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Some thoughts concerning The Responsibility of Youth in Contemporary Society

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First of all I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart, the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, His Eminence, Archbishop Stylianos, for giving me this unique opportunity to be here with you.

I consider it as a great honour to address this unique National Youth Conference which offers an auspicious occasion to consider further how the rights of youth can be better safeguarded and how youth themselves may contribute to the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The education of youth must involve not only training in the skills necessary for gainful employment, but also provide moral and spiritual enlightenment.

Both kinds of education are essential. Youth have a special responsibility to develop a global perspective and values based on such qualities as love, truthfulness, kindness, justice and esteem for all members of humanity. Youth must be assisted in developing these qualities both within the family, which is the foundation of society, and within the community to which they belong. Young people have a crucial role to play in improving the economic, social and spiritual life of the planet by developing ties with youth in other countries to exchange thoughts and ideas, in order to promote social and economic progress and justice. Young people are a crucial segment of society; they are the basis for future development, social actors of change and can serve as a pressure group to lobby governments in defining their priorities.

It has been clearly stressed that “youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but the partners of today”. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, underlined the role of youth as actors who have real expertise complementary to that of academics and researchers. It is important to strive towards the involvement of young people as active citizens.

I would like to enumerate and shortly comment on the most important challenges facing nowadays, not only young people, but the whole society worldwide. It concerns the problems of education, globalization, ecology, Information and Communication Technologies, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, Aids, disability, multiculturalism and the emerging need for new identities.

We will conclude with the important role Orthodoxy has to play in a world with so many inequities and contradictions.

1. Education

I do believe that the key for the solution of a number of problems is to fight off illiteracy and to improve the quality of education. We have to recognise its relevance to employment and its usefulness in assisting young people in the transition to full adulthood, active citizenship and productive and gainful employment. The concept of education increasingly expands to forms outside the classroom, as the introduction of new concepts show, like: informal learning, lifelong learning, distance education, e-learning, peer education and training on the job.

Unfortunately, not all countries have been successful in providing education to their young people. Despite the progress achieved, 113 million primary school-age children were not in school in 2000. These children will become the next generation of illiterate youth, replacing the current group of an estimated 130 million.

Non-governmental youth organizations and educational organizations should develop youth-to-youth programmes for basic education, skills training and literacy. Australian youth can assist young people from developing countries to obtain education and training and participate in mutual academic exchanges. Particular attention should be given to specific groups of youth in distressed circumstances, including indigenous, migrant and refugee youth, displaced persons, street children and poor youth in urban and rural areas. Programmes are indispensable which promote and strengthen respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms and enhance the values of peace, solidarity, tolerance, responsibility and respect for the diversity and rights of others. Efforts should be made to continue the positive trend towards achieving gender equality within the educational system and, subsequently, in employment.

2. Globalization

Globalization, roughly defined as the global integration of economies and societies, affects many aspects of young peoples' lives. On the one hand, they are most flexible and perhaps best able to adapt to and make use of new opportunities offered. They are the best educated generation on new information technologies; they benefit from economic growth; many young people travel around the world for work, studies, exchange projects and vacation; and telephone and the Internet enable them to stay in touch with friends and relatives abroad. On the other hand, many youth, especially in developing countries, have been left out of the digitalization and modernization process and lack the economic power to benefit from the opportunities globalization offers. Globalization can be a powerful force for poverty reduction. Unfortunately, about 2 billion people live in countries that do not benefit from globalization. These countries have seen a declining economic growth rate, loss of jobs, low incomes, and poor education and health provision. The income gap is widening not only between, but also within countries.

The four more important effects of globalization on the lives of young people are: the distribution of employment opportunities, migration, both within and between countries, youth culture and consumerism, and global citizenship and activism.

Every day thousands of young people illegally try to pursue a life of fortune in a rich country, often motivated by unrealistic information and high expectations. A parallel industry of illicit travel agents, job brokers and middlemen has arisen, which directs the trafficking of these migrants.

Globalization has numerous consequences for youth cultures. The increase in media streams has resulted in global consumerism. Through television, music videos and movies, American and

European-produced content is increasingly dominating entertainment around the world. Young people tend to adopt and interpret global products in terms of their own local cultures and experiences, thereby creating new hybrid cultural forms.

Young people around the world show concern about the negative consequences of globalization, such as unequal distribution of wealth and environmental degradation. The anti-globalization movement has expanded all over the world and comprises a heterogeneous group of non-governmental organizations, student groups, political organizations and civil rights activists. The movement fights for various issues such as global justice, fair trade, debt relief, and sustainable development. There are a lot moral dilemmas of globalisation. Unfortunately, globalisation tends to evolve from a means of bringing the people of the world together to a means of expanding economic dominance of the financial giants even over people to whom access was denied because of national borders and cultural barriers.

The Orthodox Church has experienced and cultivated the idea of spiritual ecumenicity. This is a form of globalisation that proclaims that bonds of love, brotherhood and cooperation should unite all human beings of every race and language and of all cultures. The Gospel saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt.4:4), should be more broadly understood. We cannot live by economic development alone in a homogeneous society. We need humanism in a new sense as well, without the levelling of national and local culture.

As Archbishop Stylianos rightly stresses (*Voice of Orthodoxy*, v. 25 (10), October 2003), "Without anyone being anachronistic or an enemy of progress in general, or rejecting the obvious socio-economic or even 'cultural' prospects that 'communications' and 'information 'technology' now open up, we must admit that these new possibilities 'cut us off' (unconsciously and perhaps inevitably) from certain other possibilities which were always sources of unquestioned spiritual renewal. In spite of all the publicity about the convenience the internet provides you to conduct a host of 'transactions' in minimal time, without even leaving your seat, the result of this 'progress' is essentially a great deal of loneliness! This is because loneliness is of course the distance from being with others in person. One can certainly 'deal' in a thousand issues with unknown people in any part of the world today, however the personal immediacy, the trust built by familiarity, the joy of unselfish friendship and the like, have now become for many a mere 'romantic' memory. Meanings and experiences that we had up until just a few decades ago, which were fundamental characteristics of the mature and perceptive person, such as 'recollection', 'concentration', 'contemplation', 'reverently gazing' at the uniqueness of the moment, 'prayer' and so on, tend to be replaced unwittingly by the single concern for what is practical. Just as the term 'development' in its international usage has come to signify predominantly, if not exclusively, only 'economic' prosperity. As if people only have material needs and desires!"

3. Environmental issues

The deterioration of the natural environment is one of the principal concerns of young people world wide as it has direct implications for their well-being both now and in the future. The natural environment must be maintained and preserved for both present and future generations. Young people are strong advocates for environmental preservation. The mobilization and support of local youth organizations will be critical to achieving the Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development has become a key element in the programmes of youth organizations throughout the world. While every segment of society is responsible for maintaining the

environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special interest in maintaining a healthy environment because they will be the ones to inherit it.

Environmental education, with emphasis on protection, preservation and improvement of the environment, has to be integrated into education and training programmes. Participation of youth groups in gathering environmental data and in understanding ecological systems and actual environmental action should be encouraged as a means of improving both their knowledge of the environment and their personal engagement in caring for the environment. Governments should encourage and assist youth organizations to initiate and develop youth-to-youth contacts through town-twinning and similar programmes in order to share the experience gained in different countries. It is absolutely necessary the initiation of programmes in order to promote participation in tree planting, forestry, combating desert creep, waste reduction, recycling and other sound environmental practices. Young people should be involved in designing and implementing appropriate environmental policies.

The "Clean up the world" campaign inspires more than 40 million volunteers in over 100 countries each year to take action to improve their local environment. These volunteers include millions of young people, and the campaign represents a practical way for youth to take responsibility for their immediate environment in a voluntary setting. It is necessary an increased participation of the youth in decision-making about environmental policies.

The orthodox view of the ecological crisis is worth mentioning. [According to Prof. Elias Oikonomou] The spirituality of the Orthodox Church possesses an ecological significance, because a) it is based on the idea of freeing one's self from dependence on material things and pleasures, b) it considers this life and world as a training ground preparing us for eternal life, c) it seeks the sanctification of the mind and intellectual perfection, aiming at the likeness of God. The ascetic life, marked by the decrease in the consumption of independence from the material, shaped the practice of fasting on all levels (clergy, monks, and laity) within the Orthodox Church. Over-consumption does not make people happier. Exactly the opposite happens.

4. Information and Communication Technologies

Information and communication technologies have become a significant factor in development, having a profound impact on the political, economic and social sectors of many countries, as well as on socialization. Young people are often the leading innovators in the use and spread of information and communications technologies. There is an increased emphasis on using information and communication technologies in the context of global youth priorities, such as access to education, employment, e-commerce and poverty eradication. Yet questions remain open as to whether information and communication technologies can empower young people and improve their lives or whether they are deepening the already existing inequalities and divisions in the world. We have to keep in mind that many young people are excluded from the information revolution.

In many countries the Internet is the least-controlled medium for information, and it can be a powerful tool for activists and advocacy groups, contributing to increased transparency, the development of civil society and democracy. Lists servers, temporary and long-term web sites and collective online writing and editing of documents are common features of today's youth activism. The important concerns of a global "digital divide" apply as much to youth as to any other age group. Special efforts must be made for youth in rural areas to make use of wireless technology. Measures to improve access to the Internet and to increase information technology

literacy at large should be encouraged. Urgent attention is needed to prevent the digital divide between developed and developing countries from widening in the next generation.

5. Unemployment

Unemployment and underemployment among youth is a problem everywhere. It is, indeed, part of the larger struggle to create employment opportunities for all citizens. The problem has worsened in recent years because of the global recession which has affected developing countries the most seriously. The disturbing fact is that economic growth is not always accompanied by growth in employment. The difficulty of finding suitable employment is compounded by a host of other problems confronting young people, including illiteracy and insufficient training, and is worsened by periods of world economic slow-down and by overall changing economic trends. Globalization has substantially changed the job market, to which young people, as newcomers, are "most vulnerable". New technologies have replaced manual labour, mainly affecting low skilled jobs in the service sector. Governments, in particular those of developed countries, should encourage the creation of employment opportunities for young people in fields that are rapidly evolving as a result of technological innovation. Essential is as well the promotion of flexibility in training systems. Youth organizations should be directly involved in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating voluntary service programmes.

6. Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile crime and delinquency are serious problems all over the world. There is evidence of an apparent world-wide increase in juvenile criminality combined with economic recession, especially in marginal sectors of urban centres. In many cases, youth offenders are "street children" who have been exposed to violence in their immediate social environment. Young people who drop out of school or come from divorced families should benefit from specific social programmes that help them build self-esteem and confidence conducive to responsible adulthood. The family, as the primary institution of socialization of youth, continues to play an important role in the prevention of juvenile delinquency and underage crime.

Youth organizations, should consider organizing information campaigns and educational and training programmes in order to sensitize youth to the personally and socially detrimental effects of violence in the family, community and society, to teach them how to communicate without violence and to promote training so that they can protect themselves and others against violence. Governments should also develop programmes to promote tolerance and better understanding among youth, with a view to eradicating contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and thereby prevent violence.

7. Drug Abuse

The use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol may become a means of escaping from situations that youth often feel powerless to change. The vulnerability of young people to drug abuse has in recent years become a major concern. Violence, particularly street violence, often results from drug abuse and illicit drug networks. The international community places particular emphasis on reducing the demand for and supply of illegal drugs and preventing abuse. Supply reduction includes combating international illicit drug trafficking. Drug abuse prevention initiatives range from discouraging people from taking drugs, thus preventing involuntary addiction, to helping those who are abusing drugs to stop doing so.

Tobacco use is one of the main preventable causes of death in the world. There are an estimated 1 billion smokers in the world today. By 2030, another billion young adults will have started to smoke. The highest rates of smoking among youth are in developing countries. It appears that young people in many countries are beginning to drink alcohol at earlier ages. Despite efforts to restrict the advertising and marketing of alcohol and tobacco in industrialized countries, the youth market remains a major focus of the alcohol and tobacco industries. Youth organizations can play a key role in developing healthy lifestyles and in raising awareness of the damaging impact of drugs.

8. HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) / AIDS

The current generation of young people has not known a world without AIDS. As a group they are especially vulnerable to contracting and transmitting the disease. There are 10 million young people currently living with HIV/AIDS. Of this number, 6.2 million live in sub-Saharan Africa and 2.2 million in Asia. Globally, almost one fourth of those living with HIV are under the age of 25. One third of women who are living with HIV are between 15 and 24 years of age. There are currently an estimated 15 million children who have been orphaned due to AIDS, having lost one or both parents to the epidemic. Twelve million of those orphans live in sub-Saharan Africa, a number that could rise to 18 million by 2010.

9. Disabled Persons

Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of society and violations of their human rights in all parts of the world. The youth can promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards these individuals in order to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

10. Plurilingual and Multicultural Communication

The great challenge in our time is to be able to communicate in different languages taking into consideration the cultural backgrounds in the multicultural societies we live in. The linguistic and cultural identities of the members of contemporary societies are extremely difficult to be defined. The concept 'native speaker' is not any more functional inasmuch as most people partake of various languages or language varieties and live by diverse cultures and subcultures. The term *multicultural* is now used to describe societies and persons who belong to different discourse communities.

Language learning is for young people a prerequisite for educational and vocational success. It is a precondition not only for enhancing possibilities for employment or for finding a better job, but at the same time for their fulfilment. The satisfaction one gets from achieving something, which could change his or her life, like learning foreign languages, is a powerful incentive, which must be exploited by individuals as well as by public and private organizations, especially by schools and universities.

The concept of *culture* is as polysemous and problematic as the one of the *language*. If we define culture in the broadest sense as the activities of the members of a society, then, language is not only an element of culture itself; it is the basis for all cultural activities. Consequently, the single

word *culture* expresses the whole life of a community, a very effective explanation, which has been developed by the social anthropologists. Culture, thus defined, consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, work of art, rituals, ceremonies, and other related components.

In comparing languages and cultures, ethnocentrism is the tendency to interpret or evaluate other languages and cultures in terms of one's own. Cultural relativism, on the other hand, is a relative approach that derives from an understanding and appreciation of languages and cultures different from one's own. The more languages one speaks and understands, the more he/she understands, appreciates and tolerates multilingualism and multiculturalism. The advantages of multilingualism were known in ancient times. The Latin poet Ennius (239-169 B. C.), who spoke three languages (Oscan, Greek and Latin), used to say that he has got three hearts, i.e. three ways to comprehend the world. The Archbishop Stylianos, polyglot himself and charismatic in many ways, stresses the importance of knowing foreign languages with the following words: "Often I feel the need to say to my fellow countrymen living here in Australia: Why should you remain one-eyed, although you can have two eyes? You understand that the bilingual immigrant has a great advantage over the monolithic monolingual Anglo-Saxon" [«Συχνά αναγκάζομαι να λέγω εις τους εν Αυστραλία ομογενείς μας: 'Γιατί αφού μπορείτε να έχετε δύο οφθαλμούς, να προτιμήσετε να μείνετε μονόφθαλμοι; Αντιλαμβάνεσθε πόσον πλεονεκτεί ο δίγλωσσος μετανάστης έναντι του μονολιθικά Αγγλοσάξωνα;»].

In foreign language teaching an intercultural approach can contribute to a better understanding of the multicultural societies we live in and thus bring people together.

Governments should establish and strengthen programmes to educate young people in the cultural heritage of their own and other societies and the world. Governments should institute, in cooperation with non-governmental youth organizations, travel and exchange programmes and youth camps to help youth understand cultural diversity at both the national and international levels, develop intercultural learning skills and participate in the preservation of the cultural heritage. Members of every religious or cultural minority have the right to maintain their distinctiveness and the particularity of their culture. Children and youth should be informed about the cultural differences in their own societies and must be given opportunities to learn about different cultures as well as tolerance and mutual respect for cultural and religious diversity.

11. Youth and participation in decision-making

Youth inclusion strengthens their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy. Opportunities for youth participation in home, school and community development are especially crucial in conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as in protecting the rights of girls and young women.

Effective youth participation requires changes in how societies perceive young people. These changes need to be reflected in appropriate funding, in innovative ways to spread information, in training to facilitate intergenerational collaboration and in organizational structures that welcome new voices.

Current national efforts to include youth in decision-making must also recognize the changes occurring in the patterns and structures of youth movements. In many countries, political parties are having difficulty attracting young members. Campaigns that encourage youth to vote seek to reverse the trend of reduced political interest by young people. Apathy towards politics and a lack of interest to participate in traditional youth organizations seem to characterize the younger

generations of many countries. For many young people, the world of politics is too distant from their daily realities of school, leisure and finding work.

Low voter turnout and membership in political parties should not lead to the conclusion that young people are not interested in the political future of their societies. Although student movements are linked to campuses and teaching facilities, the range of student-driven causes continues to expand beyond concerns of educational reform and funding cuts to include democratic reforms, employment and health issues, racism, arms proliferation and environmental concerns, to name a few. Student movements have played crucial roles in major social and political transitions of several countries in the last 10 years and are likely to continue to be at the forefront of democratization and progressive social action.

12. Striving for Multiple Identities

Living in multilingual and multicultural societies, the best example is Australia, where over 200 languages, including over 45 Indigenous languages are spoken, means that everyone has to develop multiple identities, being, for example, at the same time Australian, Greek and European. Greek identity comprises both, language and religion.

12.1 The Greek language

The Greek language has a documented history of 3,500 years, the longest of any single language within the Indo-European family. It is the oldest language in Europe with fragmentary records in Mycenaean dating back to the 15th or 14th century BC. Today, it is spoken by approximately 17 million people in Greece and abroad, especially of emigrant communities around the world. Greek literature has a continuous history of nearly three thousand years.

The classic tongue of Greece -the language of Homer and Plato and Aristotle- is one of the most important sources of the everyday speech of many languages, especially of English. Among familiar personal names are many that come from the Greek, as George and Philip. The name George means "landsman" or "farmer". The *geo* in the name George means "earth". It is in *geography* and *geology* and *geometry*, they all have something to do with the earth. Now for some girl's names: Margaret, she's a pearl; Dora, she's a gift; Irene, she's peaceful, if you go by the Greek names. When you say that Australia is a democracy, you are talking Greek: *demos* – *kratein* "people governing". Democracy is government by the people. The precious word *economy* is Greek as well. They called it *oikonomos*, from *oikos* "house" and *nomos*, "management". That's the spirit of economy -the management of the house. Glamour is merely another form of grammar. Because grammar at one time meant "magic" or "fascination", glamour took on the meaning "witchery, allurements". This word also is Greek. Most of the new scientific vocabulary is of Greek origin, like astronaut, bioethics and telematics. Some more Greek words with English derivatives:

ἅγιος:	holy: hagiography, hagiology
ἀγορά:	marketplace: agoraphobia
ἀγωνία:	agony, antagonistic
ἀερόβιος:	living in air: aerobic, aerobics
ἀθλητής:	contestant in the games: athlete, athletics
ἄνθρωπος:	human being: anthropology anthropomorphism, anthroponym, anthropocentrism, anthropophobia
βίος:	biology
θεός:	god: theology, theism, atheism
θεωρία:	theory

κόσμος:	the universe: cosmography, cosmetic
λόγος:	thought, word: theology, logic
μαθηματικά:	mathematics
σοφία:	knowledge, wisdom: philosophy, sophistry
σύστημα:	system, systematic
τῆλε:	distant: telephone, telepathy, telemedicine
ψυχή:	spirit, soul: psychology, psychedelic

Nikiforos Vrettakos has written the following poem, glorifying the greatness of the Greek language:

***When I sometime leave this light /I shall meander upwards like a/murmuring stream./
And if by chance somewhere among /the azure corridors /I meet with angels, I shall speak
/to them in Greek, since /they do not know languages. They /speak among themselves with
music.*** [Translated by Marjorie Chambers]

The Greek language is one of the beloved topics in the poetry of Archbishop Stylianos as well. He shows in an unprecedented way the diachronic power and admirable harmony and polysemy of the Greek words.

12.2 The role of the Orthodoxy

Archbishop Stylianos describes with vivid colours the situation of today: “Many people do not feel ‘content’, even though our earth has never before known so many and various good things (in food, health, education, development and recreation). Science and technology now enable us all the possibility of living like ‘small gods’! And yet we can no longer enjoy anything, because it appears that we have not appreciated anything correctly. We have lost our proper relationship with nature, with our fellow human being and, above all, with God. Of course we are informed – and frustrated – about the unbelievable sufferings in the so-called ‘undeveloped world’ (economic devastation, epidemics involving untreatable diseases, and massive death tolls through hunger or natural disasters). But the tragedy does not stop here! Even in countries of economic ‘abundance’ and countless ‘luxuries’, perceptive analysts are now recording the alarming proportions of psychosis and paranoia, such that the border between ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’ seems very blurred indeed. What, then, is to blame for the universal ‘misfortune’ of the modern world? How can we find some balance in our disturbed ‘relations’? However, in order for all people and all cultures to ‘fit’ into the boundless Love of the One God, we must all share all goods of this world (be they material, educational or spiritual) like the pieces of ‘*Antidoron*’. And the *Antidoron* (literally meaning ‘instead of the Holy Gifts’, which we receive in the Eucharist) invites all people into a family relationship with ‘common gratitude’”.

The centre of the faith and life of every young person must be the person of Jesus, so that he/she may be their constant point of reference and also the inspiration of every initiative and commitment for the education of the new generations. Young people have to build their life on Christ and put his teachings into practice.

In young people the Orthodox Church sees herself and her mission to mankind: with them she faces the challenges of the future, taking into consideration that all humanity needs to be renewed in spirit.

This Conference offers to a young person a vivid experience of faith and communion, which will help to face the profound questions of life and to responsibly assume his or her place in society and in the Christian community.