

The Dangers Confronting Humanity

Reflections by comrade Fidel

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It is not an ideological question, related to an irremediable hope, that a better world is, and must be, possible.

It is a known fact that the *homo sapiens* has existed for about 200,000 years, which is no more than a tiny span of the time passed since the emergence of the first basic forms of life on our planet approximately three billion years ago.

The answers to the unfathomable mysteries of life and nature have fundamentally been religious. It would be foolish to pretend otherwise and I am convinced that it will always be this way. The deeper science delves into the explanation of the universe, space, time, matter and energy; the infinite galaxies and the theories of the origin of the constellations and the stars; the atoms and the fractions of them that made possible life and its short span; and the millions and millions of combinations that govern it; the more questions man will have in search of ever more complex and challenging rationalizations.

The more involved human beings are in the quest for answers to such deep and complex endeavors related to reason, the more significant the efforts will be to release them from their enormous ignorance on the true possibilities of what our intelligent species has created and can still create. Living and ignoring it is tantamount to a complete denial of our human condition.

One thing, however, is absolutely certain: there are very few who imagine how close we might be to the extinction of our species. Nearly twenty years ago, at a World Summit on the environment held in Rio de Janeiro, I pointed to this danger before a select audience of Heads of State and Government, who listened with respect and interest; albeit unconcerned for a risk they perceived to be centuries or perhaps millennia away.

They certainly felt that science and technology, combined with a basic sense of responsibility, would suffice to tackle the problem. That important summit happily concluded with a great photo-op of distinguished persons, including the most powerful and influential. There was no danger whatsoever.

Hardly anyone talked about climate change then. George Bush senior and other dazzling leaders of the North Atlantic Alliance enjoyed victory over the

European socialist camp. The Soviet Union was dismembered and in ruins. A huge amount of Russian money ended up in the Western banks, its economy crumbled, up and its defensive shield vis-à-vis the NATO military was dismantled.

The former superpower, that had given the lives of over 25 million of its people to World War II, was left with only the nuclear power capability for a strategic response, something it had been forced to create after the United States secretly developed the nuclear bomb that it dropped on two Japanese cities when the adversary, already defeated by the irrepressible advance of the allied forces, was unable to fight.

Such was the beginning of the Cold War and the production of thousands of increasingly destructive and accurate thermonuclear weapons capable of annihilating the population of the planet several times over. Nevertheless, the nuclear confrontation continued relentlessly while the weapons grew more accurate and destructive. Russia does not resign itself to the unipolar world that Washington intends to impose. Other nations such as China, India and Brazil are emerging with unexpected economic strength.

For the first time, in a globalized world full of contradictions, the human species has created the capacity for self destruction. This in addition to arms of unprecedented cruelty, such as chemical and bacteriological weapons like napalm and white phosphorous, used with total impunity against the civilian populations; the electromagnetic weapons and other forms of extermination. No place on earth or in the sea, no matter how deep, is beyond reach of the current means of war.

It is known that tens of thousands of nuclear devices have been produced, even portable ones.

The greatest risk stems from the judgment of leaders with such decision-making power that mistakes or madness, so common in human nature, could lead to unspeakable catastrophes.

Almost 65 years have passed since the explosion of the first two nuclear artifacts due to the decision of a mediocre individual who was left in command of the rich and mighty American power after Roosevelt's death.

Today, eight countries are in possession of such weapons –most of them obtained with US support—while several others have the technology and the resources to manufacture them in a very short time. On the other hand, terrorist groups alienated by bigotry could also resort to them, the same way that terrorist and irresponsible governments would not hesitate to use them given their unrestrained and genocidal behavior.

The military industry is the most prosperous of all and the United States of America the largest exporter of weapons.

If our species can escape the abovementioned risks, there another that is greater still and even less unavoidable: that of climate change.

The population of the world today is seven billion. Soon, within 40 years, it will be nine billion. That is nine times what it was barely 200 years ago. I dare assume that in the days of ancient Greece the figure for the entire planet was about one-fortieth of that.

What's amazing in our times is the contradiction between the imperialist bourgeois ideology and the survival of the species. The need for justice among human beings is no longer the issue; this is not only possible but unwavering. The issue now is the right and the possibility of survival of the human species.

The farther the horizon of knowledge expands to previously unknown limits, the closer humanity is brought to the abyss. All sufferings known so far are hardly a pale reflection of what could lie ahead of humanity.

Three events occurred in only 71 days that humanity cannot overlook.

On December 18, 2009, the international community sustained the most important setback in history as it tried to find a solution to the most serious problem threatening the world at the moment: the necessity to urgently put an end to the emission of greenhouse gases which are causing the gravest problem that mankind has faced until today.

All hopes had converged on the Copenhagen Summit after years of preparation following the Kyoto Protocol that the government of the United States, the most contaminating country in the world, had lightly decided to ignore. The rest of the world community, 192 countries, --this time even the United States included-- had committed to promote a new agreement.

The American attempt at imposing its hegemonic interest was so shameful that in violation of the most basic democratic principles it tried to force unacceptable conditions on the rest of the world; anti-democratically resorting to bilateral arrangements with a group of the most influential United Nations member countries.

The States that make up the international organization were invited to sign a document that is no more than a travesty, a document that relates purely theoretical future contributions to curb climate change.

Barely three weeks had passed when at sunset on January 12, Haiti, the poorest nation in the hemisphere and the first to put an end to the horrible slavery system, was hit by the greatest natural catastrophe in the history of this

part of the world: a 7.3 degrees in the Richter scale earthquake only 6.25 miles deep and very close to its coastline struck the capital of the country where most of the dead or missing people lived in fragile houses built with clay. A mountainous and soil-degraded country of 16, 875 square miles where wood is practically the only source of domestic fuel for nine million people.

If there is a place on Earth where a natural catastrophe has become an enormous tragedy that place is Haiti, a symbol of poverty and underdevelopment, where the descendants of Africans live who were brought by the colonialists to work as slaves for white masters.

The event came as a shock to the entire world; people in every corner of the planet were shaken by the filmed images that seemed almost incredible. The injured, bleeding and moribund, crawled among the dead asking for help while the lifeless bodies of their loved ones lay under the debris. According to official estimates, the number of lethal victims exceeded the figure of 200,000.

The country was already occupied by the MINUSTAH forces sent by the United Nations to restore the order subverted by Haitian mercenary forces that, instigated by the Bush administration, had undertaken actions against the government elected by the Haitian people.

Several buildings that sheltered soldiers and commanders of the peacekeeping forces collapsed, too, adding to the painful toll in human lives.

The official reports estimate that, aside from the dead, about 400 thousand Haitians were wounded; and several million, almost half the total population were affected.

It was a real test for the world community that after the shameful Danish Summit had the duty to show that the rich and developed countries could be capable of tackling the threats of climate change to life on our planet. Haiti must be an example of what the wealthy nations should do for the Third World countries in light of climate change.

You can believe it or not, challenging the data –in my view irrefutable—of the most serious scientists of the world and the overwhelming majority of the most knowledgeable and honest people worldwide, who think that at the current pace the planet is warming up, the greenhouse gases will raise the temperature not just by 1.5 degrees, but up to 5 degrees; and that the average temperature is already the highest of the past 600 thousand years, long before the existence of human beings as a species on the planet.

It is absolutely unthinkable that nine billion human beings who will inhabit the world by 2050 could survive such a catastrophe.

There is still the hope that science may find a solution to the energy problem that today forces to consume in 100 more years the remaining gas, liquid and solid fuel that it took nature 400 million years to create. Perhaps science can find a solution to the energy required.

The crux of the matter would be to know how long it would be, and how costly, before human beings can cope with the problem, which is not the only one, since many other non-renewable minerals and grave problems demand a solution, too.

There is one thing we can be sure of, based on all the knowledge we have today: the closest star is four light-years away from our Sun. At a speed of 187,500 miles per second; maybe, a spaceship could cover that distance in thousands of years. The human beings have no other choice but to live on this planet.

It might seem unnecessary to deal with the subject if only 54 days after the disaster in Haiti, another incredible earthquake, 8.8 degrees in the Richter scale, with its epicenter 93.7 miles northwest of the city of Concepcion and 29.6 miles deep, had not caused another human catastrophe: this time in Chile. It was not the most severe in the history of that sister nation, for it is said that another one in the past reached 9 degrees, but this time it was not only a seismic event.

But, while in Haiti they waited for hours for a tidal wave that never came, the earthquake in Chile was followed by a huge tsunami, which arrived at its coasts almost thirty minutes or an hour later, depending on the distance and the data that are still not accurately known, one whose waves made it as far as Japan.

If it had not been for the Chilean experience in facing earthquakes, its sounder constructions and larger resources, the natural phenomenon would have taken the lives of tens of thousands, or perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people.

Yet, it did cause about one thousand fatal victims, according to official reports, thousand of wounded and maybe more than two million people sustained material damages.

Almost the entire population of 17, 094,275 people suffered terribly and still endure the consequences of the earthquake that lasted more than two minutes, its repeated aftershocks and the moving scenes and suffering left behind by the tsunami along its thousands of miles of coastline.

Our Homeland fully sympathizes with and morally supports the material effort that it is the international community's duty to make in favor of Chile. The

Cuban people would not hesitate to do for the fraternal Chilean people anything within the extent of its capabilities from the humane point of view.

I think it is the duty of the international community to objectively report the tragedy sustained by both peoples. It would be cruel, unfair and irresponsible to fail to educate the peoples of the world about the threatening dangers.

Let truth prevail above selfishness and the lies used by imperialism to deceive and confound the peoples!

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