UNESCO

DG/90/6

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)

to the Global Forum for Environment
and Development for Survival

Moscow, USSR, 18 January 1990

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Distinguished Participants,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 1989 has been a dramatic turning-point in history. Our bicentennial celebration of the birth of a universal idea of liberty and human rights has been followed over the past few months by the privilege of being eye-witnesses to a nascent civilization of peace, based on freedom and democracy.

This rebirth of solidarity and hope in Europe has a worldwide dimension as well. Although we remain divided by the growing chasm between the rich and poor and continuing imbalances in North-South economic relations, survival on this planet, with its looming environmental threats to each of us, is bringing us together. We are united by threats that, unlike the receding shadow of nuclear war, fall well within our personal and community capacities to confront in daily life.

Not only must we act - and act now - to prevent further environmental deterioration, but we must also find ways to reverse environmental damage through research and technical applications. As Albert Einstein said, we will be 'one or none'. This requires a solidarity reaching round the globe and into millions of local situations. It therefore must be based on an active democratic spirit in which popular participation, locally, nationally and globally, underlines the belief that citizens count all the time and are not merely counted at the polls.

The present 'spirit of our time', representing as it does great change and continual challenges, was admirably expressed recently by President Mikhail Gorbachev:

> 'Our time is indeed a watershed of destiny. Material culture is developing with stunning speed. Nevertheless with so many people still living in poverty, misery, hunger and squalor, we cannot say that ours is a world of plenty. At the same time we are becoming painfully aware of the worst side of technological progress which threatens mankind with self-annihilation. To find the way out we need spiritual values, we need to rethink man's attitude towards nature, towards others and to himself. We need a revolution of the mind. This is the only way towards a new culture and new politics which can meet the challenge of our time'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since I am Unesco's Director-General you may expect me to talk about my organization at some length. I will not because the subject before us is so challenging and my charge from your organizers to keynote a discussion among all of us here is so specific. Let it simply be understood that my organization, and I personally, are deeply committed to the points of view and contributions we can make here and elsewhere to further the cause of global education. As Unesco continues to become stronger, with the support of its Member States and the professional communities with which it works, I look forward to achieving the goals we share here in co-operation with you and others.

The road to that new culture lies through global education. That is why I wish to express my pleasure at being among you today and my thanks to Academician Velikhov, Mr Matsumora, the Very Reverend James Parks Morton and Senator Ulloa, for their invitation to speak on this important matter.

I am happy to see Elie Wiesel here. He honours us by his presence, along with that of Ambassador Singh and my United Nations colleague and friend Jim Grant of UNICEF.

Since the forum has already outlined some of the key issues that confront us as we move towards the twenty-first century, it would be a real oversight for me not to add that the industrialized societies, of the East and the West, have largely anchored themselves in short-term economic and material considerations. Moreover, their enormous productivity is an achievement which has not been shared in a balanced fashion. The needs of war have prevailed over the priorities of peace and over the imperative of ending poverty in the world.

We can all agree that we have endangered our harmony with the environment. But short-term thinking also puts us in contradiction with our most deeply held ethical and spiritual commitments. The new global crisis will deepen if we fail to change - and change quickly - our vision and priorities.

The Berlin Wall has come down. Yet stronger and wider walls, deep within ourselves, continue to divide us from others. Before us now is the seemingly fantastic, but truly possible, task of demolishing the walls in our minds. Together we can change our attitudes and habits. Together we can prevent the construction and fortification of a new wall between the world's North and South.

That is why I hope today, in a few brief remarks, to put forward a working definition of global education, to then raise the issue of how best to reach 'the unreachable' in the villages and the executive suites of the world and, finally, to offer some proposals about what, together, we should do.

'Global education' is a term in search of a clear definition. It is not self-explanatory, given the permanent tension which always exists between our local settings and our global address in the universe. Any approach to global education will have to be based on a deep respect for the plurality and diversity of our cultures, beliefs and histories. Homogenization, or standardization, is not what we seek. Rather than Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' of alphas and gammas, we strive for the dignity and rich personality of each member of the human race.

There are three levels on which global education, it seems to me, can be understood. The first, which is fundamental to all the others, is the need and moral imperative of providing education to everyone, child and adult alike, throughout the world. It is an unacceptable shame that almost a billion people have no access to any form of basic education and that this includes hundreds of millions of children who may never see the inside of a classroom. Women and girls suffer more from this exclusion than males, despite their key roles in nurturing families and attitudes.

Presently, we are engaged in International Literacy Year. Let all of us comit ourselves to this most urgent struggle against ignorance. Together with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF, Unesco is convening a World Conference on Basic Education for All in March 1990. If we are resolved to confront the tragedy of illiteracy and ignorance, then each of us can work to ensure that this world gathering leads to concrete results: a new priority given to basic education by all countries.

The second level, towards which we must strive, is to harness school systems, non-formal learning and informal education to teach and learn about the global issues that shape and threaten the quality of our lives. This includes not only the underprivileged in the villages and urban slums of the poorest and richest countries. It also includes those with the highest and most specialized educational backgrounds who, all too often, lack a global vision or an understanding of the interconnectedness of self, society and nature on a planetary scale. Here, the religions and spiritual teachings of the world offer us guidance in understanding our oneness with all of creation.

The third level concerns the means at our disposal to project a global reach for education through both simple and highly advanced existing technologies. On the all-important local level, be it in the richer or poorer countries, the daily newspaper and radio have a crucial role to play in building bridges to the wider world. We must promote these media, defend and expand their freedom and appeal to their professionals at all levels to work with us for global education. At the same time, television provides a visual and 'real time' window on the world which can change perceptions with speed and force. And today, as we will see, in the worldwide broadcast of this forum being organized by Intelsat and Intersputnik, the means exist through the satellite and the earth station to provide global education with the whole world as its classroom.

Yet the question remains concerning our ethical, spiritual and intellectual capacity to arrive at a global vision for ourselves and to share it with others. Here I stand before a distinguished audience in one of the world's great capitals. But in my mind's eye, I am thinking of those I have met in my travels who are not among us today.

I see a village schoolteacher, lacking even the most basic materials, patiently working with his, or her, pupils to teach them to read and write. I also see the concern of so many fathers and mothers that their children be better educated, better off and more secure in the necessities of life. And then I see a young man in the urban slums of the North or the South and I sense his desperate search for work and the despair that drives him to drugs. Last, I see a scientist in an ill-equipped laboratory trying to provide his or her country with a scientific and technological basis for development and decision-making. These are the people who must stand at the centre of any concept of global education because they are the world. And this world, this vision is a Gestalt, not a mere listing of concepts.

When the day comes when we can learn from them and they can learn from us in a continuous sharing, we will have overcome the age-old mistrust of the culture of war and set out on the adventure of a peace culture. This will involve making connections for ourselves that bridge humans and nature, town and countryside, time and space, in a new civic culture for the planet. Our mind's eye will see in those children, young people and adults, the connections between the environmental crisis and the debt crisis, between the billions of dollars a year in net capital outflow from the South to the North and the laboratories and classrooms that never will be built.

We need immediate measures before irreversible social and environmental damage is done. It is the responsibility of the policy-makers to take rapid action. But they must be given sound advice by the scientists and the thinkers and the religious leaders. We cannot be silent, we must speak out.

The 's' in Unesco stands for science, a major responsibility and challenge. For this reason Unesco, with UNEP, WMO, FAO and ICSU is working to produce a 'Joint Annual Statement on the Environment'. Aimed at

decision-makers, this publication will be clear, concise, readable and, above all, action-oriented. It is an excellent example of the kind of close co-operation being built up between United Nations agencies and the scientific community. Indeed, we must speak out.

Environmental survival, after all, can be a difficult, abstract concept, unless we can reach each child with a simple and powerful idea that we humans are part of nature and that we must love our trees and rivers and farm-lands and forests, as we love life itself. The school, at village and neighbourhood level, is an extraordinary medium for linking global concerns with local life. Trees will be cut and burned, soil will be stripped, water will be polluted, unless the school becomes a source of new, workable solutions for living. Teachers can be trained to root the curriculum in learning the local soil, waters and forests. Gardening and simple experiments could show better, more environmentally adapted ways of meeting everyday nutritional and energy needs. Literacy, in our time, is the fundamental first step to women's rights, lower fertility, better health and nutrition for all. By reading words, we also learn to read the environment.

What can be done now to move towards a new global perception and a new worldwide set of ethics? We here, like my organization and many similar gatherings, have only our commitment to scientific truth, our store of humanistic and spiritual wisdom and a possibility of projecting the power of moral suasion. Together, however, Unesco and other actors can forge a partnership to take certain measures right now. Each step is designed to give substance to Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar's inspired plea for an 'earth patriotism'.

Our first initiative would be to create a worldwide expert panel of scientists and educators to plan a global education curriculum of practical value and planetary scope.

Second, putting environmental education at the centre of all curricula from kindergarten to higher studies and training the teachers and the administrators who can carry the message into all schools. Environmental education and global education go hand in hand in creating a new era of sustainable growth.

Third, promoting a global civic education by devising teaching methods and materials that emphasize the ethics of worldwide community living. This would involve an examination of the vestiges of the war culture out of which we are evolving.

Fourth, teaching the children of the wealthier countries about the conditions of their brothers and sisters in the developing world and, most important, showing that solutions exist in the here and now to eradicate poverty while preserving our natural resources.

Fifth, working with the mass media and telecommunication enterprises to produce and broadcast audio-visual packages that introduce audiences, particularly children and young people, to the great teachers of this world at all levels and in all cultures. This would be a practical step to preserve our common cultural and educational heritage.

And, finally, let me make a very immediate and concrete proposal: building on the broadcast of this forum scheduled for tomorrow by Intelsat and Intersputnik to create global television learning networks on the issues of the human agenda for the next century. This would be an experiment in informal global education at its best. To this end, together with UNICEF, I am

working closely with Academician Velikhov, his colleagues and specialists in the public and private sectors in other countries to create such a system.

All of these measures, and many more, are possible and practical for today. An example of an even more challenging approach, which will take some time to develop, is an attempt to take advantage of the momentum of developments leading towards a 'common European house'. We could launch an effort to write world history textbooks for all the world's children. The time is ripe to share a meaningful and relevant past among all of our cultures, without prejudice or exclusivity. Of course, this will be a history of civilizations and everyday life, but of battles and empires.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time itself is an ethical dimension and we must be prepared to act in the present and without delay. May I insist, as I have written before, that tomorrow is too late!

Here in Europe, where events are moving at a breathtaking pace, time is of the essence. I think you will understand, now that I have tried to orient global education within the problematics of East-West and North-South development, if I end with an appeal concerning this continent. Europe's potential, as a contributor to advancing the cause of development and environmental protection for the entire world, is enormous. In the construction of this new and inclusive European house, I wish to call on the scientists, teachers, artists, journalists, librarians and others to come together as individuals and as professional communities to weave a new and resilient web of co-operation in constructing and rebuilding the cultural, educational, scientific and communications facilities of this continent. The governments of this region bear ultimate responsibility for its future. It is up to us, as individuals, professional and scientific groups, religious leaders and parliamentarians to make sound and convincing proposals as these governments go about setting priorities and objectives.

I would like to repeat that Unesco is a structure of persuasion, with an ethical mission at the global level. This is the strength of my organization. It stands ready to serve as a catalyst and clearing house in a co-operative effort along these lines. Together, we can accomplish great things in little time. As we do so, we show that global vision - and <u>teaching</u> that vision - make it possible to act regionally and locally for all who strive for a better life on this planet.

Those are the elements of the dream of 1789 and the dreams of 1989. They include all humanity among those 'significant others' with whom we share this spaceship earth and this time machine that can take us rapidly to a future rich in choices and vibrant with solidarity and democracy.