Address by
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First of all, there are two aspects to the strengthening of UNESCO, and they are absolutely essential: centripetal action, that is action directed towards the centre, must be combined with centrifugal action, action taken in the field. The former, which is vital for drawing together all the ideas and suggestions relating to reflection and intellectual leadership, must be projected and reflected in the latter, which is action in the field. UNESCO must also contribute there in order to encourage and facilitate reflection and intellectual leadership, bearing in mind at all times that the ultimate goal is execution, the practical application of the ideas and principles by which the Organization must be guided, since what matters are the results, that is to say the action carried out in the Member States.

When the basis for future action has been established, one overriding problem still remains to be solved: how to reach those who may be described as the unreachable? This is a genuine problem brought into focus by the fantastic change effected by the eradication of illiteracy in large States of India, for example, and by the fact that in those places where illiteracy subsists the population could not be reached through formal systems of access to education. There is however, a tool - technology - that can help us to reach the unreachable, who seem to have so far missed the train of knowledge. What must be affirmed is that they have not missed the train; that it is always possible to recover lost time; that no period of learning is better than another; that learning covers the whole of one's life. Another point to be borne in mind here is that, while it is certainly true that co-ordination within the system is necessary, we must not forget to bring into the dialogue the representatives of civil society.

Today the States, which yesterday were omnipotent and omnipresent, are vacating much of the space they used to occupy and have allocated to themselves the role of watchtowers, monitors of the smooth functioning of the democratic system, as the area civil society is required to occupy grows ever larger. It is a great responsibility to help society fill the space and take up the duties that have fallen vacant. But at the same time we must take account of the problems associated with the vacuum left by certain once omnipotent States. There are the minorities to whom respect is due and who, in the operation of any democratic system, must also respect the majority. The biochemist - who cannot but agree with the humanist - knows that each individual is, biologically and socioculturally speaking, a unique being, exceptional and not just different. The uniqueness of individuals must be reconciled with the culture of peoples, the culture of minorities, and it must be borne in mind that the establishment of differences between diverse realities within minorities will create a Russian-doll syndrome: each time one is opened up another is found inside and so on, until the ultimate reality, that is the individual, for each individual is unique and distinct, hence the universal and at the same time individual dimension of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must view human lights as the rights of each individual and be aware that the individual belongs to a minority: hence the Declaration is made for the individual and is universal. These individual and universal rights must also be transcended: we must ensure that they eventually protect the next generation and the one after that. Going further still, we must ensure that they have the necessary scientific rigour, the essential companion in every human undertaking, for scientific rigour is absolutely indispensable in all matters to do with energy and the environment.

One of the tasks of the Organization is to provide decision-makers with an international scale. I have also another job for UNESCO: to provide them with data of universal relevance that will enable them to make decisions on a scientific basis. The promoting of the emotions are not enough, and this must be said with all the respect genuine ecological movements
deserve. The alternatives are so complex, the decisions to be made are so difficult, that feelings alone will not do at a time when decisions must be taken in relation to sources of energy and financial resources. The rigour of science must be used and, wherever necessary, research conducted in ever greater depth, into ways of giving decision-makers the capability they need at the time when the relevant means are adopted, and these means must be adopted in good time.

This concern for what may be called the 'ethic of time' is something on which emphasis must be placed. This new ethic is based on taking decisions in time, at the right moment, for any delay in taking them may have irreversible effects. There are points of no return. The leaders of the world must know how to take the necessary measures on the basis of sufficiently reliable data at their disposal - and do so in time before changes that have a permanent impact on the full human rights of citizens occur.

Both complexity and globality must be taken into account in this decision-making process. Things are, admittedly, very complex at times, but there are also times when it is people who complicate them, and that is rather different. And they complicate them in an effort to simplify them. But simplifying a complex situation involves dishonesty as well as leading usually to a situation in which it seems that reality is in the process of changing. But that is not the case, for the situation can be changed only when it is known and not when it seems to be known. Reality is complex and global. It is necessary to insist on this scientific rigour, and that is what UNESCO is trying to do, for by so doing it imparts to its scientific programmes the rigour for which it is known internationally and which is its best credential and guarantee.

Considerable emphasis has been placed on prevention, and UNESCO has to help to prevent anything that could be irremediable, and in doing so it has to bear in mind that it must be seen to be doing so, by making its action known. Yet nothing is more difficult to put across that publicity about preventive measures. Since there has been no suffering or conflict, the merit of having avoided them goes unnoticed. How do you recognize or even admit something that has not happened? I shall refer briefly to an experience of my own. For years I worked on the prevention of brain disease in new-born infants. Because potential damage was avoided, no one thought that any credit was due. It is difficult to raise funds for something that cannot be seen. A great display will be made of decorating a general who wins a minor battle, but there will be no thanks for someone who has averted a major war, because no one will have witnessed any great event.

Relatively speaking, this could also apply to the part played in UNESCO by the Office of Public Information. And the more efficient such information is at performing a genuinely preventive function, the more important it will be because it will have to find ways of demonstrating, again and again, that it is thanks to UNESCO that it has been possible to avoid conflicts and the adverse consequences that would have ensued had UNESCO done nothing. What must be done, therefore, is to publicize and promote that image of UNESCO and give pride of place to information, especially information about what can be prevented through UNESCO’s action.

There is a proverb in Spanish that goes: ‘What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over’. It is very difficult to have any feeling for what the eye does not see, to touch the heartstrings when there has not been a major disaster, in other words when the worst has been avoided. This is why it is so important to strengthen public information systems, and not only as far as the Organization is concerned but also in each and every one of its Member States.
Alongside these reflections on the future of collective endeavour, it may be fitting to highlight the distinctive nature of each of the Member States, as was done earlier in connection with the uniqueness and universality of human rights. It must be said that no distinction is appropriate between small and large countries, a point illustrated by a country like Norway, which, for UNESCO and for the United Nations system, is not a small country but one of the greatest. For Norway's percentage contribution is greater than all the others. I think that that says it all.

In Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, the foundations were laid for a new vision of development, and the results now open to view are enormously significant. It was there, in the heart of Africa, that Member States first said that account also had to be taken of that gift of the biosphere, an unrepeatable gift if ever there was one. A new dimension of development thus took shape, that of its compatibility with the environment. A task for everyone now is to get the Yamoussoukro initiatives going, to affirm the primacy of values and to realize that it is values that must prevail, not models. What UNESCO does is strengthen ideals and values, those of democracy and hence of freedom of expression and equity.

There should be no dealing out of models or claiming that others fit into them, and still less should they be imposed. How could one seek to impose freedom? What has to be done is pave the way for the establishment in all countries of the principles governing this Organization, which are freedom, equity and solidarity, and this needs doing as swiftly as possible. Let us do it bearing in mind what UNESCO's Constitution says when proclaiming that economic development and political development are important, but not sufficient; the essential thing is the moral and intellectual solidarity of humankind. This is the task that falls to UNESCO and, to carry it out, it is Article I of the Constitution, no less, that establishes that the Organization will promote the free flow of ideas by word and image. These are the values of UNESCO, its foundations, as indicated by the Constitution when it affirms that there is no other door open to democracy than freedom of expression and the need to guarantee it.

What is the substance of education for democracy, in the service of freedom of expression and equity? What reciprocal action is required for respecting others? How can otherness be strengthened? These are the major questions that have to be answered, knowing full well, as has already been said, that it is an evolving process. Nothing just comes about itself, what is more. Education, like peace and serenity, is something that has to win ground over and over, day after day. Let us remember in this connection the words of President Vaclav Havel in the College de France, when, on the subject of waiting, he said there should be no expecting someone to come along from outside, in the manner of Godot, since he was not going to come, given that he did not exist. This image may be applied to development and also to democracy. There is no point in waiting for something to come about that does not exist. What does need to be done is assist and contribute to the take-off, but without waiting for a non-existent Godot to turn up.

Benito Suárez, that great Mexican, said: 'Mexico must draw from its own children the talents necessary for its development, because the help it needs will not come from without'. And so it is. It is in UNESCO's hands to assist and contribute to this development, to this mobilization, but without thinking of gifts or handouts, or in terms of processes that are not home-grown. Because if without freedom there is no justice, as has been so often repeated, the key can lie only in that awakening of the skills and potential of everyone. This is the secret, the surest answer to the questions being raised.
To conclude these few reflections, I must hark back to the world-wide solidarity for which UNESCO has been pleading and the universality it fosters. There can be no progress without universality, and universality must encompass all countries, big and small. It is true that the Organization has always been very mindful of those who have gone away. The point must be made, however, that in the intellectual field considerations of any other nature-geopolitical dimension, military might, economic predominance - are of no consequence; only talent, the intellect, matters. In UNESCO all countries enjoy equal representation, and that is so because what they represent is the talent, the very genius, of their citizens.

UNESCO's message is a message of love embodied in the action it takes. Such, moreover, must be the message of all organizations or institutions of churches and religions. It is necessary to emphasize the duty incumbent upon UNESCO to prevent the functions and programmes through which it endeavours to attain, accomplish, achieve its supreme goals from ultimately diluting, blurring or, worse yet, destroying this message of love, which sometimes happens when an institution or belief converts its action into a message of power and violence.

UNESCO is very mindful of its mandate, which is to construct the defences of peace. To do that, and this must never be forgotten, one must be able to face up to major difficulties and at times lay one's finger on many sore spots that leaders, powerful leaders at any rate, do not like to have mentioned. This responsibility has the weight of a commitment that cannot but be of concern to UNESCO. But I must add that there is something that must be a greater, a much greater cause for concern that any criticism about the undesirability of denouncing the intolerable. Our greatest cause for concern is the criticism that could be levelled against us by future generations, and this is something that eventually becomes an obsession. The eyes and gaze of our children, of our children's children, of future generations, and the reckoning that we could be called upon to give, that should be a very great cause for concern. This commitment will be even better understood if we consider that when this happens, when those new generations look back to the officials in charge of UNESCO today those officials will not be able to see them or to answer their call.