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Development and Civilization

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It is just wrong to approach the issue of development in purely economic terms. This is because there cannot be any economic development without the development of the human mind. By this I mean that one has to first rise to the level of being a civilized wise person in order to grasp the problems of humanity.

To become civilized is more than obtaining a diploma. A civilized person knows what it means to have a decent life full of values and strives to live accordingly. In order to advance in that direction, a person must be capable to ask the right questions, and to try to find the right answers. But questioning has two aspects. First, one has to inquire and ponder on the reasons why humanity has been unable to become a peaceful and united global community, and secondly one has to ask oneself about the personal responsibilities that one may carry in respect of this pitiful situation.

This is because we're all responsible for our daily decisions and for every simple word that we utter. We have to accept that we have a share in every unpleasant and distressing situation that we may encounter in our daily life. This share may be significant or not but let us not forget that we cannot improve in becoming a fully civilized person if we do not assume our responsibilities.

The person who succeeds in self-questioning will also be able to self-control. The one who attains self-control is also able to integrate in the community and become a respected person. By "community" I mean not only the social environment, but also the natural environment. We all live in a social surrounding. We have a family circle, a school circle, a business circle and many friends. Thus, in order to be appreciated in these circles we need not only have self-control, but also be compassionate and respectful towards all those we encounter. This includes not only human beings, but also all that is animate as well as inanimate, including the water, the earth and the air.

A civilized person is both useful and also generous. Civilized people are not envious, but rather support and contribute to others' successful achievements or even probable successes. Civilized people do not like violence. They try to solve frictions without resorting to violence. They are respectful of the opposite sex and support gender equality. **Gender equality is fundamentally related to sustainable development and globally accepted as a necessity for the promotion of human rights. Gender equality is critical as women and men face different challenges in full participation, representation and decent work opportunities.** Today in our country, unfortunately, we cannot claim that gender equality has been fully implemented. Especially, as violence towards women continues to be news on daily basis.

Another indicator for being a civilized person is the way we behave towards our environment. That is our home, our school, our workplace and our streets. Those who spill trash in any environment cannot be accepted as being civilized. Such people think only of their own comfort and disregard others discomfort. They are mostly manipulative and selfish. In fact, it is even difficult to define them as being human. Let me quote a sentence that my son, a geneticist, frequently mentions. He says "Don't forget we are all monkeys".

Speaking of environment, I also have to talk a bit about the depletion of the natural resources. Natural resources are consumed by both economically developed countries as well as by developing countries. Carbon dioxide released into the sky causes greenhouse effect and creates climate change. Acid rain as you all know leads to the death of forests which are essential to our survival. Human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels and clearing of forests, have intensified the natural greenhouse effect, causing global warming. It has been demonstrated that 60 percent of the anthropogenic global warming that occurred before 2005 was generated by just seven countries. These are the United States, China, Russia, Brazil, India, Germany and the United Kingdom. These nations need to self-criticize and take the necessary steps towards reducing global warming.

On the fifth of June this year the World Environment Day the director of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), Achim Steiner said:

"Our daily decisions as consumers and producers, multiplied by billions, have a colossal impact on the environment. Some of them contribute to the further depletion of natural resources others help to protect fragile ecosystems. Each time, the choice is ours. We must collectively drive a shift to a more sustainable future, both as consumers and as the essential human elements that make up governments, businesses and the investment industry. To achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns, we must decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. This means rethinking resource use in the production, distribution and use of products. Recycling rates are low - less than one-third of some 60 metals studied by the Institute for Research and Planning have an end-of-life recycling rate above 50 per cent and 34 elements are below one per cent. This represents huge potential for financial and environmental savings. Consumers and businesses can choose to be less wasteful - by not throwing out perfectly good food, by looking at more energy-efficient practices, and by taking a host of other simple measures."

Obtaining energy from renewable sources is now a priority for the whole world. In this regard, to pursue the present development paradigm is to be immersed in a no-exit situation. Today, the share in the electricity consumption of the world is resting on the shoulders of coal, oil and natural gas. Together they represent 87 % of the total consumption. The remaining 9 % is water, wind and solar energy while only 4 % is produced from nuclear energy.

Another important issue is the reduction of poverty? But in order to reduce poverty one has to be educated. One cannot improve the quality of life without competent knowledge and education. During the World Education Forum held in Korea from the 19 to the 22 May of this year, the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said:

"Studies show that one dollar invested in education can generate up to 15 dollars in economic gain. If all students in low-income countries learned basic reading skills, more than 170 million people could be lifted out of poverty." He also declared: **"Education must do more than produce individuals who can read, write**

and count. It must nurture global citizens who can rise to the challenges of the 21st century”.

My definition of a “Civilized person” is similar to Ban Ki-moon’s “Global citizen”, but the difference is that a civilized person does not have to live necessarily in a city. I have met many wise people who live in the countryside as villagers. Wisdom is an essential part of being civilized and incorporates love and compassion. Such values are part of our traditional culture and should be preserved and respected. Today's education is becoming mostly international and universal. I consider that it is important not to lose the traditional values while focusing on universal values.

For example we should be careful to protect and enrich our native language and try to use Turkish concepts and definitions during our daily life. This is because one can only think and generate new concepts in one’s mother tongue. As I said before, thinking properly and wisely is what makes us a civilized person. Another way to protect the Turkish language is to find appropriate equivalents for foreign words. This, of course is the duty of the state more than being the duty of an average citizen. But at least we could try to use, as much as possible, the locally existing words and concepts. For this, we need to comprehend the importance of our mother tongue and make an effort to protect it.

A civilized person tries to learn at least one foreign language. Learning a foreign language is useful and even necessary. This is because one will always encounter situations where one will need to speak a foreign language. But we have to remember that learning a foreign language does not mean forgetting one’s own mother tongue. The aim of education should be to develop a balanced education system between a foreign culture and the local one. This can be achieved by conserving the national language and traditions in the education system.

Many schools in Turkey are just inclined to transmit a standard knowledge, instead of trying to form and shape the young people who will constitute the backbone of our future society. The aim of education should be more than simply transferring information to the students, but also should lead the young people to become more civilized and wise. This leadership requires more than knowledge. It requires wisdom. A wise person does not just try to be smart by finding a solution to the problem at hand, but tries to think about the long-term effects of that solution. This is the main difference between being smart and wise. The smart person is short-sighted while the wise is long-sighted. A long-sighted person calculates the long-term effects of his/her decision and protects the social as well as the natural environment. This is the duty of a civilized person.

Achim Steiner said on the World Environment Day:

“The message of World Environment Day, more than any other, is that no action is too small to make a difference. We all know what we have to do. Let’s start today, and through our individual decisions create a collective impact that will change the world”.