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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address
by
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at the International Forum
"For a Culture of Peace and Dialogue among Civilizations,
against a Culture of War and Violence"

Kishinev (Republic of Moldova), 16 May 1998

Mr President ,
Mr Prime Minister,
Mr Minister of State, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee,
Ministers,
Mr Mayor of Kishinev,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to welcome you to this International Forum. Organized at the initiative of distinguished Moldovan personalities, with the support of the Moldovan Government and UNESCO, this meeting reflects a ground-swell in civil society against violence and conflict. The rejection of intolerance and a profound aspiration to live in peace and security are becoming an increasingly salient feature of society today.

I particularly welcome the choice of venue for this Forum. Moldova experienced one of the first conflicts after the Cold War ended and yet it successfully avoided becoming a quagmire. Your country therefore has much to tell us about its own experience. It is by no means surprising that personalities from various fields of cultural life in regions of conflict are in the vanguard of this movement against violence. The initiative of Moldovan intellectuals, artists, academics and researchers, supported by their counterparts from other countries, shows their awareness of the importance of individual responsibility. Indeed, personal responsibility is instrumental in consolidating efforts to build a more secure, just and humane world and in bringing about a culture of peace.

On the threshold of a new millennium, the issue of responsibility takes on new dimensions. Humankind is still beset by war and violence. It also faces new global challenges. For the first time in human history, we may be approaching the border from which there is no return, so great is the impact of human activity on our planet. The widening asymmetry within and between countries, environmental destruction and flourishing arms sales, raise doubts about many of civilization's values and standards. How can we handle new global threats ? Of decisive importance here is the ability to rise above day-to-day concerns and short-term vision and to find new points of reference for human behaviour and interaction. History shows that no situation is hopeless if risks are recognized early enough.

People have always dreamed of achieving peace for all time and putting an end to violence and war for ever. Adopting the dream of a world without strife and war, the founders of UNESCO turned it into the Organization's prime goal: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The end of the Cold War gave us a unique opportunity to reformulate many fundamental values, concepts and modes of behaviour. It is an opportunity which can bring us closer to achieving the noble aims of the United

Nations: "To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours".

The transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace is UNESCO's first and foremost challenge at the close of the twentieth century. For this we must not only overhaul approaches based on force and imposition, but also effect profound changes in cultural attitudes, in daily behaviour. In January 1997, in my Declaration on the Human Right to Peace, I remarked that we must use imagination and resolution to expose the roots of world problems and nip conflicts in the bud, or better still, prevent them. This is the responsibility not only of governments and other leaders but also of citizens - entire nations. We have paid the price of war. A universal rejection of violence must be effected by society as a whole. To reject violence, we must work consistently, day in and day out, to change our outlooks, to educate our children with values of tolerance and dialogue, to replace the logic of force with the logic of reason and respect for the views of others.

The conflicts that have arisen since the end of the Cold War have erupted not as a consequence of new freedoms but more often in reaction to earlier oppression or repression. The suspicion, intolerance and hatred that came to the fore were in many instances built up over decades, and even centuries. But alongside the persistent conflicts of recent years, it is significant that humankind has begun to demonstrate a new skill in resolving them. Take Mozambique, El Salvador, the Philippines, the changes in South Africa that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago, the efforts for peace in the Middle East and, finally, the beginnings of a settlement in Northern Ireland! All these examples prove that conflict is not inevitable. In every case, the breakthroughs were made by dialogue, mediation, negotiation and imagination - not force.

In the UNESCO report submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations last autumn, I remarked: "The challenge of promoting a culture of peace is so broad and far-reaching that it can only be accomplished if it becomes a priority for the entire United Nations system". The success of UNESCO's transdisciplinary project, "Towards a Culture of Peace" depends largely on the extent to which Member States, individuals and communities, take these ideas and proposals to heart and mind. Here I wish particularly to underline the pivotal role of education in promoting a culture of peace. By education, I mean not only formal instruction in schools but also informal training within a whole range of cultural institutions, including in the very first place the family and the media. The report prepared for UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century concluded that in this new, interrelated

world of ours, we - the citizens of the world - must learn to live together.

Learning to live together means to demonstrate solidarity with others, to share our knowledge, our experience with others and be willing to learn from them. To learn to live together means to dare to share, to dare to do things otherwise, to dream of a better, safer, more just and humane world. It also means having the resolve and courage to transform our dreams into reality. Who will be responsible for changing the culture of war into a culture of peace? We could answer: governments, parliaments, intergovernmental organizations... And this would be correct, but it is not the only answer. We could say that it cannot be achieved without the active involvement of those who possess financial resources and influence. And this also would be true, though only partly true.

If we realize that exchanging the culture of war for a culture of peace, depends, in the final analysis, on each of us, no matter how great or small the scope of our individual responsibility, then this will be the greatest and most overwhelming truth. I wish to cite the example of one man who revolutionized the consciousness of his fellow citizens through his words and his example. Recently, the American nation and the entire world commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination of one of its finest sons - the fiery preacher, courageous dreamer and fighter, Martin Luther King. His example continues to inspire humanity because he dared to dream of civil peace, achieved through equality and justice. He was convinced that the active pursuit of an ideal can be a force to overturn injustice if it gains the minds and hearts of a majority of people.

"In the midst of darkness light prevails", said the Mahatma Gandhi. The democratic values enshrined in UNESCO's Constitution are "lights": justice, freedom, equality and solidarity. I am convinced that your discussions and the recommendations made at this Forum will facilitate the elaboration and approval of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a culture of peace which both the General Conference of UNESCO and the General Assembly of the United Nations will consider in 1999. As you know, the UN General Assembly has made the year 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace, at UNESCO's suggestion. I have no doubt that your discussions and the initiatives which follow will be of great service for other activities taken by groups or individuals to mark that year.

The Kishinev Forum is being held in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. You will discuss the role and interrelation of human rights and a culture of peace in building democratic, civil society, particularly in countries in transition. The elaboration of

specific actions in the context of the Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004 will be of special importance. The initiators of the Kishinev Forum have proposed two extremely important themes in its very title: for a culture of peace and against a culture of war and violence; and for a dialogue of civilizations. The history and culture of Moldova are marked by its position at the crossroads of the Latin, Muslim and Slavonic civilizations. Moldovan national culture with its colourful originality and astonishing musicality, makes a singular contribution to world culture. It is able to do so because it has been open to cultural diversity. It has forged a distinct and distinctive cultural identity, not through isolation but through the "dialogue of civilizations" which we are here to renew and to revitalize.

During my present official visit to the Republic of Moldova, President Luchinsky and I have agreed on expanded co-operation between UNESCO and the Republic of Moldova. As a Member State of UNESCO, the Republic of Moldova may rely on the solidarity and support of the entire world intellectual community in its efforts to promote world culture - the culture of peace and dialogue among various civilizations. It is with special satisfaction that I note the creation, in the State University of Moldova, of a UNESCO Chair for the study of problems in South-Eastern Europe and the establishment of an Associated Schools Network in Moldova. The ASP network's activities promoting education for peace, tolerance and respect for the environment are helping to prepare the citizens of tomorrow - a new generation which will continue the "dialogue of civilizations" well into the next century. Moldova will, I am sure, remain a crossroads of civilizations. It has not only produced talented musicians and composers, painters and writers, philosophers and statesmen. It has also offered refuge and inspiration to many writers and poets born in other climes who have found a new home here. They include the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, whose poetic heritage is part of the treasury of world culture.

UNESCO is involved in commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of this great poet who, by his ancestry, creative output and influence on the culture of other nations, truly embodied the dialogue of cultures. We consider it our duty to support those who preserve the memory and study the heritage of this poet in those countries where he lived. Thanks to the members of the Pushkin society of Kishinev, we know that, when the poet lived in Kishinev, he wrote more than 200 poems, including "Gypsies", and started work on his novel "Eugene Onegin". It was here, in 1821, that he wrote the following lines in "On Eternal Peace":

"It is impossible for people not to perceive, with time, the absurd cruelty of war, as they have perceived the nature of

slavery, tsarist power... They will see that we are destined to be free and to live in freedom".

These words were written by a poet who was only 22 years old but who had the courage to express his freedom-loving ideas at a time when peasant servitude - essentially slavery - prevailed in his own country. For this, he earned disfavour and was sent into exile. Reading these lines, we see that here on Moldovan soil, at the start of the last century, ideas corresponding to the contemporary conception of a culture of peace had already ripened in the mind and heart of a poetic genius. It is an inspiring thought as we set out to tackle the important agenda of this forum. It is for us now to follow up the ideas of the poets of today, the artists and scientists who are willing to take their part of responsibility in forging a new and peaceful future for us all.