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Address by
Mr Federico Mayor

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as Director-General of the
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Mr President, 'For them the springs shall flow freely and corn shall be plentiful all the year long'. Those lines by my illustrious predecessor, Jaime Torres Bodet, epitomize our common commitment to the generations to come. It is our commitment that determines the future. We are committed to illuminating the paths of tomorrow's world by promoting education, science and culture. These enduring and unalterable goals and principles must also guide our present decisions just as, under the wise leadership of its President, they have guided those of the General Conference, faithfully reflecting maturity, serenity and the spirit of understanding and agreement. The session which will complete its work in a few days' time, and the Executive Board which preceded it, provide an example of international co-operation, common purpose, and respect for the democratic principles which govern the proceedings of this eminent institution of the United Nations system.

Thank you very much, Mr President, for the kind words you have addressed to me, emphasizing and commending that unity, that common vision and that unavoidable striving after the construction of peace in the minds of men. That unity, that clear common purpose, both implicitly and explicitly, require the prompt return of the countries that have withdrawn and the inclusion among us of those that have not yet become Members. For if we are united - and only if we are all united - we shall be able to prepare the ground to ensure that the coming millennium can really begin with 'springs flowing freely and plentiful corn'.

Mr President of the General Conference, Mr Chairman of the Executive Board, distinguished ministers and delegates of Member States, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends: I should like to express my gratitude for the support you have given me and the confidence reposed in me for the efficient carrying out of the decisions that have been adopted. This support is especially necessary when the challenge is on such a scale. Following a genuinely democratic procedure which illustrates the statute of our Organization, I stand before you today not as the Director-General of one group or another but as the Director-General of all, without exception; the Director-General of all the Member States, without distinction, all on a footing of complete equality and with equal regard for all their cultural diversities; everyone's Director-General, with the independence derived from the absolute figures of vote. Added to your support is that of outstanding intellectuals throughout the world who have encouraged me to take on this task, as well as the support of the Secretariat and all its members at Headquarters and in the Field, men and women occupying all positions and grades, with many of whom I have already had the satisfaction of working some years ago. The foregoing augurs well for our ability to pursue our course with determination and enthusiasm, for if we continue steadfastly to serve the Organization and stand up to the reverses that may befall us and might lead to premature disenchantment, we shall be able to tackle all obstacles and resolutely endeavour to make an effective response to the problems and threats that are, in our sphere of competence, a feature of these closing years of the century.

At this moment of great expectations, I should like to stress the fact that an intergovernmental organization like ours is purely and simply an organization of States, deriving all its power and effectiveness from those States, and using it for their benefit. Of course, behind the term 'State', which refers to a country's political and administrative structure, are the people and civic society which are its real historical embodiment. My appeal, my call for a joint effort today concerns them most particularly.

Mr President, I think it may be appropriate, in referring to the closer co-operation between those of us who are called on to share in the same task within the Organization, to reassert at the same time the effective independence of the various bodies - the General Conference, the Executive Board and the Secretariat - which work together within it, and the full and independent nature of their competences, functions and responsibilities. Only on that basis can the Organization increase its efficiency without a loss of comprehension or harmony.

In this differing but combined effort, we can all refer to one sure guide, the Constitution of Unesco, the true Magna Carta of our Organization, whose principles are today as valid, or more so, than when they were established. These principles which the passage of time has confirmed and strengthened are thus for us inviolable and will be, for me, the compass which will determine and guide our action at all times.

Forty years after the founding of Unesco, however, it seems appropriate to introduce changes that, as in the rest of the United Nations system, will bring its functioning into step with the new reality. These are changes that would amount to something more than reorganization. They are changes that would actually make it possible to safeguard the aims of the Constitution and their operative principles.

It was at the end of a European conflagration that became world wide that the architects of peace, by pooling what then constituted 'the sinews of war', coal and steel, saw with all the foresight of historic moments that world peace could be safeguarded only by creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that threatened it. Creative efforts! Let us make no mistake: coal and steel, nuclear energy, micro-electronics and biotechnologies have had, have, and will have varying importance. But what is needed today to come to terms with all the changes that have occurred and to prepare for the changes that we must bring about is the mobilization of intellectual resources and a rapid rise in the general intellectual level.

The founding objectives were not beyond the means of mankind nor were they erroneously formulated. It is true that the goals still look very distant. Furthermore, it sometimes seems that they move away more quickly than we can pursue them. We are now struggling amidst growing and insidious complexity that weakens the effectiveness of action, when it does not dissipate it altogether. Complexity however, can be neither avoided nor concealed. Complexity, fragility and acceleration seem to me to be the three overriding characteristics of our time. These characteristics, far from serving as a pretext for inaction or as an excuse for being left behind, are a major argument for strengthening our determination and redoubling our energy, although this must be done by refining the definition of objectives in order to align, with demanding realism, our aims with the resources available to us. It is precisely in the 'universal village'

whose outlines we are beginning to make out that we must assess the total cost - which reason prohibits - of doing without Unesco, without the dense web of interdependence that, enwraps our entire human experience, without the intellectual frame on which the invisible but essential networks of harmony can be woven.

Let us think for a moment about the extraordinary beneficial and sometimes, unfortunately, adverse changes we have witnessed during the last thirty years. The extension and conquest of new areas on our planet and in space itself; the rapid obsolescence of products and the dizzy speeding up of changes that have made immediacy a guiding principle of contemporary life; the globalization of structures, mechanisms, exchanges and the most far-reaching processes in present-day society; the intensification of demographic disparities in various areas: population explosion and megalopolization of cities in developing countries, set against zero and sometimes negative population growth in post-industrial countries, together with an inversion in age-group patterns that suggests that by the year 2025 less than 20 per cent of the population will be more than 20 years old, while more than 35 per cent will be over 60; the damaging not to mention spoliation, of the natural environment, accompanied by the disappearance, irreversible in many cases, of hundreds of plant and animal species; the extremely serious risks of catastrophe due to technological accidents; the sweeping, unstoppable technological developments in biological engineering and production engineering (such as automated machinery, together with so much else), in the creation of new materials, in photonics (lasers, optical fibres, image processing), in recent medical instrumentation, in space technology (satellites, remote sensing); etc.

My training is that of a scientist, and a scientist is, by definition, a man accustomed to team work, in whom boundless hope - of possible discovery or innovation - coexists with the implacable realism of daily experimental practice. The scientist advances only gradually, in a process of accumulating contrasted certainties. But, in his view, far from being the goal at the end of an operation, verification is a new starting-point that starts the climb upward once more. This modesty of pace, this need to check the validity and utility of what is to be done, this rigorous requirement for work to fulfil day by day the objectives that one sets oneself, will obviously be mine. There can be no others. Modesty and ambition then, as two indissociable dimensions of the one and only aim: to be useful.

Mr President, the scientist must be aware of the needs and aspirations of the society in which he lives. Furthermore, he must collaborate in the most lofty and difficult task facing mankind: to shape the best of possible futures. I have always felt the exigency of this commitment.

Born in 1934, I belong to what is called in my country the war generation. I spent my early years amidst the din of two long, cruel wars, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. They were difficult times of seemingly irreconcilable clashes, of scarcity, poverty, which irreversibly left on me the conviction that political peace, civil harmony, justice, freedom and individual and social well-being are supreme values. My youth was governed by the ideal of gradually building up a liveable society in which there would be least be room for us all, a society to which we would all contribute but one that would be also the common heritage of all.

This common destiny coincides, moreover, with my own personal life-story. Coming from a humble family, in which neither of my parents had been able to continue their education beyond primary level, I learnt as a child the value of knowledge and the value of work. We are what we make of ourselves, as we used to say at home, and our achievements are the surest testimony of our identity. For that reason, beyond any other consideration or advice, I look to the life of my father, a worker who retired at the head of his firm; his life was his own work, and this to me is the most perspicuous message.

The process of social and political democratization in Spain coincides with the period of my adult life. In the 1970s, democracy for my country was an objective which was not only necessary, indeed essential, but also attainable. The question was how to contribute to it in the most effective way possible, by helping to establish tolerance, to extend areas of freedom, to gain ground for genuinely practised pluralism, and to open up my country's frontiers by ending its sterile isolation and returning it fully, without presumption but without inhibitions, to the world community to which it belongs.

Mr President: for many of those present, the immediate past has been a period of limited but interminable armed conflicts, imbalances in the world economy and an increasing number of flagrant, unjust and inadmissible discrepancies. What is no less certain is that at present more favourable conditions for international co-operation are being created: the visible democratization of vast areas of the world, the reduction of tension, the increasing realism of the claims that are being made - all these give us reasonable grounds for hope.

As we all know, Unesco has suffered the worst attacks upon it during this period of harmonization and progress towards the new reality. Unesco is the most vulnerable and fragile link in an international system which today appears even more necessary than at the end of the Second World War. Its ultimate objective is to quote the words of His Majesty the King of Spain, in his address to the General Conference in 1983 - 'to change man through education [which] means ultimately to change societies, in peace and freedom'.

It is impossible for us, where action is urgently needed, to move in the right direction without exploring the general context in which Unesco should develop its future action. Within its fields of competences - education, culture, science and communication - Unesco must become a leading light in the service of humanity. It can achieve this only by standing back and taking stock of the situation. On the other hand, nothing can be achieved by merely following a series of changing impulses.

The plenary debate in the present session of the General Conference has emphasized the advisability of concentrating efforts on essential objectives, while taking up the challenge of creating and maintaining the critical mass required by global programmes, combined with certain actions which have a foreseeable catalytic effect, so as to promote regional collaboration and help to bring in extra-budgetary funds. This concentration in the interests of efficiency will call for interdisciplinary co-operation, in order to achieve a simultaneous advance on all sides, and for the maintenance of a universal grasp of problems combined with the search for specific solutions, in which the long-term view is not obscured by the landmarks of past achievements.

No one, I feel sure believes that the task that lies ahead will be the work of one man. The present situation of the Organization calls for an efficient and fully self-confident Secretariat. The staff members of the Organization are its principal resource and therefore merit priority attention. For this reason, equal treatment for all, a sense of personal responsibility for the work performed, greater respect for individual initiative and transparency in all activities should become standard practice.

The international civil service is essential to the future of humankind, for that future will stand in ever greater need of global projects from which appropriate local solutions can be derived. Although a variety of allegiances frequently create obstacles, the world in which we live is either one world or it is nothing. One arising from the vast range of cultures, whose existence is the greatest asset distinguishing the human condition; one, in order to defend the dignity of every woman and every man and to safeguard human rights; one, for concerted action and dialogue in the face of conflict, for the eradication of ignorance, and for the promotion of justice; one, for freedom and for peace. Alone, we are helpless. By joining forces under the supreme banner of the United Nations, we can succeed. For this reason, we should feel special respect for international civil servants, who must set aside their origins, native land and customs, although these remain intact in their heart of hearts, in order to belong solely to the international organization which they serve, and by their efficiency, discretion and objectivity to be equal to the lofty calling that is theirs.

I am convinced that all members of the Secretariat, whatever their grade, age, status or origin, will work jointly and judiciously to defend their legitimate interests, while at the same time, mindful both of the situation facing Unesco and of the question-mark hanging over the future, co-operating unstintingly in the search for ways and means of doing their duty most effectively under the present circumstances.

There is also a need to modernize our services through greater use of office automation and informatics and to improve our working methods by introducing the principles of business management. At the same time, we must revitalize our evaluation systems, combining the existing method of self-evaluation with assessments conducted by outside bodies.

Alongside the work of implementation, the Secretariat has the capacity to take initiatives, which must ultimately be endorsed by the appropriate organs. However, it is the General Conference that is empowered to lay down policies and general guidelines for the Organization and to decide on the allocation of funds, in the form of the total budget granted to the Organization.

Besides providing conditions of total independence and effectiveness - which are not incompatible with the necessary austerity - for the functioning of the Executive Board, I shall take care to establish frequent and far-reaching contacts with the Permanent Delegations. I shall not forget how much I have learned from members of the Executive Board and Permanent Delegates. Throughout my term of office, but particularly during the early stages, I shall put into effect the wise counsel of the Chinese proverb: 'We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak'.

On this basis, without haste but without delay, I shall set in motion the modernization process that we all expect and want. It is obvious, however as I have already pointed out, that this renewal of our methods of action must be strictly compatible with our permanent objectives and fully in keeping with our

heritage of past gains. Reform, then, or better still reforms, but without disruption. What criteria should be applied? The General Conference, I believe, has just laid them down for us with great clarity: 'Do less, but better', 'Lower volume, higher quality', 'Fewer in number with better follow-up' are the recipes that have emerged. They might almost be termed obvious, thus stated, but they are extraordinarily difficult to put into practice. In a body composed of 158 members, attitudes and interests are so varied that they inevitably and legitimately tend to find expression in a multitude of purposes and projects. So concentration, while necessary, is very difficult, both as regards the practical goals to be attained and as regards the ways and means to be used.

Around what key issues can this concentration be achieved? Once again, the work of the General Conference provides us with decisive guidance.

The first and most obvious is a matter which has been part and parcel of the Organization's work since its inception. It is the promotion of literacy, now understood in the broad sense as the learning and practice not only of reading skills, but also of the other idioms we use today to understand and express knowledge and reality (through the audio-visual media, machines, etc.) involving also a thorough, critical grasp of the particular circumstances and requirements of the society in which they are to be used.

Protection of the environment in harmony with man, promotion of science in the service of progress, widespread application of knowledge for the benefit of the least developed countries, co-operation and cultural development of and among people and nations - these are, among others, the major key issues of general interest to Member States.

This concentration of activities must go hand in hand with consultation and agreement. This is the view taken by the General Conference which, as I see it, has made this its second line of approach. There is in fact a considerable amount of duplication and repetition among the activities carried out by various intergovernmental organizations, by those organizations and states, and by public and private agencies. A comparison between the work programmes of all these bodies shows that they overlap to a surprisingly high degree, and this means that it is absolutely necessary, before implementation starts, to engage in consultation on all the activities which the various authorities are planning to carry out in a given subject area or sector of the programme. So far as our Organization is concerned, such consultation must be initiated or, as the case may be, improved, first and foremost among the organizations of the United Nations system, between them and the intergovernmental organizations of the various regions, and between both of these and the main non-governmental organizations concerned, etc.

To complement such consultation and concerted action, the general public in the various Member States must be associated with our Organization's activities. This is another crucially important point for the effectiveness of our work. It is essential for this purpose that we should succeed in creating a close-woven fabric of public support for our activities which will ensure that they truly become a feature of real life in each specific context. The functional decentralization of our structure and our work, to which the General Conference, the Executive Board and the Secretariat itself have already devoted priority attention, will only be genuinely effective if it is reflected in social as well as in territorial terms and is firmly anchored in the field.

It may be added that associating the public at large with our activities in this way will bring those activities into much greater immediate prominence and will help us to emerge from the isolation in which we, unfortunately, often find

ourselves. We, like other international organizations, are accused of living and working in a closed circuit.

For this purpose, it is essential that we make the dissemination and utilization of the results of our work one of our basic objectives. We serve if what we accomplish is of service, that is to say, is known and used, and if its use makes a difference to the individual and collective behaviour patterns of those for whom it is intended. This is ultimately the sole valid criterion, the criterion that carries conviction.

The General Conference has also emphasized the need to strike a better balance between, on the one hand, activities that lead to the production of analyses (reports and studies) and legal and standard-setting texts (recommendations, resolutions and agreements) and, on the other, those actions that represent a direct effort to grapple with reality by down-to-earth means. I consider this line of emphasis, which might be defined as preferring action over words, to be of decisive importance in giving the Organization a higher profile and strengthening its effectiveness, albeit on the understanding that Unesco must work as a sponsor rather more than as an executive agency. For Unesco's function (our job is to sell yeast, not bread) is that of a catalyst, triggering off processes and creating synergetic effects.

To that end, economic resources are important. However, what is at stake is not only material contributions but also, and above all, the human resources that will enable us to advance hand in hand. This symbol of solidarity - of North and South, East and West joining hands - might bring a glimmer of light to the horizon that has been darkened with war, the trafficking in arms and drugs, ignorance and oppression. In this context I call upon all States - and particularly the most developed - to work together in conjunction with numerous associate experts, and to encourage their young people to contribute to one of the boldest transformations for which, in the name of equity, the world is calling: the struggle - the only struggle in which we should be called to enlist - against illiteracy, the struggle against ignorance and the struggle for individual and collective independence.

Humanity can scale the lofty, shining heights of peace and justice, harmonious co-existence among people and between people and their environment, for it is not certain that conflict is inevitable, and it is not certain that human beings have a propensity towards aggression and war. We cannot be genetically inclined towards love any more than towards aggressiveness. Nurture is stronger than nature. Nurture through education, through training, in the hands of those who are labouring throughout the world at the most difficult, most vital task of all - teachers, of which I wish to speak here and who will be ever present in my mind throughout my term of office.

Peace grows and makes its home in the mind of each individual. There exists a vast, imperceptible substratum for peace. We must recognize the uniqueness, significance and importance of each man and woman. If all that they think, do and say is treated as insignificant, a sense of disenchantment and helplessness sets in. And, clearly, significance does not necessarily imply publicity. Suffice it, then, to recognize the tremendous value of silent concern, of unlimited, anonymous generosity, of modest disinterestedness and courage. It is enough that we should all know that in the invisible web of love, affection and disinterestedness, in this dense, tough fabric, are the strong threads that guide the real and continuing advance of peoples, and that here the errors and pettiness of those who seek vainly to convince us that all change is impossible can have no place, and vanish.

Thousands of people connected with this Organization have from the outset striven to achieve this end. They include Presidents of the General Conference, Chairmen of the Executive Board, members of those bodies, Permanent Delegates, Secretariat staff, specialists, scientists, artists, educators, politicians, and so on. I wish to remember all of them now. All, and in particular my predecessors and the Director-General with whom I had the honour of working for over three years as Deputy Director-General. He has been paid the tribute he deserved. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, an African of universal stature, has laboured tirelessly at the head of the Unesco Secretariat. We have all learnt from his valour and self-commitment. I hope that he may continue for many years to highlight the most urgent development needs of the peoples. In order that multilateral co-operation may be concentrated on the essential aspects of progress and eliminate those which are harmful. In order that important long-term activities may not constantly be set aside for the most urgent. May he continue for many years to help in making into reality these lines from the Tenth Elegy by Rainer Maria Rilke: 'That one day, free now of the terrible vision/That pursues me, there may arise a song of joy'.

Mr President, I know the obstacles that lie in the way of change. But, as a biologist, I know that nature has evolved through creative transformation. To those who advocate doing nothing, to those who say that only what is possible can be done, let us oppose, for the sake of the dignity of every individual, the never-failing formula of innovative inspiration and of imagination, in order to demonstrate that what is impossible to the faint-hearted is possible to the enterprising. Let us combine our resolve and our dreams so that we may not be branded with Camus' terrible condemnation: '...being able to achieve so much, they ventured so little'. I know that ultimately this will not be so. Because there is an indomitable force that withstands all, that ever emerges, that finally overcomes all obstacles. That is the creative force that is the hallmark of humanity. It is the force of the spirit. And it has its dwelling here.