

Jose Mujica, President of Uruguay

What is it that flutters within our minds? Is it the model of development and consumption, which is shaped after that of affluent societies? I ask this question: what would happen to this planet if the people of India had the same number of cars per family as the Germans? How much oxygen would there be left for us to breathe? More clearly: Does the world today have the material elements to enable 7 or 8 billion people to enjoy the same level of consumption and squandering as the most affluent Western societies? Will that ever be possible? Or will we have to start a different type of discussion one day? Because we have created this civilization in which we live: the progeny of the market, of the competition, which has begotten prodigious and explosive material progress. But the market economy has created market societies. And it has given us this globalization, which means being aware of the whole planet.

Are we ruling over globalization or is globalization ruling over us? Is it possible to speak of solidarity and of “being all together” in an economy based on ruthless competition? How far does our fraternity go?

Today, man does not govern the forces he has unleashed, but rather, it is these forces that govern man; and life. Because we do not come into this planet simply to develop, just like that, indiscriminately. We come into this planet to be happy. Because life is short and it slips away from us. And no material belonging is worth as much as life, and this is fundamental. But if life is going to slip through my fingers, working and over-working in order to be able to consume more, and the consumer society is the engine-because ultimately, if consumption is paralyzed, the economy stops, and if you stop economy, the ghost of stagnation appears for each one of us, but it is this hyper-consumption that is harming the planet. And this hyper-consumption needs to be generated, making things that have a short useful life, in order to sell a lot. Thus, a light bulb cannot last longer than 1000 hours. But there are light bulbs that last 100,000 hours! But these cannot be manufactured, because the problem is the market, because we have to work and we have to sustain a civilization of “use and discard”, and so, we are trapped in a vicious cycle. These are problems of a political nature, which are showing us that it's time to start fighting for a different culture.

Development cannot go against happiness. It has to work in favor of human happiness, of love on Earth, human relationships, caring for children, having friends, having our basic needs covered. Precisely because this is the most precious treasure we have; happiness. When we fight for the environment, we must remember that the essential element of the environment is called human happiness.