

UNESCO's 65th Anniversary

14 December 2010

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Madam President of the Executive Council

My dear Madam Director General,

My dear and much admired Director General Amadou Mahtar M'Bow

The Honorable Director General Maatsura

Your Excellencies, Permanent Delegation Ambassadors,

Dear Staff members and former Unesco's Staff members,

Secretariat and Services personnel,

Attendees, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Peace be with you all. Paz, Paix, Salam, Pau, Pace, Peace, Shalom, Mira, Irenius (¡Irina!)... Peace! Building peace, that enormous task, the great challenge that the United Nations entrusted to this Organization through education, science, culture and communication.

Education to participate, to educate "free and responsible" people, in the words of Article 1 of our Constitution. Unesco was founded 65 years ago in London. Three years later the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved in by the UN General Assembly.

The Charter is quite clear. It begins: “We, the Peoples, are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. It is peace and not war that underlies all civilizations, cultures and beliefs (Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, the religions of the Maya and Quechua, Confucianism, Animism, etc.). In our times figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa of Calcutta... are bright points of reference.

As long ago as 1918 President Wilson called for a “permanent peace” and created the League of Nations. But the League was soon cast aside with the arrival of Hitler, Fascism and the Japanese Empire. World War II was atrocious in all senses of the word. But the lessons were not learned: despite Roosevelt’s excellent design for the United Nations in 1945, aid was soon replaced by loans, cooperation by exploitation, values by the laws of the market... and the United Nations by groups of plutocrats. We must remember this today, to firmly and promptly re-establish an efficient United Nations System, endowed with the necessary personal, technical and financial resources.

A Unesco based not on money, but rather on ideas, with its stamp of prestige. We must openly declare that the wealth of this Organization lies in its universally accepted ideals, represented in Unesco’s associated schools, centers and clubs, its national commissions, its biosphere reserves, its cultural and natural heritage sites, its intangible heritage, Unesco chairs... and, even more, in teachers and professors from the world over, the scientific, artistic, literary, that is, the intellectual community. Students who now or in the future will have no age limit, since educational opportunities will

always be available, are the primary beneficiaries as well as the protagonists of Unesco's work.

The world is immersed in a grave global crisis whose roots are ethical. The "intellectual and moral solidarity" proclaimed in the Unesco Constitution has been replaced by the greed and irresponsibility of the most prosperous in our global village. You, Madam Director General, accurately described this situation in your speech at Forum 2010 in Santiago de Compostela when you said that "There is no security in the world when over a thousand million people live in extreme poverty. Societies are not secure when their populations lack access to education and health, human activity threatens the environment and women lack the same rights as men... The intrinsic dignity and the human rights of each person must continue to be the basis for all our acts and the measure of their success. This is the foundation of sustainable development that, in turn, creates the basis for durable peace".

A massive mobilization of all elements of society is necessary to counteract "the great domain" those in power, since energy resources, the media and military and economic power have progressively fallen into ever fewer hands, putting the destiny of humanity at great risk.

Nevertheless, I believe we are living in fascinating times, since for the first time we have a true knowledge of reality and refuse to be accomplices or to remain passive spectators. Thanks to modern communications technology we have the means for distance participation. And what is likewise important, the influence of women

in decision making is increasing, as is the case with Unesco where today a woman is in charge.

I like to repeat that the future has yet to be forged and that the human species is endowed with boundless creativity that enables us to invent the future. It is essential to accelerate the transition from a secular culture of imposition, force, violence and war to a culture of dialogue, conciliation, alliance and peace.

Young people were previously limited to a local territorial and intellectual space. Now, fortunately, they may progressively become citizens of the world, capable of abandoning the resignation and submission of relentless determinism to act according their own reflections and, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “free themselves from fear”.

These new world citizens, actors of a “new humanism”, may benefit from the experience of those who have preceded them in history and from the treasures lying deep in each culture. I have learned so much from the wisdom of Africa!

Only with the impact of this mobilization will we be able to reverse the market’s relentless impact on politics. The world continues to invest in military spending (4,000 million dollars daily), when what people anxiously seek are outstretched hands, rather than ones that are armed or raised. Hands open to love.

The time for silence is over, as is the time for being passive witnesses, all conforming to the same pattern. We do not have to

suffer to aid those who suffer. It suffices to open our doors and windows and look around us, to be able to respond in a spirit of solidarity.

Unesco should rapidly increase its presence in cyberspace to provide content to counteract the lack of universal principles and values and fly high in the infinite space of the spirit.

Both President Obama and the Earth Charter have urged us to make a “new beginning”, which should be led by the intellectuals and the International Organization that represents them.

Time is of the essence. Amin Malouf once said that “a situation without precedent requires solutions without precedent”. This is what we desire and are determined to achieve. And we have the knowledge and the will to do so. Our supreme duty is to refuse to lose heart. It is, in the words of Pedro Salinas, to persevere. To continue, as a daily homage to all of those who for so many years have worked for this Organization. To continue to work untiringly, so that the future generations may not pass on us Albert Camus’ terrible sentence: “They were despised because they could have done so much, but dared so little”.

Congratulations for these 65 years and, what’s more, for the many years to come!

Federico Mayor
UNESCO
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