



Belgrade 1980

General Conference
Twenty-first Session,
General information

Conférence générale
Vingt et unième session,
Information générale

大会
第二十一届会议
一般性资料

Генеральная конференция
Двадцать первая сессия,
Общие информационные документы

Conferencia General
21a. reunión
Información general

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الدورة الحادية والعشرون،
معلومات عامة

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Address by

Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow

upon his re-installation as

Director-General of Unesco

Belgrade, 29 September 1980

7 OCT. 1980

Mr. President of the General Conference,

I thank you wholeheartedly for the kind words you have spoken about me. I am gratified that my re-election as Director-General of Unesco should have taken place in Belgrade during a session of the General Conference presided over by an eminent son of Yugoslavia and comrade-in-arms of Marshal Tito, who accorded me the honour of receiving me in 1974, shortly after I had assumed office and whose wise counsel guided me during the difficult period which the Organization was at that time undergoing. Today, I am happy to be able to benefit from the advice of someone with very high responsibilities in the Government of Yugoslavia and to know that I have gained his friendship, the exceptional warmth of which I have had occasion to appreciate.

Mr. President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,

In accepting once again the high office of Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, I wish to express to each of you my gratitude for the signal honour bestowed upon me and the extreme pride I take in it.

On 14 November 1974, when I took the oath before the General Conference which had just invested me in this same post, I pledged myself, in exercising my functions, to be a citizen of each of your countries and a servant of the community of nations. By their unanimity, the votes you cast on 27 September 1980 inspire in me the thought that I have managed to keep my promise to you. Over these six years, I have also endeavoured to remain true to all the ideals of Unesco, to renew its programme, to assert its intellectual calling, to improve the structures and the functioning of its Secretariat, and to extend the dialogue with Member States. That is why I attach a very special value to your renewed expression of confidence in my leadership.

My gratitude and my thanks go to your States, which have constantly supported me in all the efforts I have undertaken. Each of my visits to your countries has been an occasion for discussions at every level, from which I have not only obtained a better knowledge of the problems facing us but also drawn new inspiration for intensifying Unesco's activities and new strength for setting about the task. Moreover, every visit paid to Headquarters by distinguished personalities from all over the world has contributed just as much to strengthening these indispensable bonds.

The support of your governments, your delegations, the Permanent Delegates to Unesco, and your National Commissions has always been forthcoming, especially at the difficult times when I needed it most. It has been most amply demonstrated at the General Conference and at the Executive Board, of which I wish to thank the successive Chairmen and all members, whose understanding and support have been unfailing. The continuous co-operation thus established between the Director-General and the Member States has certainly contributed decisively to the work accomplished by Unesco over the past six years.

My gratitude goes likewise to the scientific, cultural and intellectual communities, and indeed to all those who, through the wealth of their suggestions and advice, have assisted me so greatly in the discharge of my duties.

Lastly, my thanks go to all my colleagues, members of the Secretariat at Headquarters and away from Headquarters, united in a great family by a shared ideal, who serve the Organization devotedly throughout the world. I want them all to know the value I place in our collaboration, and the joy I derive from it. A world organization such as ours can fulfil its mission only if its Director-General can draw on the intelligence, sensitivity and generosity of men and women rich in the multiplicity of their origins and the diversity of their knowledge. More than ever now I am going to need them, their loyalty to the Organization, their initiative and their resolute participation in the common task.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this point, when you are inviting me so warmly to resume my task, to continue on the highways of human solidarity the exalting journey I began six years ago, allow me to halt briefly in order, from this platform, to survey the routes which we have pioneered together, and to try and discern those we may be able to open up in future.

On the paths I have already trodden, throughout a life to which Unesco has lent complete fulfilment, by providing me with an insight into both the universality of the world and its particularities, I have had occasion to encounter all forms of greatness and of servitude.

I have met the highest political leaders and the humblest craftsmen, intellectuals and artists, and ordinary workers. I have paused in the countryside and in the town and tried at times to live the lives of their inhabitants; I have admired the works of all cultures, appreciated the meaning of different values; I have seen supreme power side by side with deepest distress.

I have found, everywhere, that - leaving aside the particular features that distinguish them - the nations long for dignity, justice and well-being; and that, leaving aside the differences in their circumstances or beliefs, all individuals thirst alike for freedom and brotherhood. And, to my ears, their many voices all express the same supremely important message: that conflicts and wars break out when such needs are ignored, while peace takes root when they are fully recognized.

I have found among all peoples the same need to affirm their own identity and at the same time to hear what others have to say; to communicate with one another; to pool their individual knowledge and to learn about one another's varied achievements. And in that vital dialectic in which each people is true to itself while reaching out towards others, and discovers itself through its recognition of the rest of the world, I have come to see, more and more clearly, the need for a form of development that springs from the special genius of each community but remains attuned to the universal pulse of mankind; a form of development that, over and above our strivings to vanquish poverty and ignorance, taps all the creative potential of society and embraces all that is spiritually as well as materially meaningful in life.

I have seen that mankind now possesses the necessary resources and means to attain, on a global scale, the goals long pursued but until now beyond reach: to protect women and men everywhere from the humiliations that go with poverty, ignorance and disease and subsequently enable them to organize themselves and produce what they need - while respecting their environment and the unbroken development of their history.

I have found that more and more people feel it impossible to countenance the production of engines of destruction and death in the place of instruments designed to protect and beautify life. And wherever I have been, I have sensed the longing for the establishment of relationships based on mutual trust among the nations, so that their common hopes may cease to be crushed under the weight of their misunderstandings and so that all may gain increased possibilities of thriving in a climate of mutual respect. From this point of view, it is clear to everyone that the powers conferred by modern science and technology should be available to all, having been brought into being by a whole chain of inventions, spread out in time and space, to which all peoples have contributed and to which they all, therefore, have an equal right of access.

I have found that - for all of us - advances in modern technology have vastly increased the impact of communication, making it one of the areas where the voice of the strongest can drown that of the weakest and the modes of thought and behaviour of a few can be imposed upon all the others. For this reason, peoples now aspire to make their voices heard - by acquiring the necessary technology and adapting it to their needs, thereby bringing about a genuine pluralism on a global scale.

Considering all these challenges, I have seen how closely the responsibilities committed to Unesco chime with some of our deepest hopes and how much it therefore deserves that we should devote to it the resources of our knowledge, our energy and our will.

It is by striving - step by step - to detect, receive and interpret the vibrant signals of the world around us that Unesco is getting to the very heart of the major preoccupations of our time.

Focusing all the efforts that the international community is making to resolve the new dilemmas confronting it and to master the changes that have to be made, Unesco has succeeded, in the many fields in which it is called upon to act, in remaining true to a vocation that requires it to be a seat of knowledge and creative thought, at the service of all men and of the whole man.

To do so, it has had to overcome many difficulties: in particular, on the eve of my initial election, an open crisis so serious as to raise passing doubts as to the Organization's capacity for continuing its mission.

We nevertheless managed to weather that dangerous storm - thanks to the determination, finally asserted, to ensure that the essential principles of Unesco's Constitution should prevail; from then on, it was possible to knit up the threads of the indispensable dialogue.

To sum up in a few words the spirit common to all those negotiations, in which we all worked together, giving of our best, I might perhaps describe them as deriving - in the final analysis - from the desire to demonstrate, on the world scale as well as within each society, greater unity through greater justice, and to breathe into international and social relations a new dynamism inspired by a twofold insistence on dignity for each and tolerance towards all.

It is this dynamism that gives such profound significance to the practice of consensus that has been developed in Unesco. Such consensus, because it is never a purely formal matter but bears on the substance of the questions being debated, always modifies structures and behaviour - however slightly - righting injustices and bringing about improvements which in turn engender, in the longer term, new attitudes rich in potential for further changes. Thereafter, over and above the concessions

agreed to by the different parties concerned, there gradually takes root an awareness of the gains to be achieved through understanding and listening to one another.

Unesco has thereby constantly aimed at the gradual establishment of interdependent relations based on mutually accepted differences. And it has always believed that, in the course of that evolution, those countries that are still seeking their path to development will find themselves fully through acceptance of the collective destiny of mankind; that the industrialized countries will learn to share, alike, the powers of the present and the responsibilities of the future; and that, by multiplying the opportunities for encounters and exchanges, the peoples of the world will little by little weave their individual characteristics - rendered compatible - into the fabric of a new humanism.

In following these paths I have often come up against scepticism and doubt. Do the successes already gained entitle us to form such ambitions? Above all, are our means commensurate with the challenges which, on all sides and in ever increasing numbers, darken the horizon? My reply is that our means are unlimited - because they are the means of intelligence, placed in the service of the ethical principles that embody the hopes of all men under all skies. Their strength is that of our dreams, which await only the conjoining of our wills in order to become reality. Thus every initiative taken by Unesco has effects which go far beyond the material sphere, to work silently on minds and hearts.

We therefore have the right to wish, and to begin today to prepare, for the advent of a new era in which the values of freedom and brotherhood will flower in all nations. But we also have the duty to remind each of them that, to gain that end, it will have to reject the temptations of selfishness and dare the adventure of solidarity. Breaking with habits so deeply rooted in our past is a kin, in some ways, to a leap into the unknown. This is why so many peoples hesitate to do so, and why the forces of change mark time, while the dangers of resistance to progress multiply around us.

With the accession of almost all nations to sovereignty, the world is resounding with all the aspirations which are beginning to find expression but which are still slow to make common cause and to take shape in specific projects that can be taken up by the entire human community. Thus the twilight of our century is overhung by a stormy sky, heavy with new problems, unanswered questions and vague threats, but imbued at the same time with rich promise, since all the protagonists of international life have come on the scene, since they can now at last embark together on the dialogues of a future that has to be made.

It is not forbidden to hope that they will wish to do this, and that they will succeed in it. It is not unrealistic to think that Unesco will manage to surpass itself and make an even more telling contribution in the future than it has in the past. Unesco can bring to light the enormous reserves of generosity and imagination that today lie dormant in the international conscience. It can inspire in mankind, which has conquered its innate fear of the unknown, of plague and cholera, the will also to conquer the scourges of war, destitution and ignorance. It can inspire in mankind, which has discovered electricity and invented the compass and the computer, the will also to devise the mechanisms of a more just and more close-knit world.

Sustained by our united wills, it is Unesco's mission to be the crucible in which the Utopias of yesterday become the achievements of tomorrow. In pledging myself before you to devote all my energies to that mission, I ask each of you to lend me, along my way, your irreplaceable support.

Mr. President,

With this profession of faith, I should now like, before the General Conference that has re-elected me, to renew my oath.

"I SOLEMNLY UNDERTAKE TO EXERCISE IN ALL LOYALTY, DISCRETION AND CONSCIENCE THE FUNCTIONS ENTRUSTED TO ME AS DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION, TO DISCHARGE THESE FUNCTIONS AND REGULATE MY CONDUCT WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE ORGANIZATION ONLY IN VIEW, AND NOT TO SEEK OR ACCEPT INSTRUCTIONS IN REGARD TO THE PERFORMANCE OF MY DUTIES FROM ANY GOVERNMENT OR AUTHORITY EXTERNAL TO THE ORGANIZATION".