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Address by  
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of the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(Unesco)

at the presentation of the  
Pierre de Coubertin International Fair Play Trophy for 1970

Paris, 4 May 1971

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. President of the General Conference,  
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome to Unesco House, on the occasion of the presentation of the seventh Pierre de Coubertin International Fair Play Trophy, all those who have gathered together once again to show their regard for the ethical value of sport.

Once again I should like to pay a special tribute to my friend Jean Borotra, Chairman of the International Committee of Fair Play Trophies, who for eight years now has led the Committee with unflagging enthusiasm and zeal, on which I cordially congratulate him on behalf of you all.

I am happy to greet H.E. Mr. Olechowski, Ambassador of Poland, H.E. Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi, Ambassador of Tunisia, Mr. Bartel, Permanent representative of the regional inspectorate in the French Ministry of Youth, Sport and Leisure, Mr. Włodzimierz Golebiewski, President of the Polish Cycling Union, and all those sport lovers who have come in order to show their support of Unesco's action to encourage fair play.

I shall presently have the privilege of handing the International Trophy for 1970 to Mr. Ryszard Szurkowski, the Polish racing cyclist. This is not the first time that one of Poland's sportsmen has been rewarded for his fairness and generosity: three years ago a Polish skier was awarded a diploma of merit. I must also congratulate Mr. Mohamed Senoussi of Tunisia, who has obtained the diploma of merit for fair play throughout his career as player and umpire.

May I on this occasion sincerely thank the Comité français du fair play, of which Jean Borotra is also the President, for having prepared a booklet on fair play and made it available to Unesco and the International Council of Sport and Physical Education? As soon as this Council draws up a text on the subject for the international community, Unesco will help to have it circulated in several languages, as was done for the Declaration on Sport. In this connexion I would observe that if we want to make our action to promote fair play more effective we must encourage the setting up of national committees. I intend to ask the National Commissions for Unesco to facilitate the setting up of such committees as far as possible.

The reason why Unesco attaches so much importance to what can give people, particularly young people, a sense of fair play is that fair play is a fundamental moral virtue, which can offset, in the individual, the immoderate pursuit of prestige and personal advantage and, in the community, the excesses of a chauvinism of which we have all too many deplorable examples before us in the world today. The behaviour of this year's prize-winner is significant in this respect: he did not think it right that bad luck should spoil his opponent's chances of winning. His spirit of justice prevailed over his desire for victory at any price.

Placing the interests of an opponent before one's own, from a feeling of fellowship, so that justice may be done and the rules of the game observed in spirit as well as in letter - this is the essence of fair play. Such an attitude helps to prevent sporting events from degenerating into conflicts in which one and all try to assert their superiority by any means whatsoever. What is more, it enables opponents to understand and appreciate one another. To experience the same joys and sufferings, the same enthusiasms and disappointments, to be bound by the same rules, to share the same ideal of courage and sportsmanship, to know what one's opponent's effort costs through having paid the price dearly oneself - all this is calculated to engender a mutual esteem which tempers rivalry with sincere understanding and fellow feeling.

Competition can thus become a friendly contest rather than a combat, and one's opponent a partner or companion in a struggle freely entered upon. This is why I think that one of the most important points about this ceremony is the fact that it reminds us of the bonds of comradeship and esteem which unite sportsmen throughout the world. In this way, sport becomes a powerful means of bringing together and fostering understanding between people of different nationalities, races or cultures. It is an invaluable instrument for peace. And it is no mere chance that a few table-tennis players recently succeeded where so many diplomats and intellectuals had failed, surmounting - not for the only time, we must hope - the barriers which States, with their reasons which reason knows nothing of and which are certainly not the reasons of the heart, too frequently erect between peoples.

That this could happen is undoubtedly due to the profoundly human content of sport. With every day that passes we see more clearly that in contemporary society this human content is something we need, a priceless refuge from all that tends to estrange human beings or debase their nature.

In industrialized countries, sport acts as an antidote to the dangerous imbalance which so often results from the rapid and unorganized advance of technology. What a superficial view we take if we think of the social rôle of sport as merely one of passing one's leisure-time! Its educational and cultural function is far broader and more profound than that. It should be seen as an integral part of life-long education, which continues throughout man's life, which should embrace, in a harmonious and constantly developing whole, all man's formative, reflective and creative activities, and the institution of which is the great task of our day.

As for the developing countries, they are discovering that sport is not merely a pastime - it can help considerably to develop human resources to the full. This

was emphasized at a seminar for Africa organized recently with Unesco's assistance in Rabat, on the theme "Sport and Development". Those who participated in this seminar expressed the opinion that sport can stimulate the development of a feeling of national identity and can lead to great understanding between different nations and ethnic groups, and they observed in passing that it can also be an important factor in the emancipation of African women. These conclusions, I think, are of very real significance, and all those who are working for the success of the Second United Nations Development Decade, the principal object of which is the fullest possible development of human resources, will have to take into account the contribution that sport can make to the progress of education, culture and the life of society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please forgive me for saying so much that you know and appreciate perfectly well. I shall not delay any further in awarding the trophies. In conclusion, may I express to the recipients on behalf of you all our admiration and gratitude for what they have done to put into practice the ideal of justice, fairness and generosity which unites us in our devotion to Sport.