

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the awards ceremony
of the 1999 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education

[The Director-General begins his address in French]

Madam Representative of the prize-winning Association,
Distinguished Representatives of the Associations receiving
an honourable mention,
Madam President of the international jury,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take great pleasure in welcoming you today to the awards ceremony for the 1999 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education. Allow me first of all to express my sincere thanks to the members of the jury for their efforts and wisdom.

Rising intolerance and violence are continuing to tear societies and peoples apart, with a grim succession of wars, conflicts and social divides.

Let us see matters clearly: the culture of prevention that it is UNESCO's mission to build through education, science and culture is still very far from being accepted by the public conscience. It is not yet a reality. As this year's events cruelly illustrate, the history of humanity continues to be dominated by intolerance and violence. Reversing this trend seems to many a Utopian ideal. But your actions, and commitments and your faith in humanity prove that it is nothing of the sort.

Wars and conflicts have deep roots: poverty, social injustice, political oppression, violation of human rights. Another such cause - and among the most tenacious - is ignorance. The chain reactions to which it gives rise have destructive effects: they insidiously foster rejection of the other, fear and even hatred of differences; they pit individuals, groups and cultures against one another and eventually make us inward-looking; they are the worst enemies of dialogue, without which there can be no healthy, balanced awareness of the other.

For this reason, education is fundamental to peace-building. Education for peace, human rights and democracy is inseparable from a style of teaching which imparts to the young, and the less young, attitudes of dialogue and non-violence; in other words, one which teaches them about the values of tolerance, openness to others and sharing.

The UNESCO Prize for Peace Education was established in 1980, thanks to a generous donation from the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, for the purpose of rewarding an outstanding activity which has strongly influenced public opinion and mobilized the consciences in the cause of peace. It is one of the main components of UNESCO's strategy to mobilize both individuals and institutions in the cause of peace-building.

[The Director-General continues in Spanish]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the Asociación de Madres de la Plaza de Mayo of Argentina, winner of the 1999 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, and I extend my heartfelt congratulations to its representatives. As you are aware, this human rights and peace movement was launched in Buenos Aires in 1977, when a group of 14 women gathered in the

Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, in front of the presidential palace, to demand information from the ruling military junta about their missing children, for whom they had spent months searching in vain, never getting any response from the authorities. The police attempted to disperse the group and, as an act of civil disobedience, the mothers marched around the Plaza. This mothers' march has been repeated every Thursday for 22 years.

The Association is an ethical movement for non-violent action to promote peace - peace based on respect for life and fundamental rights. Hence its demands for an independent judiciary and a fully democratic society.

The Association's commitment to education for peace, in particular among young people, is growing increasingly strong. Having opened a bookshop, a literary café and a cultural centre for meetings and exchanges, the Madres decided to expand their activities. They have just founded a People's University, whose aim is to teach "the value of life, words, principles and ethics" and to provide men and women with the intellectual, political and ethical means of building a more equitable and cooperative society capable of sustaining itself. By their courage and perseverance, these women have promoted the cause of justice and peace in an exemplary manner. I salute them with the deepest respect and emotion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to present to Ms Hebe de Bonafini, President of the Asociación de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, this statuette symbolizing peace by the sculptor Apelle Fenosa and a cheque for US \$25,000 which comes with the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.

The Director-General presents the statuette, the award certificate and the cheque to the President of the Asociación de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo

[The Director-General continues in French]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am also happy to award three honourable mentions for outstanding activities in the field of education for peace.

The first goes to Ms Irène Drolet, a Canadian schoolteacher, who has been carrying out an educational and ethical task of great importance in Quebec: to make the school once again a place where students learn about democracy and living together. By teaching youngsters from the primary grades upwards about the values of tolerance, respect for human rights and non-violence, she introduces pupils to participatory democracy at a very early stage, aiming to turn them into responsible citizens, not only of their nation-states but of the world. She is helping to build a world citizenship founded on an understanding of and openness to others, which calls for the participation of each and the solidarity of all.

In her primary school class, which is simultaneously a workshop, a space for reflection and a democratic forum, Irène Drolet guides her young pupils to active and independent study of these values. They are encouraged to think about poverty worldwide, racism, violence, environmental protection, peace and human rights. Thus Ms Drolet uses her classroom to lay the groundwork for the change in attitude and habits that must come about if tomorrow's

citizens are finally to recognize in human relations the power of similarities and the wealth of differences. I wish her every success in this ongoing endeavour.

The Director-General presents the honourable mention certificate to Ms Drolet

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second honourable mention goes to the **Verein für Friedenspädagogik Tübingen** (Tübingen Association for Peace Education), represented by Mr Uli Jäger. For more than 20 years, this pioneering association has been working to raise public awareness about issues of peace and conflict and to strengthen civic responsibility. The Association relies essentially on education to change attitudes and behaviour, in the firm belief that such transformations will have a direct impact on political decisions and structures. Promoting concrete action for peace and civic responsibility, the Association spearheads international campaigns against nuclear weapons, atomic testing, weapons sales and anti-personnel mines.

The Association's vast undertaking of reconciliation and communication throughout the world, its cooperation with many non-governmental organizations, and its ongoing battle against discrimination and violence are reflected in numerous concrete initiatives. Besides its Global Learning programme, I should like to mention the international campaign it launched in 1998 on the occasion of the World Cup football matches to strengthen the fair play ethic in sport, and its didactic efforts to sharpen the public's critical appraisal of media information and, in particular, the media's coverage of international conflicts and crises.

I wholeheartedly encourage the Verein für Friedenspädagogik in the pursuit of its mission.

The Director-General presents the honourable mention certificate to Mr Jäger

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The third honourable mention goes to the **Congrégation des Filles de Marie-Auxiliatrice in Angola**, represented here by Sister Lorella Figgini. This international religious order, which has nearly 16,000 members scattered throughout 87 countries, had been doing outstanding work in the field of education. By actively fighting against the growing marginalization of young people, especially young women, the Filles de Marie-Auxiliatrice are striving to preserve an essential right that is a precondition of any peace, namely, the right to education. And women, as the main providers of education in the family, are at the heart of their concerns.

The Filles de Marie-Auxiliatrice accordingly pay special attention to children and adolescents, and give priority to little girls living in dire poverty. With the creation nine years ago of the Don Bosco Centre (named for Jean Bosco, founder of the order in the nineteenth century) in the Angolan community of Kakuako, the sisters launched an outstanding experiment in education for peace and cohabitation, all the more remarkable in that it exists in a country where the population is suffering the hardships of one of the longest and deadliest conflicts in Africa.

The Don Bosco Centre is a school for dialogue and cooperation, and the Filles de Marie-Auxiliatrice are to be congratulated on it!

**The Director-General presents the honourable mention certificate
to Sister Lorella Figgini**

In conclusion, I should like to quote what Professor Paulo Freire said on accepting from the Director-General of UNESCO this same prize for peace education in 1986: "From the nameless, unfortunate and exploited people of the world I have learned, above all, that peace is fundamental, indispensable, but that it must be fought for. Peace is something which is created, built up, transcending reality, the perverse facts of social life. Peace is created in the never-ending construction of social justice".

This is the struggle in which all of us here are engaged, and which I would urge you to continue unflaggingly.

Other duties await me now, and I greatly regret that I shall be unable to join you for the concert that follows. I wish to thank the musicians present and, in particular, Mr Miguel Angel Estrella, the great Argentinian pianist, ardent defender of freedom and UNESCO goodwill Ambassador, who has done us the honour of taking part.

Thank you.