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SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address  
by  
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(UNESCO)

at the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Earth Charter Commission

UNESCO, 13 March 2000

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Co-chairpersons of the Earth Charter Commission,  
Distinguished Members of the Commission,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to meet you all here at UNESCO. I know that this meeting of the Earth Charter Commission started yesterday and I regret that I was unable to welcome you on the opening day of your discussions.

We are particularly pleased that UNESCO was chosen to host this very important meeting of your Commission. This choice is an appropriate one. UNESCO, among the UN agencies, is specifically entrusted with an ethical mission as part of its overall purpose to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, culture and communication. The objectives of the Earth Charter project are fully in line with the goals and ideals enshrined in UNESCO's Constitution.

The Charter offers ethical guidelines to make the fundamental change towards sustainable development which we now all agree has become critically important. Yet, as the five year review of the implementation of Agenda 21 demonstrated, so far the world has failed to take the new course towards sustainable development agreed on by Heads of State and Government in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

Since "Rio", the global environment has further deteriorated. The gap between rich and poor has widened. Almost one billion people are still illiterate and 800 million people go hungry everyday. As I said a moment ago, we all agree on the need for sustainable development. What is lacking is action. There is an urgent need to use more vigorously all possible existing means and instruments, as well as to develop new instruments which can help to redress the situation. Human welfare must be at the centre of concerns for sustainable development as stipulated in Principle One of the Rio Declaration. An ethical guide towards sustainable development, the proposed Earth Charter, is an essential instrument - and one that was previously missing. Ethical guidance is needed for the action required by all stakeholders including governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, NGOs and civil society at large. It is also very much needed with regard to the necessary changes in values, behaviour and attitudes of people.

As you know, UNESCO is itself involved in addressing ethical issues related to sustainable development, both as part of its work on the ethics of science and technology and its work on the responsibilities of present

generations towards future ones. UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee was instrumental in drawing up the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights. It is now pursuing an examination of the ethical and legal questions raised by the rapid development of the life sciences and the resultant technologies.

The more recently-established World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) began its work in 1999 with the ethics of energy and of access to and utilisation of freshwater resources – two areas of great importance for sustainable development. COMEST will broaden the scope of its reflection in 2000-2001 to include three other fields of priority interest : the ethics of the environment, both physical and social and cultural, in the context of sustainable development ; the ethics of outer space and last, but not least, the ethics of the information technology and new information society.

Let me recall here also that the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference in 1997 adopted the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations. The goals enshrined in this Declaration are very much in line with the Earth Charter goals, in particular as regards the preservation of all forms of life on Earth, protection of the environment but also preservation of cultural diversity and cultural heritage. Another UNESCO initiative, which is relevant to the Earth Charter, is the UNESCO Universal Ethics Project. Launched in 1997, the Project aims at identifying universally recognised basic ethical principles that could help humanity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to deal with the interrelated global problems of poverty, underdevelopment, deterioration of the environment and population growth.

I have noted with interest that, in addition to the Earth Charter drafting process, you have launched an Earth Charter Campaign including numerous educational and awareness raising activities. These seek to catalyse some of the basic changes in values, behaviour and attitudes of civil society, the private sector and governments, required for the transition to sustainable development. We at UNESCO are particularly interested in this approach. As you know, ever since the late 1980s, and in particular after the Earth Summit in 1992, UNESCO has been the advocate for massive educational efforts world-wide in order to move towards sustainable development. I have taken up my duties as Director-General of UNESCO with the deep conviction that education, and especially broadly-conceived basic education is the key to development and a core duty for UNESCO. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 on education starts with an endorsement of the recommendations arising from the World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990, and calls for a general reorientation of education at all levels towards sustainable development. UNESCO, and I personally, will

ensure that the forthcoming Dakar World Forum on Education for All pays more attention than has hitherto been paid to the content and fundamental messages of basic education. One of these fundamental messages ought to be the battle against unsustainable production and consumption patterns and the need to move towards a sustainable future. In this vein, UNESCO will be pleased to cooperate with the Earth Council, Green Cross International and others to promote the Earth Charter as a world-wide educational tool.

I am also convinced that the natural, social, and human sciences must join forces, including with the economic sciences, in order to improve the scientific knowledge needed to solve complex problems of environment and development. Efforts must be increased to bridge the gap between science and policy-making and to increase scientific advisory processes for policy-making. UNESCO's major scientific programmes on environment and sustainable development covering areas such as freshwater, oceans, biodiversity, coastal zones and the earth crust – with which I trust you are all familiar – have already gone a long way to be more fully policy-relevant. Their role will become even more important in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate how much we at UNESCO value your efforts to promote the Earth Charter. I can assure you that UNESCO will extend its full moral and intellectual support to your endeavour, including through enhanced cooperation with the two main sponsoring organizations of the Earth Charter : the Earth Council chaired by you, Mr Strong, and Green Cross International chaired by President Mikhail Gorbachev. I wish you all a successful meeting and I trust that it will be here at UNESCO House that you will be able to launch the Earth Charter document.