

DG/93/28
Original: Spanish

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Federico Mayor

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

'Latin America's Contributions to the
New International Community'

Inaugural lecture
for the cycle of plenary sessions
Forum 'Visión Iberoamericana 2000'

Antigua, Guatemala, 26 April 1993

This year we have an appointment in Brazil. The Latin American Summit will meet for the third time, demonstrating that it is no passing whim but a major undertaking, amply bearing out the simple but eloquent saying that union is strength.

It is a joint undertaking, a combined effort of will, underpinned and fortified by open and constructive debate, that now has the support of this Forum which adds the contribution of some eminent representative thinkers of the region to the efforts of its political leaders.

Nothing could be more appropriate than to associate reflection of this kind with the responsible exercise of politics, because in a far deeper sense reflection and criticism are intimately linked to human action. It is more urgent than ever to restore and secure the relationship between thought and deed. This is undoubtedly one of the distinctive and exemplary traits that the Latin-American intellectual can personify in other regions, where there is clearly a divorce between philosophy and experience. A host of names springs to mind: Martí, Asturias, Vasconcelos, Neruda, Cortázar and many others who are fortunately still with us and make a clarion call to the conscience of the world.

We need beacons to guide us at the end of the century - the end of a millennium which may be the prelude to a new dawn or the entrance to an even darker cavern fraught with dangers. Our times are characterized by many transitions and few certainties; the uncertainties, moreover, are accentuated by the dizzy pace of change. An order based on the primacy of force - which for most of the world means outside force - is collapsing, leaving a vast space in which to build (this time with the help of countless hands) a world shaped in the image of the human race. Some believed that there had been winners and losers. But this was not the case: an entire system based on either hand on money was crumbling, was starting to crumble ... although some last strongholds, heavily shored up, still survive today, obstinately hanging on to their traditional privileges! Liberty alone emerged triumphant and oppression alone was spurned. Peace in justice and equity was able to rise above the mire. Timidly, the first pages of a new culture were beginning to be written. The culture of war was disappearing, being effaced, and the culture of peace was emerging. Of course, many contradictions arose as people faced up to what they had themselves created. As Heisenberg had warned, the human environment was becoming less and less natural. As a result of our own creative capacities we are so hemmed in by the artificial that what could have given us wings has become a dead weight that prevents or impedes us from flying.

For centuries we have made ready to defend our territories: we have soldiers, weapons and strategists to deal with outbreaks of war. And now, suddenly, we have to defend ideas, ideals and identities, using the only means whereby the realm of the spirit can be strengthened and expanded, namely by knowing, understanding and sharing. In what other way or by what other assumptions are we to explain a century which is drawing to a close in a welter of electronic gadgets, but is overrun by all manner of extremism, violence and fundamentalism?

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How can we talk of joint action and harmony if the guidelines for international politics - based on commercial exchanges and financial tightrope walking - serve only to deepen and widen the gaps and the disparities? And how many of us are ready at the national level to share our work and belongings with others? We have made some progress, nevertheless, towards a most precious goal: the possibility now available to us to dissent, to disagree, to participate, to express our opinions unreservedly; and we have made progress in the establishment of democratic systems, the sole framework within which one can imagine the change which now looms inescapably over all analysis of the present and all prospects for the future. It is a change of planetary scope, from which no sphere of material, cultural or spiritual life is exempt. These are changes or transformations that, for many, possess a 'millenarian' significance: we are approaching the end of history.

I do not think that this is true of Latin America I have reason enough to affirm that here we have a continent where hope resides and projects of vast scale are forged. Its chances of success in the face of dangers that some would describe as apocalyptic surely lie in a challenge that others have failed to take up: that of giving culture its full and proper stature.

I refer to global change in the economy, in political structures and in ideologies - which must not be glossed over by obsolete and anachronistic formulas - reflecting the major issues of our time and of the foreseeable future. One of the most alarming symptoms of the crisis of initiative and lack of foresight consists in the waves of migrants from the poor countries to the prosperous cities, where manifestations of xenophobia and racism are beginning to proliferate. Yet no one could or can fail to realize that a world with such glaring inequalities can no longer remain stable.

Inevitably, there are those who prefer to look to the past, where, admittedly, the causes and some of the remedies are to be found. But it is towards the future that we must hasten, by different paths and other ways, applying scientific and technical progress for the benefit of the majority and not the few, because the problem is not the advance of science and technology, but their application and use. The headlong acceleration of science in recent decades has not been matched by any similar advance in the rational conduct of political affairs. A world dominated by technology loses moral depth, and the very notion of freedom is restricted and impoverished.

The upheaval we are witnessing is of such magnitude that we have to invent new categories to fit the startling new realities. Those who continue to defend the sovereignty of the nation-state without paying attention to global and regional dimensions, or without taking into account different ethnic groups and cultures; those who advocate rationalist systems, forgetting the crucial role of religions, beliefs and traditions, or who continue to maintain that the assertion of 'collective rights' has priority over that of individual rights; or that the class struggle rules out the struggle for democracy and freedom will be incapable of grasping that the transformations of our time not only imply new scales of values, but require new ways of thought. Above all, they will not have the foresight to act as look-outs and anticipate events, to see and to invent a common future incommensurate with our present way of life.

A reading of events based solely on the capacity to absorb progress, as in the case of the world that considers itself developed, would appear to support those who claim that the past decade was a lost decade for Latin America. But, if we apply a different criterion, we will see that it was a period of progress towards greater political maturity, in which plurality no longer meant distance but dialogue, in which democracy took root and began to spread throughout

the subcontinent, in which Third World attitudes gradually lost their stigma as an infinitely more complex reality emerged: the fact that we live in a world that belongs to all of us, in which much that was formerly peripheral is now in the centre, and much that was central is now peripheral.

In the closing stages of the millennium we note that it is no longer possible to speak of the dispossessed of the earth or of the marginalization of the indigenous population in the same terms as we did barely ten years ago. New prototypes are taking shape before us, such as the 'uprooted' or the 'outcasts' of the modern world.

The frontiers between the opulent North - which by and large lacks raw materials but possesses know-how - and the South are growing blurred and we face the prospect of sharing not just the endemic ills of underdevelopment, but the products - both goods and fantasies that the industrial paradises export. In North and South alike, megalopolises are springing up, with their affluence and their squalor; great cities where, for lack of personal support and values, people lead lives of emptiness, boredom and alienation; there is a dullness of soul, rising from the worst of solitudes - loneliness among the crowd - leading rapidly to the loss of that which is 'most human' in humanity: the sense and awareness of belonging to a community. Man on the brink, as Rof Carballo likes to put it, on the very edge between light and shadow. Here is freedom, here the compelling creative tension that wavers between yes and no, between doubt and certainty. We truly love only that which we do not wholly possess,' wrote Marcel Proust. This is why we love truth, searching for it endlessly in the gloom.

The successful and well-to-do lose all perspective and grow short-sighted as their creature comforts accumulate. They become compliant and learn to proclaim that things are as they are and nothing can be done about it. Through lack of vision they are content to rely on 'market forces', as though business transactions and the rules that govern them came from outer space.

Change implies reappraisal, beginning with ourselves - the ability to give up, to reflect and to listen; the courage to correct, to disagree, to insist and to wipe the slate clean whatever the cost; the willingness to take decisions or to step up the pressure when delay could bring with it irreversible consequences.

The proper terms in which to describe the nature of a civilization that is destined to spread throughout the world are sombre but not without hope. And fortunately there are nuances and distinctions that can trigger a wide variety of processes and give grounds for confidence in a radiant future. We shall transcend Western civilization, which has led to a paroxysm of individualism, in which people feel abandoned in the absence of any joint quest for Utopia, and in which philosophers like Cioran maintain that the only prospect for art is to get down to the task of ministering to depression.

In Latin America the volcanoes are still spitting fire and there is no place for apathy. It is impossible not to feel moved or stirred to action by all that remains to be done - overcoming poverty and destitution, reducing inequalities, ignorance and political backwardness.

In Latin America - a crossroads of historical forces and a melting-pot of peoples and periods - the living presence of the past makes it possible to build a unique future of its very own and to take the deliberate decision to proceed without feeling obliged to follow models that are currently showing clear signs of fatigue. Possibly the choice of a linear and uncritical

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mode of progress, or the mirage of modernity viewed as the supreme goal, has led to this sense of failure. At all events, the time has come for many peoples to pause at the crossing of the ways and choose the course they wish to follow - one which has not been tainted by the consumer appetites of the so-called First World, which does not yet involve the accumulation of goods and which offers the prospect of a 'moderate prosperity'.

The collapse of the myth of progress and the critique of a one-dimensional and imposed path to modernity do not invalidate the legitimate aspirations to development that all peoples long for and whose goals and objectives everyone is free to define according to circumstance. The time is fast approaching to demystify the bounties of 'modernity' (some intellectuals of the region have already done so brilliantly) shaped by outside or self-interested influences, if we are at some point to enlarge our capacity for information, choice and action. For there are 'anterior modernities' that remain unsurpassed to this day. The Mayas were thoroughly modern with their impressive scientific and technical achievements, as were the Aymaras and the Quechuas with their superbly streamlined lake craft, not to mention the art produced by the pre-Columbian cultures.

We must therefore learn to see the three temporal dimensions of a modern culture that ensures the continuity of life in all its complexity and, for that reason, as Carlos Fuentes has said, we must all co-operate in a new venture that excludes nobody and nothing, and that can be shared by everybody, without doing violence to anyone's cultural tradition. It is a matter of standing modernity on its head and converting it into a resource rather than a single objective and one copied from other people at that. It does not necessarily have to be regarded as equivalent to progress, but as a source of wonder, perhaps, as a means of looking at the world with fresh eyes.

The Latin American cultures have to make use of the modern resources available to them, but without abdicating the responsibility to preserve the 'human touch' or imprint, the evidence that the human mind or spirit is ever present, breathing life into these tools - for that is all they are - transforming them into subjects of the imagination and objects of a free and creative will. In other words, everything comes down to knowing how to be up to date without ceasing to think or to display our diversity and personality, and to being contemporary without becoming slaves to foreign ways.

Intellectuals of America: endless diversity and singularity are our wealth and our strength. Uniformity, homogenization and alienation are the great enemy - a source of weakness, docility and frailty. We must therefore watch out for new Trojan horses; try to detect the principles underlying what is pompously referred to as 'technological modernity' that encourage passivity, apathetic idleness and alienation, while creating islands of 'modernity' in an ocean of poverty. Modernity that, as Carlos Monsivais says, is the great excuse, the shadowy accomplice of urban destruction, ecological degradation, the demolition of proud and stately buildings in order to build skyscrapers, the sacrifice of forests and rivers to industrial voracity. To be modern is to go along with the century, and the century believes only in profit. To be modern, in practice, is to learn to keep in step with a unipolar world.

Now, as I have tried to stress, there are other ways of viewing modernity. If we take it to mean the release of creative forces and social energy, participation, interaction and dialogue, then clearly it is in the works of the great writers and creators that we shall find the inspiration and guidance that we need for the transformations that must imperatively be introduced before dead-end situations arise. There can be many paths to modernity, but all of them must

necessarily pass through the same crossroads, namely that of democracy, which has room for everyone and gives everyone a voice, in the sure and certain knowledge that the false dilemma between the contemporary and the traditional must be resolved as rapidly as possible.

Do we really have to choose between the old and the new when we know full well that the ability to face up to the challenges of our time involves a judicious combination of both? Why should we renounce the mingling, the meeting of ways and the cultural melting-pot by which our history was shaped, if this tangled web is the wellspring of Latin America's creativity and its eloquence?

Industrialization, technological and scientific advances, improved communications, democratic participation and efficient working methods are goals that we must reach by a wide variety of freely chosen ways, means and modes of existence, production, consumption, education and cultural creation.

I spoke earlier of hope in the future of Latin America. The principal argument is the living presence of its cultures, which is the very corner-stone of any development effort. Here we come to the heart of the issues for which we are gathered together. It is from this starting-point only that we can explore solutions to the problems that concern us all. The intersection of these two factors, culture and development, offers us unsuspected prospects of overcoming obstacles that have so far been regarded as insuperable by those, both here and abroad, who viewed development as a simple matter of economic growth. In fact, we now know that if culture and development do not advance together in the same direction, they are mutually condemned to failure.

It is culture that gives solidity to development and makes it sustainable. When development fails, culture begins to decline or yields to the temptation to cut itself off and seek shelter in self-sufficiency or even violence. If in many cases development objectives could not be achieved, it was due, among other causes, to having underestimated the importance of the human factor, that complex network of relationships and beliefs, values and motivations that form the very substratum of culture. Without spiritual commitment, there is little hope that willpower, imagination and energies will be inspired to bring the necessary resources and dynamism to bear on the development effort. This is the opinion of Javier Perez de Cuéllar, the eminent Peruvian who has closely observed the world and more than once been an eye witness of its mishaps. His thinking plainly indicates the extent to which culture has risen to the top of the political agenda and become, moreover, a prerequisite for the preservation of peace and security.

By elevating cultural values to this status, the countries of Iberian-African-Indo-american background that have shaped the face of this continent, have, by this very fact, become a model for other regions of the world, where, by neglecting their past heritage, they have lost their bearings as they head into the future. We have to live our diversity together, day by day, in the knowledge that we are not responsible for the past and that our supreme commitment is to the future.

Emphasis on efficiency and 'results' has in many cultures destroyed the last vestiges of mystery, of any interest in such questions as the meaning of human life and of the word 'sacred', or in the origin and meaning of the cosmos. Technical civilization is not concerned with such matters, it trivializes them and tends to pay them no attention. The eradication of the sense of mystery, of acceptance of the unknown, may lead to denial of the possibility of any

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mystery in individual or collective identity. However, a tradition proves itself by identifying and giving meaning to vital values that can be expressed, deciphered, interpreted, challenged, and rehabilitated.

If ever 'our deep well' of mystery ceases to attract our attention or we fear to approach its brim, to look over the edge, to reflect and reach our own (provisional) conclusions, our *own*, not someone else's, then we should beware. Only if we are capable of losing ourselves in thought can we 'reach for the summit', as Santiago Genovés would say, can we know ourselves, understand and realize that our culture is not a mould into which we have to fit but that it can be transformed by us, that it forms part of our ideas and actions, is something that belongs to us and which it is within our power to change.

Latin America's great responsibility in our time is to stimulate the intellect and the imagination so as to make its cultures an inspiration to its peoples; to have the integrity to continue to be itself without being carried away by the tidal wave of mass culture. Latin America, lastly, has a culture, or a range of vibrant cultures which, over and above their variations and differences, share the use of an Iberian language suffused with values that bind us together. Let us remember, for example, that although the year 1521 in Spain marked the defeat of the comuneros at Villalar, many of their beliefs crossed the ocean to America. One of these was a belief in community organization as the principal legitimation of power. Although they were not identical, similar structures were found among the indigenous peoples of America. Our people still adopt this approach, and it helps them to cope with poverty and isolation.

When cultures exclude others, they lose. When they share, cultures gain. When a strong leadership pays excessive tribute to cultural purity, Ibero-Americans can look back over several centuries of completely integrated multicultural undertakings on a shared basis, although we know that their origins were sometimes painful. Ibero-American pluralism has a long history, and its memory has not faded. It is our greatest heritage. There are few places that can boast the creativity of these lands with the richness of their history, both remote and closer to us in time.

The same springs that nourish our cultures must give us the key to co-operation without exploitation; to interdependence that does not violate our independence; to a legality that does not permit impunity. This has been our goal from the very beginning of our participation in history, that is, starting from the cultural continuity of Ibero-America, which we must preserve as the greatest of our assets. A firm basis in diversity and respect for differences will prevent the emergence of violence in the conflict between those who fight for recognition and equality and those who defend static identities. The first are attempting to form a civil society, the second are trying to block change. Institutions must be able to deal with these processes and transform their impetus into a creative force.

Can culture transform a contradictory and potentially violent conglomerate into a civilized society? We would reply in the affirmative. This region surely has all that is needed for the formation of societies where creativity and equity can coexist and support each other in a democratic context. And this is the approach that must be adopted if we wish to avoid a reverse process leading to chaos and disintegration. We must realize what appalling risks we run, above all in the urban areas. We must not blind ourselves to what is going on in the megalopolises, particularly those of the developed world. However, a closer look at Latin

American cities will show that in the interests of survival and coexistence, their inhabitants have sought - and often found - imaginative solutions to serious everyday problems.

In the cities we are witnessing the emergence of phenomena of great significance, such as the citizens' movements that could indicate that the mass of the population will take a higher profile from now on. These movements are driven by the poverty in which large sections of society live. They are diversifying and attracting support from different classes. They do not fit into any ideological classification, but have their own values, patiently woven on the loom of age-old cultures. If we take a look at the sprawling periphery of Mexico City, at the city of La Paz, we will see, alongside the social marginalization and needs, new ways of life being invented, all kinds of social interaction, relationships being built up between ethnic groups that once lived apart, interesting blends and combinations being formed, and support mechanisms created.

In general the strength of these social movements lies in their diversity, which also gives them their democratizing impetus.

In addition to the ethnic movements, there are feminist, ecological, neighbourhood and consumer movements that are demanding better systems of representation, that is, more democratic ones.

People who strive to consolidate democracy internally have the right to look for similar developments at the international level. That is why Ibero-America is trying to promote a fairer multilateral and bilateral system, one which implicitly recognizes the inevitability of interdependence, but on the other hand rejects outside interference. Latin America has been an open continent. We cannot forget that its countries, nations with a colonial past, have taken a decisive part in the expansion of freedoms and cultures. They were the first to take a strong stand for self-determination and sovereignty. They were pioneers in recognizing their cultural and ethnic diversity and in affirming their pluralism and their own values, rather than accepting Western-based values, and their achievements in science and art are original and unsurpassable. Ibero-America and its societies can be proud of this great heritage. It is difficult to imagine the present generation renouncing its hope of a better life, one with more humanity and more dignity. The history of the region teaches us that periods of progress and consolidation have been based more on an in-born gift for initiative, adaptation and response than on models established outside the region. The tension between the world system and local responses will continue to inspire a determination to seek individual solutions.

International institutions must encourage national development and modernization processes, but never hand down models or prescriptions, still less impose them, because each community must find specific solutions to its own specific problems. All-purpose formulas have been resounding failures. At best, they have effected improvements in some areas that are necessary for economic growth. Now, in view of the meagre results that have generally been obtained, and convinced that there is no greater development than human development nor any greater wealth than talent, we must set objectives for society. In the new era which is dawning we will have to have fewer barracks to rely on and more libraries, more teachers, more scientists, more creative artists ... And each of us will have to know the difference between value and price, and not think that it is price alone that matters.

In an increasingly 'global' context we can be fairly sure that Ibero-America is not about to become the world's shop window for supplies for a consumerist international market. But there

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is no need for us to be too downcast about this, for if the continent's true riches were disregarded in order to attain such a goal, it would invalidate the extremely valuable spiritual contribution that it can make to a world which is feeling the loss of its illusions. This real wealth arose from the painful clash between traditional cultures and foreign ones, and from it there emerged new shoots that are today producing recognizable fruits. To disregard traditional values - I should like to stress this - would be to renounce the heritage of our community, a community forged from a continuum of cultures and sensibilities that are essentially linked by two potent languages which, as Nebrija said, imply a 'moral collectivity', an extraordinary spiritual community, full of divorces and reconciliations, encounters and great losses, daily miracles, affinities and disparities, but essentially united in spirit and in aspiration.

Straddling North and South, Ibero-America is mapping out new cultural frontiers with a view to the third millennium. It is trying to put the finishing touches to its own plans for the modern world, so that it will have a place for the defeated and the forgotten and create new solidarities, developing citizenship to the full.

The nation, already pluralist by virtue of its history, will be pluralist from now on by decision of citizens enjoying equal rights, citizens brought together by their traditions who transform them in order to apply them in the present and project them beyond the present.

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Guatemala, Ibero-America and the whole world now have a spur to urge them forward, whose demands and whose appeal to the emotions are particularly strong and urgent. That spur is Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations, and Nobel Peace Prize Winner ... Her braid, in this United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People, is a symbol of this new fabric of which the world is so much in need. There will be no unravelling, no threads will be separated out. We will travel on new roads in harmony. Here, in this land of birds and colours, I once said that the Quetzal, soaring in high flight, saw only one people, the Guatemalan people: indigenous, mixed race, and whites together. One day man flew even higher than the Quetzal with wings of his own making. And he saw, trembling with emotion, that what he had always believed in his mind was true - that all people were one, 'that all were born free and equal'... All are different, are united by the guiding thread of diversity, all are unique. Free and equal! But if we do not learn to share the earth's treasures, to understand each other, to recognize each other, to hold our hands out to each other, to love each other, we shall live separate and in isolation, erecting walls, laying down dividing lines and frontiers. The majority will be oppressed and ostracized.

Peace is not simply the silence of arms; it is justice and it therefore means the elimination of poverty, hunger, the need to conform, defencelessness and ignorance. Peace is not the final objective: it is the point of departure for an integrated and equitable development which would make the most of human intelligence and mankind's collective efforts.

Will the force of argument prevail over the argument of force? Will hope in the future overcome memories of the past and the insipidity of the present? Will we be capable of settling accounts without violence? Or of remembering Saint Teresa of Avila's challenging inquiry: 'Hands that do not give, what do you hope for?'

Never again violent, never again silent. We will have to know how to state our opinion, and how to keep to it. Never again violent, but never again docile. We must rise up to defend freedom of expression with no restriction, the base of every democratic order, the only context in which firmness ensures that what should not be repeated is not repeated. Radicalism in support of democracy may discourage the extremism that opposes it.

Let us hope that this Intellectual Summit will be a turning-point. Let us hope that it will make an important contribution to the emergence of a new culture, the culture of peace, whose first pages we are timidly beginning to write at the end of this millennium.

Do we know the price of peace? For so many centuries we have carried only the instruments of war. Let us hope that civil society will be the one, once and for all, to take the helm and hold steadfastly to it. Like Borges in his last poem, 'The Conspirators', Augusto Monterroso thinks that somewhere, in some garret in Paris, Madrid, Mexico City or Buenos Aires, thinkers must be devising new ways of organizing the world, learning the lessons of past experience, formulating the new ideas that the world is now seeking, ideas and ideals that will give meaning to our lives. These new ideas - that sometimes turn out to be old ones - cannot be fobbed off. There is a reason for urgency. There is, as I said earlier, an ethic of time. Like the moon in Pessoa's poem, these new ideas must be looked at from all angles and reflected in every lake and pond, from the smallest to the largest. Otherwise the same vested interests and the same machinations as ever will prevent us from contemplating them or listening to them.

'Hurry up; or one more day will have
passed, one day less to build new
villages by the riverside of love and
tenderness, to build together what
with money alone or for money alone
could not have been done'

Now is the time for action, the time to open doors and windows. Now is the time for reconciliation at all levels: home, village, town, city, country and continent, the entire world. Now is the time for tenacity and firmness as we seek to pay, jointly, the bill for peace, as we had to pay separately the bill for war. 'It cannot be done in one day, by one person, or by one people,' warned Miguel Angel Asturias in an article published in 1929. As the ancestors, the creators and shapers, Tepeu and Gucumats, said: 'The time of the dawn has arrived'. And the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Mayas, continues: 'May all arise, may all be called, may there not be one group or two groups among us that lag behind the others'.