

"I HAVE A DREAM"

In 1994 Donella Meadows said in a conference: "Vision is the most vital step in the policy process. If we don't know where we want to go, it makes little difference that we make great progress. Yet vision is not only missing almost entirely from policy discussions; it is missing from our whole culture. We talk about our fears, frustrations, and doubts endlessly, but we talk only rarely and with embarrassment about our dreams. Environmentalists have been especially ineffective in creating any shared vision of the world they are working toward -- a sustainable world in which people live within nature in a way that meets human needs while not degrading natural systems. Hardly anyone can imagine that world, especially not as a world they'd actively like to live in. The process of building a responsible vision of a sustainable world is not a rational one. It comes from values, not logic. Envisioning is a skill that can be developed, like any other human skill."

Dreams is something Martin Luther King had as he in 1963 said¹: "I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. We've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our world's capital to cash a check. We were promised that all men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of the world. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice. We have also come to his hallowed spot to remind the world of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley to the sunlit path. It would be fatal for the world to overlook the urgency of the moment. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in the world. But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. The world's and nature's destiny is tied up with our destiny. And we have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking "When will you be satisfied. We are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. Go back knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today my friends - so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. I have a dream that one day this world will rise up. I have a dream that one day the world will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my children will one day be judged by the content of their character. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. This is our hope. We will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. We will be able we will be able to work together, to struggle together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. Let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops, from the mighty mountains. Let freedom ring from the snow-capped. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of nature. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill, from every mountainside. Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring - when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when will be able to join hands and sing "Free at last! Free at last!"

Portugal, 24 September 2008 - Sofia Guedes Vaz

¹ Martin Luther King speech adapted (all the words are his, except when I substituted the word America by the word world, and in one instance nature). This adaptation is based on the idea that the environmental crisis is very much also a question of justice. Intergenerational and intra-generational justice and justice towards nature. His dream has come through almost entirely and this should be inspirational for us in the environmental movement as well.