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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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(UNESCO)

at the award ceremony for the 1996 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education

UNESCO, 8 January 1997

Mr President of the Jury,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you today to UNESCO House on the occasion of the award ceremony for the 1996 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education.

This ceremony is specially significant in that the Prize is being awarded today for the tenth time. Instituted by the Executive Board of UNESCO in June 1978 on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Prize has since been awarded to institutions, organizations and individuals from all regions of the world who have made a particularly significant contribution to spreading the message of the Universal Declaration through education.

Contributions rewarded in this way have always displayed commitment, imagination and innovation, and all have been concrete manifestations of the international community's 'intellectual and moral solidarity', which it is our Organization's mission to promote. They make us redefine our mission in terms of the absolute importance of the individual, since the full development of the individual depends on the implementation of *all* human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or "cultural.

A new awareness by each individual of his/her rights and duties is vital in this respect, for it makes us all responsible citizens vis-à-vis ourselves and our community, and enables each woman and man to become a participant in her/his own self-fulfilment. That is the goal towards which those who work for human rights education day after day are contributing.

However, flagrant violations of these rights and violence, poverty and illiteracy are constant reminders that respect for human dignity can never be regarded as established once and for all. As René Depestre wrote in one of his novels, 'modern civilization is closing its eyes to human beings' intrinsic problems. People are being thrown into prison, tortured, humiliated, turned into zombies, racists or animals, practically flayed alive if they dare to stand up for real humanity, while lies are being told to black, yellow and white alike so that the real situation is never seen for what it is by anyone'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The outstanding commitment of Jean-Bertrand Aristide to human rights and democracy in Haiti is proof that the ideals proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should not be regarded as doomed from the start. I have decided, on the International Jury's recommendation, to reward this outstanding commitment by conferring the 1996 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education on Mr Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Mr President, on your previous visit to UNESCO in 1991 I quoted Stefan Zweig, who saw history as borne on 'the' black wings of tragedy but singing a song of hope'. At that time Haiti was living under the shadow of those black wings; today, it has found hope again, and

DG/97/1 - page 2

you are helping to make that hope a reality with the Aristide Foundation for Democracy. I am delighted to have this opportunity to pay tribute to your unswerving devotion to human rights.

From the 'liberation theology' that you advocated as candidate for the Presidency of the Republic in 1990 to the setting up of the Aristide Foundation, we find the same attachment to participation and dialogue. These are the foundations of any true democracy, but they are often rather shaky. The Aristide Foundation for Democracy seeks to make them part of everyday *life*. Participation and dialogue mean more than the exercise of the right to vote. They should be exercised on a daily basis and open to all the population, including the most disadvantaged. We know that that poses a real challenge in your country, where 85 per cent of the population can neither read nor write. In this situation, literacy training becomes the first step to learning about human rights and democratic values.

Education, the free flow of ideas and the strengthening of civil society are the priorities of the Aristide Foundation which, in many respects, coincide with those of UNESCO. In fact, we find the same objectives in the appeal for support to Haiti adopted at the twenty-seventh session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1993. It is to give effect to this appeal's recommendations that we are now implementing, in close co-operation with the Haitian authorities, a whole series of projects aimed at meeting the needs of the Haitian population in UNESCO's fields of competence. We hope that these activities, like those organized by the Aristide Foundation, will help to give democracy in Haiti a firmer basis.

The most successful teaching method is that of example. You have set this example with the democratic, peaceful and tolerant transition which you have effected in Haiti in very complex circumstances. This transition sets an example not only for your own country but for the whole world. The observance of human rights, your policies in education and culture, and the foundations that you have laid for grass-roots participation and organization offer the best possible lesson in human rights to the courageous people of Haiti, who have suffered so much.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to take into account the many different aspects of human rights education reflected by the nominations submitted, I have decided, on the Jury's recommendation, to award Ms Gloria Ramirez an honorable mention.

Madam Director-General of the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, you have devised programmes for human rights education both for the general public and for specific groups: autochthonous populations - and particularly women - young people, human rights activists, the legal profession and the police. You are also interested in education and research on human rights in school and university circles; I am delighted that a UNESCO Chair in human rights, which you will co-ordinate, is being established in the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

On behalf of UNESCO and in my own name, I should like to congratulate our prizewinners most warmly.

I am pleased to present Mr Jean-Bertrand Aristide, former President of the Republic of Haiti, with the 1996 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education and with a cheque for \$10,000.

Lastly, I present this Prize's honorable mention to Ms Gloria Ramirez.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Without education for human rights and democracy there can be no conscious and lasting support for the principles of human freedom and dignity and respect for the individual. May your efforts and ours help to give concrete expression to these ideals, for which we are working, in the consciences, hearts and actions of our fellow men and women.