



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

28th PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE

64th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 17-21 September 2012

CSP28/DIV/9
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

**REMARKS BY THE WINNER OF THE MANUEL VELASCO-SUÁREZ
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN BIOETHICS**

DR. JUAN ALBERTO LECAROS URZÚA

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Hon. President of the Pan American Sanitary Conference
Hon. Director of the Pan American Health Organization
Hon. Ministers of Health and delegates from PAHO Member States
Hon. Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Hon. President of the PAHEF Board of Trustees
Family members and friends of Dr. Manuel Velasco-Suárez
Ladies and gentlemen:

First, I'd like to express my thanks to the Pan American Health and Education Foundation, to the Pan American Health Organization, and to the jury members for the Manuel Velasco-Suárez Award for excellence in Bioethics, for your support of research in this field and for having awarded the first Award ever for a research project in ecological bioethics.

Dr. Manuel Velasco-Suárez, in his long trajectory of cultivating and popularizing bioethics in the Americas, proved to be a visionary who understood the strict interdisciplinary and systematic character of this field, as his theoretical and applied work deepened the linkage between the ethical aspects of health, both individual and public, and the political-social and ecological problems our societies face, in the context of broad ethical reflection on human life in its place of origin: our planet's biosphere. As his studies in neurology in the United States and his initial years of service as a humanist physician in Mexico well reflect, Dr. Velasco-Suárez understood early on that the ecology of the mind, social ecology, and the ecology of our biosphere is a single, united entity. Without a doubt, he is one of the intellectuals who has best embodied the foundational spirit of bioethics that one of the field's pioneers, Dr. Van Rensselaer Potter, proposed, and who defined it as a science of humankind's survival that harmonizes, on the one hand, the continual symbiotic relations between the great diversity of species and, on the other, diverse ethnic populaces, with the goal of having them live and get along in conditions of equality, health, and dignity within civil society. It bears recalling that Dr. Velasco-Suárez, in his tireless fight for peace, justice, and global health, promoted the creation of the Southeast Center for Ecological Research in his native Mexican state, Chiapas. The Center is now a renowned institution at the international level. He also founded the Association of Mexicans for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which in turn

was an affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Award in 1985.

I am thus doubly honored to receive this Award, because it supports for the first time research in a neglected area of bioethics, namely ecological ethics, and because it takes the name of so illustrious a visionary. Dr. Velasco-Suárez fully understood that individual, social and ecological ethics are interconnected. The research proposal that I have formulated follows this line closely, that of a “global bioethics,” meaning a civil ethic for contemporary society, which increasingly must face ever larger social-ecological challenges at a planetary level, which parallel dizzying advances in science and technology.

The general goal of my research is to develop a theoretical framework of bioecological ethical principles and a methodology for applying them. And the specific goal is to assess the scope of this theoretical and methodological framework by applying it to a specific case: the public, social, and legislative debate on policies regarding transgenic crops and foods in Chile.

What justifies such a research project?

If we observe the historical development of bioethics, we see that the field has been very fruitful in constructing ethical theories and methodological frameworks for discussing and resolving individual ethical conflicts, above all in the clinical setting, such as, for example, topics regarding abortion, euthanasia, refusal of treatment, etc. The same has occurred in biomedical research, such as, for example, embryonic cell research, gene therapy, pharmacogenetics, etc. Conversely, even though social and ecological conflicts have given rise to multiple and diverse theoretical focuses, there has been little advancement in creating suitable methodologies for discussing and resolving them. This is attributable to the nature of these conflicts, which obeys considerations transcending relationships among individuals. Social-ecological conflicts involve higher levels of complexity that make a mechanical application of traditional bioethical methodologies insufficient, because they do not resolve crucial questions. I will set forth some of the more generic ones: Are the people alive today collectively more valuable than future generations? Does the survival of human life have any significance in an irreversibly degraded biosphere? Is the unbridled growth that developed societies continue to aspire to just and compatible, when they do not leave room for the legitimate growth of less developed societies? Is it fair that more than 10 million people die annually from hunger when there are sufficient food stocks to feed everyone, even more than the current world population? Is it fair that the countries that pollute the least should be assuming the same environmental costs as those that pollute the most? To what extent is it necessary and/or right to dedicate millions of hectares to transgenic

crops destined for fodder for animals consumed mainly in the First World, at the cost of the disappearance of subsistence agriculture and biodiversity?

This research takes as its base a framework principle, which defines responsibility as caring for the vulnerability of life as a whole. From this principle flow three derivative principles, namely: the principles of justice within and between generations and of caring for life in the biosphere. To preserve the integrity and interdependence of these principles, four nonhierarchical strategic principles arise: sustainability, taking precautions, shared but differentiated responsibility, and common purpose. Finally, methodological rules are postulated to apply these strategic principles in substantive, procedural, and distributive fashions. The final part of this research tests this theoretical-practical model in the concrete case of the discussion on public policies regarding transgenics in Chile.

I would like to close by thanking the people who opened the way for me to reflect on bioethics and those who work with me on the subject today. I wish to honor the memory of the late Dr. Francesc Abel, S.J., founder of Europe's first bioethics center, the Borja Institute of Bioethics, who motivated me to work and do research on environmental ethics, and also express thanks for the welcome from the Bioethics Center of the German School of Clinical Medicine at the Development University in Chile, and its director, Dr. Juan Pablo Beca. Finally, I wish to thank my family and especially my mother, who is here today, for their constant support during my period of specialization in Europe, and my dear friends, particularly Rodrigo Severín, who tolerated me patiently and listened to my philosophical ruminations regarding the preparation of this proposal.

Thank you very much.