

Memorandum at the occasion of the Day of the United Nations against violence

The allotment and leisure garden movement in Europe came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Today it brings together some 9,000,000 members in 15 European countries. By its various actions, it aims at providing a realistic response to daily violence in a democratic society.

Since it came into being, the principal aim of the allotment and leisure garden movement has been to improve the well-being of people, marked both by the overwhelming poverty of their era and by their being uprooted from the soil as a consequence of the massive rural exodus provoked by industrialisation.

1) In fact, as a result of urban living, people lost the contact with the soil and with nature, which they had in the country. The allocation of an allotment and leisure garden (the former allotment) provided a remedy for this.

2) Tending this allotment and leisure garden enabled those families who had been up-rooted to achieve some relief to their misery, by harvesting fruit and vegetables.

3) Work in the garden at that time was also intended to prevent workers from falling into alcoholism.

4) Just spending time, or working, in the garden, at one with nature, was intended to compensate for the harmful aspects of working and housing conditions, which often had an adverse effect on the health of the family as a whole.

As society continued to evolve, with the improvement in working conditions, the reduction in working hours, increased urbanisation, the development of a greater ecological awareness and the reaction to various food scandals, allotment and leisure gardens took on additional roles, such as for instance:

1) Providing healthy nutrition

2) Beneficial occupation of leisure time close by for all the family

3) Improvement in the quality of life in an urban setting (air, built-up environment, and so on)

4) An environmental role (safeguarding species becoming extinct, inter-connection of biotopes, and so on)

5) Friendliness between town dwellers (often isolated), contacts between generations, persons of different races and religions, integration of foreigners

Violence has of course existed since the creation of man, and each era has duly analysed the causes of violence at the time and sought to find remedies.

Today violence, a daily phenomenon where minor incidents are almost trivialised (we are speaking only of incivility) takes a form, which presents a risk of society being destabilised and democracy being threatened.

Having to react, and to put forward remedies, it is also necessary these days to research and analyse the causes of violence, in order to find solutions suited to verbal and physical violence as well as vandalism.

By way of example, one could like to list some generative causes of violence.

- 1) Non-occupation and unemployment
- 2) Debt and lack of job security
- 3) Loss of values, standards, and lack of prospects for the future
- 4) School failure, loss of motivation
- 5) Demoralising built-up and non-built-up environment
- 6) Poorly understood multicultural population
- 7) Lack of tolerance and lack of acceptance for others

The allotment and leisure gardens enable a reaction to these phenomena

Through the work necessitated by cultivating the soil, allotment and leisure gardens provide **occupation** for the unemployed.

The result of their labours, namely the harvest, enables them to have additional healthy nutrition, which in turn provides an **improvement in their otherwise precarious position**.

Contact with nature, following its natural cycles, the concrete result of cultivation, the positive achievement of their own efforts, enables un-employed gardeners to rediscover **ideas of respect and value**, and slowly triggers a more positive view of what is to come in the future.

This applies both to adults and to young people who, by virtue of the natural cycle and the results obtained by their parents, can see the

problems associated with a lack of motivation and a certain capitulation being remedied.

Contact with other gardeners, with whom one shares the same concerns, the same hopes and the same joys, enables an **integration** to occur in the local association, and then in society as a whole. Moreover, the bringing together of the entire family fosters the realisation of the objective "living together in a better way".

Although it needs time, association life enables **responsibilities to be assumed**, and thus constructive and democratic participation in social life.

The presence of (more and more numerous) foreign gardeners in these groups of family gardens enables contacts to be made and a better **understanding** achieved of the differences of culture and of origin.

Everyone learns both to communicate and **to tolerate**. Not without reason, a Swiss gardener, speaking of the Moroccan members of his association, confirmed, "Rather than complaining of their noise, one learned to celebrate with them".

The groups of allotment and leisure gardens, veritable oases of green where vegetation changes with the seasons, are established at the heart of or close to collective and often inhuman, dense, monotonous and run-down housing. They enable housing to become more "human", and **the quality of life to be improved**, the monotony of the buildings to be broken, and a positive influence to be exerted on morals and individual behaviour.

By occupying children, for example, during the summer holidays, the association gives those children a certain **taste for life and hope**. So it tries to avoid that children during periods of non-occupation and idleness, react to their frustrations by way of "incivility", on seeing some classes ostentatiously satisfy their desires for a luxury, which they themselves might never achieve.

The actions involving educational pieces of land, spread out over the school period, enable a twofold objective to be achieved:

- To **fight against incivility** (which now appears ever earlier) by inculcating in young people the basic values of citizenship, respect for others, respect for the environment, taste and effort, solidarity and patience,
- To urge the older **to respect** the work of the younger, and as a consequence the work of other gardeners and in fact of the others in general.

The allotment and leisure garden movement contributes therefore with the means it has at its disposal to the fight against the phenomenon of violence.

It is of course continuing its endeavours in this field, and offers its assistance and its co-operation to the authorities at all levels (local, regional, national and international), in order to reduce the generative causes of violence and to create a more human society.

It is ready to co-operate with non-government bodies pursuing similar objectives, to combine the efforts taken to reduce harm.

Associated gardeners ask all the competent bodies to provide them with land and then legally to protect them, so as to guarantee they last, in order that throughout Europe allotment and leisure gardens might play their beneficial role for society as a whole.

Luxembourg, November 2003