

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the closing ceremony of the third International Conference of Ministers
and Senior Officials responsible for Physical Education and Sport
(MINEPS III)

[The Director-General begins his address in Spanish]

Mr President,
Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a genuine pleasure for me to be with you today and witness the results of your work.

First of all, I must say that I sincerely regret not having been able to attend the opening meeting of the Conference, which was honoured by the presence of Dr Julio María Sanguinetti, President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, and Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, as I took up my duties on 15 November and had many commitments connected with the 30th session of the UNESCO General Conference. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate to President Sanguinetti, and to the Government and people of Uruguay, on behalf of UNESCO and for my own part, the expression of our gratitude for the generosity of their welcome and the quality of the organization of this Conference.

I would like at this point to pay tribute to His Excellency the President of Uruguay, Julio María Sanguinetti, who will very soon be completing his second term of office as executive head of his country. His successes and achievements in all spheres of Uruguay's life are numerous, ranging from the consolidation of the democratic process in the past decade to the strengthening of the economy in this, his second term. President Sanguinetti is already part of the history of Uruguay and I am sure that all of you will join with feeling in this simple but fair assessment of such a brilliant statesman.

I would also like place on record my intention as Director-General of UNESCO to pursue the Organization's fruitful relations with Uruguay, with the incoming Administration that will take up its responsibilities on 1 March next year, to be led by Mr Jorge Batlle, who was elected President of Uruguay in an exemplary democratic process that is indeed an example to the whole world. We will continue to work together to our mutual benefit.

It would be impossible not to feel happy to meet so many loyal and eminent friends here today in this lovely city of Punta del Este, all working for sport. I find the presence among us of a large number of ministers and representatives of various intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations highly satisfactory, it helps to confer upon this meeting the importance it merits.

MINEPS III is one of UNESCO's last major events before 2000 and the first important international conference since I took office as Director-General on 15 November 1999. I am pleased that my mandate is starting under the sign of physical education and sport which, in my opinion, are synonymous with effort, perseverance, rigour, respect, loyalty and solidarity. I have been a keen sportsman for many years and although my new duties afford me few opportunities to practise sport, I still set aside some time for it.

I should now like to refer to what is the subject of your deliberations. In the first place I have noted with satisfaction that your work has been characterized by a spirit of openness, goodwill and frankness. The untrammelled comparison of ideas and experiences in the field of physical education and sport is one of the essential dimensions of a conference such as this one. This exchange illustrates the function of global tribune assigned to UNESCO which, as I said in my inaugural address, has pursued for over half a century the goal of mobilizing those who are most willing to help, most generous with their talents and most fertile in imagination - but always on the basis of what is possible, feasible and practicable, in keeping with our resources, our means of action and also our commitment, in the pressing service of the inhabitants of our world.

The consensus that emerged during the Conference on questions as important as the desire to promote sport for all and the extension of its practice to all sectors of the population, the need to encourage it in school and university, to preserve its ethical and moral values, to intensify cooperation between public authorities and the voluntary sector and to reduce inequalities between nations in the field of sport, seems to me to be an encouraging sign that should pave the way for practical initiatives and programmes.

On taking up my duties, I said that UNESCO was a challenging paradox and that “it cannot lapse into a mere club for intellectuals, but must serve as a forum for international intellectual exchange. It cannot pretend to be a research institution, but must keep abreast of and stimulate research. Nor is it an operational agency, yet it must see that global ethics for peace, justice and solidarity, through international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication, are both morally observed, and tangibly applied. Finally, UNESCO is not a funding agency, although it must provide catalytic funds to generate further funding: in order to demonstrate that ideals only take shape through action”.

This is the framework within which UNESCO is helping to bolster the action of all those working to ensure that sport, loyal to its values and its humanistic mission, is an integral part of continuing education and a factor of personal fulfilment and friendship, an instrument of peace, development, solidarity and international understanding. Indeed, sport can make an outstanding contribution to international exchanges and understanding between peoples, since it is not affected by traditional disagreements of a political, economic or social nature and develops on the fertile ground of the universal values of humanity. If sport has a meaning it can only be found by turning towards humanism. For that reason, a profound change in attitudes is also necessary, so that women may take a greater part in all the various aspects of sport and play an effective role in decision-making in this field.

[The Director-General continues in English]

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not go over the ground that you have already covered. However, I would like to recapitulate some of the concerns and some of the proposals which you have voiced both in plenary and in the commission and which the Rapporteur has just summarized.

It has been clearly recognized by all participants that physical education and sport are an essential component of lifelong education and that every education system must give physical education an appropriate place to strike a balance and strengthen the links with learning in the classroom. Physical education and sports programmes help form habits and behaviour patterns

that contribute to the full development of the human personality. By helping to build up the child's abilities, physical education and sport contribute to the vital process of learning to live together. Physical education is not only an end in itself. It is at once a means of self-fulfilment for the pupil, an instrument of education and emancipation and a method of socialization and integration.

Much needs to be done for the right to physical education and sport to become effective the world over. The exercise of this right, a corollary of the right to education, most obviously begins at school. But out-of-school children must not be excluded either. It is up to those responsible for non-formal education programmes to ensure that is not the case. More generally, sport for all must become a priority for both governmental and voluntary sports organizations. Also, because physical education and sport are a means of cultural expression, it is important that traditional games and sports be brought in as components of sport for all.

My next observation concerns the institutional situation in your field of activity. For the role of national authorities is often diminishing. On this issue, two essential points have been highlighted, namely that no government should turn its back on a social phenomenon as important as sport and that some measure of responsibility should remain with the State in this field.

This in no way diminishes the decisive contribution of the voluntary bodies that manage and give impetus to one of the most important mass movements in the world. I believe CIGEPS could play a more active role in representing and defending the interests of the international sports community both in Member States, and particularly those making up CIGEPS, and in UNESCO's decision-making bodies: the Executive Board and the General Conference.

Your committee should not underestimate its potential influence when it comes to advocating a reinforcement of UNESCO's means of action in this field. For the scant resources currently earmarked for advancing physical education and sport do not always permit UNESCO to play its rightful role as a catalyst. One important task is to narrow the gaps and inequalities between countries in the field of physical education and sport. The development of international cooperation in that regard is a binding obligation and one of the key objectives of MINEPS III. How can we encourage and implement cooperation and exchanges between the North and the South? This question, which has been the object of special attention on your part, requires us to make practical and realistic proposals.

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many challenges arise from the spectacular development of sport nationally and internationally. There are risks threatening competition sport, such as excessive commercialization and advertising, doping, violence and chauvinism, which distort, corrupt and discredit sport. These were discussed at length at your last meeting in Moscow and have not, I am afraid, ceased to be of topical concern. On the contrary, the problem of doping at a number of recent sporting events led to an outcry in the media. The merchandising of the sports world poses problems, not least of which is the erosion of educational values. But let us not forget that, in spite of all these problems, sport is for many if not most people, a unique source of self-improvement, a fine school of good human relationships and a civilized form of individual and group competition. These positive aspects of sport make collaboration between UNESCO, the Member States, the Olympic Movement and the World Health Organization

particularly important and that is true too for our links with NGOs. UNESCO brings to our partnership its particular vision.

As I said in my inaugural address as Director-General, “UNESCO is a factor of hope, because it is the one international organization which, through all its programmes, respects and defends what is of universal worth and dignity in the material and spiritual heritage of all cultures, and thereby, the absolute dignity of all human beings themselves”. In order to defend these values in the world of sport, I would greatly like to see CIGEPS and the UNESCO Secretariat work together in deciding on an appropriate and effective institutional framework to combat doping and all other unacceptable practices that are contrary to the sporting ethic. If we are to ensure the survival of the ethical foundations of sport - summed up in the expression “a good sport” - we must take practical steps to translate into action the principles proclaimed in the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport and the Olympic Charter.

I hope that the follow-up to this Conference will take us towards concrete action, towards decisions that restore to physical education and sport the place, role and status they deserve. In a world full of uncertainty and often without clear reference points, there is a pressing need for at least some common frameworks and shared values. It is my profound conviction that sport can provide us with these in ways that bind people together. The noble ideals of UNESCO and the Olympic ideals together offer fertile ground for renewed efforts to bring this about.