

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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United Nations Educational,
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(Unesco)

At the ceremony for the award of the
International Simón Bolívar Prize
to the Contadora Group
(Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela)

Unesco House, 20 June 1985

26 JUL 1985

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,
Distinguished Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Simón Bolívar Prize was established by Unesco in 1978 at the suggestion of the President of the Republic of Venezuela then in office, Mr Carlos Andrés Pérez, and is funded by the Venezuelan Government. Its purpose is 'to reward activity of outstanding merit that, in accordance with the ideals of Simón Bolívar, has contributed to the freedom, independence and dignity of peoples and to the strengthening of solidarity among nations, fostered their development or facilitated the establishment of a new international economic, social and cultural order.'

In 1983, the year in which the Prize was first awarded, the Jury unanimously selected two eminent public figures: His Majesty Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, and Mr Nelson Mandela, the South African political leader.

In choosing simultaneously and jointly the monarch who has very creditably directed Spain's transition to a democracy of which he is still the surest guarantor, and the African freedom-fighter who has been imprisoned for over 20 years and is the symbol of his people's long struggle for dignity and freedom, the Jury for the Simón Bolívar Prize highlighted the true meaning of the Liberator's message.

In 1985, two nominations particularly engaged the Jury's attention: that of the Contadora Group and that of His Royal Highness Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

The Jury took the view that both the Contadora Group's action and Prince Talal's work for solidarity were in keeping with the ideal of peace and co-operation bequeathed to us by Simón Bolívar. For this reason I should very much like to associate myself with the special tribute paid by the Jury, in its statement, to Prince Talal for his untiring actions on behalf of disadvantaged children. However, the Jury, which is represented at this ceremony by the well-known journalist Mr Claude Julien, Director of 'Le Monde Diplomatique', unanimously recommended me to award the 1985 International Simón Bolívar Prize to the Contadora Group. The jury felt that the Central American crisis, with its ever-growing threats of war and its still tenuous chances of negotiation, represented '...a major challenge to peace in the world...' today, and that the Contadora Group was playing a decisive role 'in seeking a negotiated solution to Central America's conflicts...'. .

In accepting the jury's proposal, I should very much like to thank all its members for the excellent work they have done, and to say how happy I am at the choice they have made. Accordingly, I am pleased to welcome you here today on the occasion of the award of the 1985 International Simón Bolívar Prize to the Contadora Group. I also extend my greetings to the Ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela, who have come to Paris expressly to represent their countries' governments at this ceremony.

The Contadora Group was established in January 1983 to cope with the explosive situation obtaining throughout Central America. The Ministers of

Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela met on the Contadora Island off the coast of Panama and decided to unite their efforts to try and arbitrate in the conflicts that were tearing the countries of the region apart.

The peace plan prepared by the Contadora Group is famous today as the Contadora Act on Peace and Co-operation in Central America. It has been supported by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly and a number of regional and international bodies, including the Organization of American States and the European Community.

The Contadora Group's activities constitute an admirable response to a threefold concern: to put an end to the terrible suffering being endured by the peoples of Central America as a result of the conflicts raging there; to ensure the exercise of the right of each of those peoples to dignity and independence; and to contribute to finding a solution to a crisis which, if prolonged, would seriously jeopardize the chances of peace in the world.

It would be difficult not to see in this action a continuation of an endeavour initiated more than a century and a half ago by Simón Bolívar.

As early as 1822, in fact, the Liberator proposed the establishment in the Isthmus of Panama of an institution which would 'act as counsel in major conflicts, as a place of contact during periods of common danger, as a faithful interpreter of public treaties whenever difficulties should arise and, lastly, as conciliator in our disputes.'

With Bolívar this idea sprang from a broad vision of the future of the new American nations, which, incidentally, he regarded as indissociable from the future of the world. He was totally convinced that any independence must necessarily be precarious if it led to division and gave rise to rivalries. Young nations belonging to a single cultural area but isolated from one another could soon find themselves embroiled in conflict with each other by contradictory forces, thereby furthering the interests of external powers.

That is why Bolívar launched a series of rousing appeals to the unity, cohesion and brotherhood of the newly liberated American nations. He saw in their union the beginnings of a wider union destined to embrace all America. He even had a vision of the advent of a 'new world equilibrium' that would enable the community of nations to secure justice, dignity, progress and happiness for men and women everywhere.

In 1815, in his Jamaica Letter written when Latin American independence was still in the embryonic stage, Bolívar said '...How beautiful it would be if the Isthmus of Panama could be for us what the Isthmus of Corinth was for the Greeks! Would to God that some day we may have the good fortune to convene there an august assembly of republics, kingdoms and empires to deliberate upon the high interests of peace and war with the nations of the other three-quarters of the globe.'

The Panama Congress was indeed convened by Bolívar on 26 June 1826. It proclaimed four fundamental principles: the right of peoples to govern themselves; non-interference in each other's affairs; a permanent union of the American republics; and the co-operation of all governments on earth to ensure peace for all and progress for everyone.

But Bolívar's vision turned out to be too far in advance of his time. In many respects, it is even in advance of ours. At the end of his life, in a moment of melancholy realism, the Liberator himself compared his project to that of a madman trying to control the navigation of boats from a rock.

But there are Utopias, which, by inspiring men, eventually alter the course of events. In history too, rivers have been known to return to their sources. Today the Contadora Group is returning to Simón Bolívar to refresh its vision of inter-American solidarity and to try and give new birth to the noble project of Panama.

In opting resolutely for a process which, by re-establishing dialogue and concerted action in Central America, emerges as a vital harbinger of peace throughout the world, Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela have rejuvenated the ideas of the visionary of the Santa Marta rock. They have thus proved that there are still peoples throughout the world who are determined to assume full responsibility for their destiny against all odds.

Distinguished Ministers,

You will understand the emotion I feel as I award the States you represent the diploma and gold medal of the 1985 International Simón Bolívar Prize for the actions whereby you affirm at one and the same time your trust in the historic genius of your peoples and your faith in the wisdom of the world.

May this Prize be of service in helping the world attain to a better understanding of what your countries' admirable effort really means, and thereby encourage the pursuit of an initiative, the intelligence and courage of which have a message for every one of us, and the repercussions of which have implications for the future of us all.