



**“Defend this little planet called Earth. Human rights and environmental safeguard”, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel.
Rome, 6th June 2016**

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Abstract

This contribution offers a summary of the Nobel Peace Prize Adolfo Pérez Esquivel’s speech. During his *Lectio Magistralis* the main geographical topics of human rights and environmental safeguard were discussed. Both are aspects that require a deep reflection in order to try and reach a solution and in this sense a crucial role is assumed by geographical education as was affirmed during the 2013 Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe and in 2016 in the New International Charter on Geography Education promoted by important geographical associations like IGU, EUGEO, EUROGEO and AIIG.

Keywords: Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Environmental Safeguard, Geography Education, Human Rights, International Charter on Geography Education, Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe

The *Lectio Magistralis* took place in Rome at the Sapienza University with Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 for his nonviolent fight in defense of oppressed people by the Argentinian dictatorship, his dedication to the poor and for his efforts in the defense of human rights and social injustices by denouncing the atrocities committed by the military regime. The ceremony was attended by professors and members of the Sapienza University such as the Rector Eugenio Gaudio, the Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy Stefano Asperti, the

Dean of the Department of Document studies, Linguistics, Philology and Geography Giovanni Solimine, and Professor Livio De Santoli, Delegate of the Mayor of Rome for Energy.

The guest speaker was introduced by a brief debate on the contemporary geographical challenges regarding social justice and environmental safeguard; the most evident global changes are related to climate warming, environmental migrations, world hunger and to the legal protection of marginalized individuals. All the aspects discussed were linked to a main universal issue: the globalization phenomenon. In

this sense Adolfo Pérez Esquivel has dedicated his life to supporting human rights of that part of population that was underprivileged or a minority.

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel gave his *Lectio Magistralis* on the causes and effects that are destroying the Planet, illustrating that the ideal response to this dilemma lies in the balance between human and natural needs. He illustrated different topics strictly related to geographical knowledge, all of them ascribable to the concept of territorial identity. In particular environmental rights, meaning the protection of and the access to natural resources, and the field in which, as a President of the International Academy of Environmental Sciences of Venice (IAES), Esquivel supports the establishment of an International Criminal Court for crimes against the environment. In this context the migrations related to natural disasters or climate changes are the consequences of an unequal distribution of resources and technologies used to prevent and support ecological development, influencing and changing the relationship between territory and human beings.

People's mobility represents an important aspect of contemporary eras, and even though migrants are increasing constantly many countries maintain a closure policy and are reinforcing their boundaries. This concept clashes with the philosophical thought of land communion proposed in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* by: 'a right to associate, which all men have. They have it by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must finally tolerate the presence of each other. Originally, no one had more right than another to a particular part of the earth'. In his text he promoted exactly what eminent personalities nowadays, such as Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Pope Francis, keep declaring about the need to host and share, following the catholic concepts of peace and fraternity. Nationalism is gradually prevailing over solidarity and migration policies, and in this sense is promoting the financial value of land in spite of the memory of place. Considering a nation as a matter of territorial borders is a viewpoint generated by a consumerist society; instead of being aware of the importance of people's attachment to the place or enhancing the concept of territorial identity, it is

reducing and damaging the actual place value.

This panorama is generated by our specific historical period which is structured on a globally based system. The most relevant aspect of globalization is the reduction of time and distance variables, even though this brings different undeniable advantages, especially in terms of communication and transportation, but at the same time it is causing a degeneration of the perception of cultural identity. The risks of globalization are strictly connected to human relationships and local identities, as a matter of fact it is supported by a superficial communication system based on a global scale and by single thought.

In this sense Adolfo Pérez Esquivel reported a human living crisis, where there is no balance and a policy of consumption is put into effect without taking care of personal relationships either with regard to people or to places. It is fundamental to assume a standpoint against a system based exclusively on the financial market and to re-think a democracy where the population is the main player and not just a mere spectator. A democracy which develops critical thinking, which feeds indignation and opposition before injustices. Re-thinking a new society, a utopia that refuses the modern form of domination and brings about people's awareness, and referring to Thomas More's *Utopia* human life should be dominated and regulated by knowledge and culture.

Owing to his activity with and his dedication to oppressed humanity, Esquivel was very close to the reflections expressed in the Encyclical Letter, *Laudato si*, by Pope Francis. This document represents an ultimate analysis of ecological and social issues, especially because it encourages the interaction between scientific and technological progress as well as the social and moral one. Respect for human beings and the natural environment requires a reversal in the trend of production and consumption models. The solution lies in human behavior, which can be led to a more sustainable approach towards the environment through education. Because of this, the transmission of ecological knowledge and skills must be supported by scientists, institutions and organizations in order to solve the environmental issues.

So, geography education responds to the need to increase the awareness of the population not only with regard to the natural problems afflicting the Planet Earth but also to the human ones. Even though its crucial role lies in education, the position of the subject of geography in European schools is problematic, reflecting the lack of attention and responsibility for the territory in modern societies. In order to improve geography's position in schools a group of geographical associations (EUGEO, EUROGEO, AIIG, IGU) promoted a document in 2013 called the Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe to support geography in schools. The Rome Declaration sets down a number of minimum requirements for geography teaching, addressing European governments and educational institutions in recognizing the value of geography, it also provides standards and guidelines to guarantee a sound geography didactics. This discipline can stimulate active citizenship and the ability to understand the complexity of the contemporary world which is undergoing significant imbalances, and it is

fundamental to understand the major issues in the territory we live in.

In 2016 this initiative was followed by the New International Charter on Geography Education promoted by EUGEO and the IGU Commission on Geographical Education. This document updates the 1992 first edition of the Charter, focuses on the aims and objectives for geographical education and gives some reflections on the discipline, while linking and arranging meetings between institutions and organizations in Europe.

These occasions are vital to improve the quality and the position of geographical education and to raise the awareness of its crucial role in society. In order to face the increasing changes involving our Planet it is necessary to adopt a geographical point of view which is founded on its ability to interconnect environmental and social fields of studies, and which gives the opportunity to connect different disciplines thanks to its marked interdisciplinary nature.



Figure 1. The brochure of the event.

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