destructive infrastructures, as well as changing production systems and predatory consumption practices. This invites us to appeal to imagination and audacity. We need to move, in the words of the great theologian Leonardo Boff, "*from being lords and masters to being brothers and sisters among ourselves and with all creatures. This new perspective implies a new ethic of shared responsibility, care, and synergy with the Earth*".

And in this context, the Rights of Nature -ecological justice-, walking hand in hand with Human Rights -social justice-, give us clues to face ecosocial collapse, as

well as to promote and build all the alternatives that guarantee a dignified life for all beings on Earth. In other words, these existential rights serve to repair and restore, as well as to prevent, while laying the foundations for building global existential justice.

Land is a basic condition for life, equity and freedom

If we accept that a new ethic is necessary to reorganize life on the planet, we must accept that all living beings have the same ontological value, which does not imply that they are all identical; this approach articulates the notion of "*biocentric equality*", in which, according to Eduardo Gudynas, all living species have the same importance and therefore deserve to be protected. In this endeavor, we need to create the conditions that guarantee respect for the people and communities that protect their territories, which in reality is a form of self-defense of the Earth itself.

It is time to understand that Nature is the basic condition of our existence and, therefore, it is also the basis of collective and individual rights of freedom. Just as individual freedom can only be exercised within the framework of the rights of other humans, individual and collective freedom can only be exercised within the framework of the Rights of Nature. If we think of our grandsons and granddaughters, i.e. future generations, we may as well conclude that their existence and freedom depend on respect for Nature. The German jurist Klaus Bosselmann rightly notes that "*without the Rights of Nature, freedom is an illusion*".

It is equally urgent to dismantle the patriarchal and colonial structures that provoke and reproduce multiple forms of violence. It will be necessary to crystallize the collection of colonial and ecological debts, in which the nations enriched by the exploitation of other peoples and other territories are the debtors. It will also be necessary to dismantle the world economic system, with all its tools of domination, such as the foreign debt, which forms a predatory machinery of life.

In this journey, there will be advances and setbacks. But, to the extent that a broad and diverse participation of peoples, collectives, organizations, and individuals is achieved, at no time can we lose hope, which we do not assume simply as the belief that something will inevitably turn out well, but rather as the certainty that what we do has meaning, regardless of the outcome.

If we humans do not reestablish Peace with the Earth, there will be no possibility of Peace for us on Earth, which is understandably rebelling against so much destruction that we are causing.

We are certain that in this harmonious and loving reunion with Mother Earth, we will be able to count on her enormous capacity for resilience and recovery because she is a true Mother, and is on our side.

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