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Youth and Covidkratia

The Covid-19 pandemic is testing the resilience of our society and democratic systems. This silent virus has decided to hold everyone accountable and not to distinguish between rich and poor when it comes to infection targets. But it has had the biggest impact on those who were likely to suffer the most from it: the poor, refugees, women and youth.

The new form of organisation that has arrived with this reality – where a virus decides on the civil liberties of citizens as well as on the common faith of countries and regions – has not only been used by the most autocratic governments to justify perpetrations of human rights abuses, but also continues to add new challenges to our progressive agenda. Despite all the optimism of the will, 2022 is not going to be any different when it comes to these abuses, and it is our duty to be attentive, reactive and vigilant.

The next decades will be shaped by the way we adapt to the circumstances of today and the path we choose. Unfortunately, when it comes to progressive values, the human rights agenda or democracy, the biggest pandemics are misinformation and intolerance. When both combine, the reality turns into a permanent threat to freedom, equality and global order – as happened, for example, under the eyes of the international community during President Trump’s mandate. As such, we need to actively promote inclusivity and comprehensive social policies on the grassroots level. Particularly when it comes to youth, we need more than ever to foster a modernised progressive agenda that combines social equilibrium, climate action and economic development.

While attention is focused on fighting Covid-19 and the disruption of global supply chains, democratic setbacks are taking place worldwide. In Nicaragua, where the opposition is arrested by Ortega’s regime; in Swaziland, where the last remaining absolute monarchy of Africa assaults and murders the militants of democracy; in the Philippines where freedom of the press or respect towards NGOs is only a mirage; or right next to Europe where silence has been complicit with the difficult realities for young people in Western Sahara, Palestine or Armenia.

If we add to that equation the Abraham accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, the constant tension between Washington and Beijing, the

eruption of regional conflicts in Africa or the political uncertainty in Europe, one could say that hope is not enough to shape a successful 2022.

I would only dare to make two predictions: the first is that we will have a more chaotic world in 2022 than in 2021 for multiple reasons. One of the most determining events will be the mid-term election in the United States, where the fact that the only topic that both parties will agree on is the approach towards China is a reflection of the increasing polarisation. On China, particularly, it is our role to remain especially attentive, and not to forget the historical struggles for freedom in other parts of the world while the spotlight turns to Taiwan.

The second prediction is that we can change the course of recent history and renew the vows for freedom, equality and solidarity only through the engagement of youth in civil and political movements. In order for this to take place, we need political parties and traditional organisations to become open to new contributions, inclusivity, reform and disruptive ground-breaking approaches.

It might be that we are reaching the end of a cycle when change is the only constant. Let's take the opportunity to build a new generation of progress.