Address by
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Temporary President
of the General Conference

at the opening session of the twenty-second session
of the General Conference

Unesco House, 25 October 1983
Mr. President of the French Republic,
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
Mr. Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. In my capacity as head of the delegation of Yugoslavia and by virtue of Rule 37 of the Rules of Procedure of our General Conference, I have the honour and privilege of presiding at the opening of the present twenty-second session. In my capacity as Temporary President, I therefore declare open this twenty-second session of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

2. It is my very special privilege to welcome here today Mr. François MITTERRAND, President of the French Republic. Mr. President, your presence here is a great honour for Unesco and doubly so for our General Conference; it adds a special dimension and significance to this opening ceremony. In accepting our invitation to attend this opening session you have once again underlined the profound commitment of France, our host country, to the cause of international co-operation. Your participation in our deliberations testifies to the importance you attach personally to the part your Government and people have to play in building that intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind upon which the defences of peace must be constructed. It is therefore with great appreciation and interest that we look forward to your message.

3. May I also extend a most cordial welcome to all of you, heads of delegations, delegates, representatives, observers of non-Member States, liberation movements and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, journalists as well as other representatives of the mass media.

4. Ladies and gentlemen, before turning to the main tasks with which we will have to deal at this session, I wish to pay tribute to the memory of one who has left us since the fourth extraordinary session of the General Conference: Sir Ronald ADAM (United Kingdom) who was a member of the Executive Board from 1950 to 1954 and Chairman of the Board between 1952 and 1954.

5. Let us also remember at this moment the many others who may have contributed in some way to furthering the ideals of Unesco and particularly those who have faced danger in the call of duty and have given up their lives in the defence of peace.

5bis.I now invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to observe one minute's silence in their memory.

(The Conference observes one minute's silence)

6. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, we have considerable tasks ahead of us; a great deal must be said and done in the coming days. So I will limit myself here to some reflections about the accomplishments of the last three years and the challenges still facing us in the context of the world situation. These tasks will be the immediate responsibility of my successor in the President's seat and the more extended concern of the Member States, the Executive Board, the Director-General and the Secretariat in the years to come.

7. At once a witness to and a participant in the work of Unesco since 1960, I can in full confidence reiterate my optimism with respect to the achievements of our Organization. That optimism, however, is made all the more precious, indispensable, I would say, when we take a clear look at the world today. I have had occasion to point out, both at the fourth extraordinary session and at several sessions of the Executive Board, the state of permanent confrontation which makes our world a world of crisis, ever so far removed from that "peace", as Unesco's Constitution describes it, that "peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world" and which it is our duty to promote, for the sake of our generation, of that of our children, indeed for the sake of many generations to come. But I must say these things again here. It is
the time and the place for them, for if Unesco does not or cannot devote itself to the great task of building peace and brotherhood in the minds of men and women, in any number of small but significant ways, then the lights of hope must be forever put out.

8. There is no "great and terrible war" but simply an endless succession of brewing conflicts, of focal points of crisis, of lasting confrontations in many domains, which are not only a negation of the international community's lofty words about peace but also undermine the security of all our people, both their mental well-being and their material prosperity.

9. Interdependence in the contemporary world is a factor both of relations between countries but also in relation to the forces that make for harmony - or the negation of harmony - in international life. Thus the political, socio-cultural and economic realms are very closely interlinked, bringing the effects of the complex contradictions in international relations to all spheres of human endeavour. Thus the general and long-term economic and financial crisis has become a major cause of instability and a threat to world peace. Trade flows between the developed and developing countries, as well as between the East and West, are dwindling as a result. Economic sanctions have become the means of political pressure, and through protectionism and other protective measures attempts are made to gain unilateral advantages. Economic instability has a feedback effect on the political situation and the one aggravates the other.

10. The developing countries are the most seriously affected. The fall in prices of raw materials, along with the constant rise in prices of industrial products and technology, have halved the national incomes of the largest number of these countries. In the last few years alone, the indebtedness of the developing countries has increased to the terrifying amount of 640 billion dollars. This indebtedness is, above all, the consequence of un-iquitable positions in international economic relations, namely, the fact that the outflow of capital from developing countries through price disproportions, high interest rates and profits of transnational companies is much larger than the inflow. The international financing of development is itself becoming more restrictive all the time. Many developing economies simply cannot sustain the burden of debt repayments. All this points to the necessity of substantial transformations in the international economic and financial system which would only reduce the indebtedness of the developing countries, but, at the same time, open up new prospects for their speedier development and more equitable position in international economic relations.

11. There has been evidence of late of an increased readiness on the part of the most powerful industrialized countries to seek specific solutions for facilitating the financial positions of the most indebted developing countries. This shows that they too have become more aware of the interdependence of world development. However, still no readiness exists for a joint quest of solutions through negotiations with the developing countries as a prelude to deeper changes in international economic relations.

12. Against this background of increasing penury the arms race is not only accelerating, but has acquired new even more dangerous proportions. Accompanied by the increasingly expressive role of military power in international life. Thus the political, socio-cultural and economic realms are at the same time a cause of further aggravation. Simultaneously, it deprives mankind of enormous material resources which could be used much more appropriately for economic development, for combating not just hunger and poverty but also for the less material but equally indispensable human needs which Unesco aspires to fulfill: I refer to the right to education, to scientific progress, to culture and to the fruits of communication. I am deeply convinced that with such humanistic goals we here in this Organization are strongly committed to mobilizing all our strength, the manifold resources of our moral convictions, indeed of our imagination, to combating all these negative forces from within, from the commanding heights of the spirit, with the armour of solidarity and goodwill.

13. You yourself have singularly fortified our position, Mr. President, by the bold proposals you made on 28 September last to the thirty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. You took up the themes of disarmament and development together, pointing out that the technical progress stimulated by the present crisis was extremely ambivalent because this very technical progress, and I quote "is a source of growth but also a determining factor in the arms race"). "Must we limit ourselves to this observation?" you asked, "must we accept that the principal efforts of the largest countries be devoted to military technology? Must we accept the idea that the over-armament of the planet takes priority over its development?" The global political solutions for our predicament which you then proposed seek to break the paradoxical chains of cause and effect between military insecurity and economic insecurity and obtain, through a basic re-examination of military spending itself, new ways to convert the energy of destruction into the energy
of development and growth. Word of your initiative has been carried to the far corners of the globe, catching the imagination of men and women everywhere. It is an example for other world leaders and, in the name of Unesco, I can only hope that it will be followed. Yes, Mr. President, we at Unesco are particularly receptive to your broad and courageous vision for such ideas have been the leaven of the Organization's activities ever since its creation thirty-eight years ago.

14. Having been closely associated with the efforts of our Organization since the twenty-first session of the General Conference it is also my duty here today to pay tribute to the way these activities have contributed to the broader purposes of Unesco. These activities are the result of a collective effort in which the Member States, the Executive Board, the Director-General and his colleagues have worked tirelessly to achieve their goals.

15. We have together elaborated and adopted a Medium-Term Plan for 1984-1989. As I pointed out at the close of the fourth extraordinary session of the General Conference, that session itself, with its extraordinary pressures of time and work, was a severe test of our determination to achieve international solidarity. The Plan it produced rises to all the major challenges of our time, within Unesco's fields of competence. Among them are fundamental problems related to our most cherished cultural values and beliefs, to ethical principles and political convictions. Nations disagree on these matters, often very deeply, and it is not surprising that even at Unesco this should continue to be the case. However, the search for mutual understanding on the part of all Member States and all groups of Member States was so strong at that extraordinary session, that the Plan we adopted represented the fruit of an honest and balanced consensus.

16. In the last three years the triennial programme for 1981-1983 has also been successfully implemented, together with the many solutions which the Executive Board and the Director-General have been obliged to find in order to respond to a number of difficult or challenging situations. Unesco has amply fulfilled its role as a critic and corrective agent. Concurrently, Member States, the Executive Board and the Director-General have joined forces in the preparation of a new and ambitious biennial programme for 1984-1985. The programme is innovative through the fresh and original paths mapped out in the Second Medium Term Plan, now translated into operation or intellectual reality with great skill and vision. The programme is ambitious in its cohesion and scope, in its search for that true interdisciplinary co-operation which is the thread running through its fourteen major programmes. The objectives defined by those fourteen major programmes are truly inspiring ones - this is simply because they are basic, first to the survival of mankind, and then to its further enrichment and progress. It is when we run through this programme, aware of its great purpose, that our confidence in the relevance, nay the vital necessity of Unesco is fully renewed.

17. With what limited resources will the Organization meet these worldwide responsibilities, fulfilling what is, what can only be, a catalytic or seminal role in relation to the vast needs in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. May I take this opportunity here, to congratulate the Director-General for having drawn up such a comprehensive programme with a budget that has decreased substantially. This is unprecedented in the history of the Organization. In a time of austerity, Unesco too has marshalled its resources in the most economic manner possible.

18. But it is not a lack of resources that can hold back a determined group of men and women who share a common purpose and are united in their commitment to it. The first decisive step in that united effort, as far as the 1984-1989 Medium Term Plan is concerned, will be taken here, at this General Conference.

19. This is why I should like, in closing and on behalf of my successor as it were, to make a special appeal to all of you that the same constructive spirit of goodwill and co-operation which you were kind enough to extend to me during the twenty-first ordinary session and the fourth extraordinary session be fully renewed and strengthened here. The shadows of our crisis-ridden world must not loom over our deliberations for we speak another language and seek more humanistic goals. We must live with the almost overwhelming conflicts of the present, not by protecting ourselves from them, but by recognizing their immense difficulty and doing all we can by our own example, so as not to reproduce them here.

20. Ladies and gentlemen, this thought also reminds me of that old story about the idealist who said, "what a wonderful place the world would be if all the nations would get along with each other as if they were all members of one big family". To this the realist replied, "the trouble is - THEY DO!"