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A vision for the young people of today One hundred years of Scouting

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Year after year, the great of this world gather to discuss the global situation, try to identify priorities and objectives and sign up to commitments. But often these objectives remain unfulfilled and the commitments ultimately prove to be no more than rhetorical statements of good intentions.

The quest for world economic growth has distorted the notion of development (however it may be prefaced with adjectives such as "human" and "sustainable") and resulted in the main objective of political action – the improvement of life conditions – being lost sight of.

Hence, the expansion of the global economy is not bringing about a reduction in poverty. On the contrary, social exclusion is increasing, inequalities are widening and the worldwide social conflict that results fuels a diabolical vicious cycle of all kinds of intolerance and discrimination.

The socio-economic model that prevails today drives us towards constant competition, frantic consumerism and, consequently, the incessant and irresponsible exploitation of the world's natural resources. In this model, from birth individuals are considered more than anything else consumers, subject to sophisticated advertising strategies that create ever-increasing, artificial needs, with devastating social consequences. One example is the obesity epidemic associated with the over-consumption of sugars and fats in foods and beverages; another is the growing consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco.

In a society where success is measured by the ostentation of luxury and where to appear is more important than to be, the need for self-affirmation sometimes deviates into criminality, often of a despicable kind.

The scourges of poverty and exclusion are not confined to the planet's poorest countries. In the absence of an alternative vision that may give a purpose to their lives, even the best-off youngsters are confronted with uncertainty, dissatisfaction and frustration.

While millions of children and young people are denied even the hope of a decent life, the failure of the prevailing model can be gauged – even in the richest countries – by the continual deterioration in family and social relations, the dramatic increase in cases of depression and stress-related conditions and an alarming rise in the number of suicides among young people the world over.

It is urgent to correct this situation. Moreover, the eight Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to be achieved by the originally established deadline of 2015 without a more determined effort by the major global players. The result will also depend on the capacity to resolve the contradictions between the declared objectives and the means employed to achieve them and on the will to put down the foundations of a fairer and more peaceful society.

This is a process that cannot succeed unless hope is restored to the children and youth of today, offering them values worth living for and making a commitment to: a vision of a different world and the tools to build it.

Education plays a key role in this, especially a type of education that, in the etymological sense of the word (*"ex-ducere"*: "to extract", "to free that which is inside"), can help boys and girls to discover and develop their own talents.

It is a matter of offering educational avenues that look beyond mere objectives of schooling, that consider, in the best cases, not only access to education but also its quality. It is not enough to aim for the knowledge and technical capacities that school can and should help all children to develop. It is essential to recognize the importance of opportunities and experiences of non-formal education that UNESCO defines as "educational activities provided outside the formal education system for a defined population group and with clear learning objectives".

Not all out-of-school learning experiences are non-formal education. To qualify as non-formal education, they must have defined pedagogical objectives and methods.

Moreover, it would be too limiting to consider only formative experiences aimed at the acquisition of skills that are instrumental for socio-economic integration, without reflecting on the model of society that young people aspire to build.

Today, more than ever, it is essential to offer young people values that help them to develop from childhood as responsible citizens able to lead their own lives (and sometimes those of others, as leaders in different social and professional contexts) and to build a society different from today's. A society which, seizing the opportunities presented by globalization, not only respects but values the multiplicity of cultural

identities, thus creating a virtuous cycle of solidarity and peaceful coexistence at all levels.

In this context, special attention may be deserved by Scouting, whose vitality remains intact a hundred years after Baden-Powell's pedagogical intuition was initially tried out in the first Scout camp on Brownsea Island in August 1907. His book "Scouting for Boys", which was subtitled "A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship", marked the start of an educational movement that has since influenced hundreds of millions of women and men all over the world.

As it did then, Scouting still offers to young people, through play, adventure and service to the community, universal principles and values. Freely adopted, these principles and values are the basis of the personal commitment "to do my best" taken with the Scout Promise and will empower young people to play a constructive role in society and help to build the more peaceful and caring world of which most of humanity dreams.