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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**Address by
Mr Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow**

**Director-General of the
United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)**

**at the opening of the eighth session of
the General Conference of ALECSO**

Tunis, 21 December 1985

Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General of the League of Arab States,
Mr Director-General of ALECSO,
Distinguished Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be with you at this eighth session of the General Conference of ALECSO. I should like to thank my friend, Dr Mohieddine Saber, for allowing me, yet again, to address the delegations from the Arab world, to whom I am bound by so many personal ties and shared hopes.

It is also a pleasure for me to greet all of the Ministers and prominent persons who are present here. I should like to congratulate very warmly all those who have received the ALECSO gold medal today: Mr Mohammed M'Zali, Prime Minister of Tunisia, who is an old friend, H.R.H. Prince Talal ibn Abdul Aziz, a friend whose concern for all areas of Unesco's activity has been unfailing, Mr Sean McBride, another friend whose name is forever linked with Unesco's efforts to throw light on the fundamental problems of communication in the modern world, and Mr Ahmed Ibrahim Saloun.

I was particularly moved by the generous remarks made by the outgoing President, by Mr Mohammed M'Zali, by Mr Chedli Klibi, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and by Mr Sean McBride on the subject of Unesco, its work and the tasks which it performs. Their expressions of regard for the Organization and its Director-General are a source of great encouragement to me, helping me to continue, calmly and with the equanimity, the task with which the Member States have entrusted me. In 1957, the League of Arab States, whose Secretary-General has so admirably defined the missions of ALECSO and Unesco, was the first intergovernmental organization of the Arab world to establish relations of co-operation with Unesco, and those relations have been continued with ALECSO since that organization's inception.

Co-operation between our two Organizations has steadily grown, thanks to, in particular, the constant interest shown in it by the leaders of ALECSO, beginning with its Director-General, Dr Mohieddine Saber.

Our respective activities in the Arab world have thus been co-ordinated through joint consultation, the exchange of information and documents, the establishment of joint committees and the pooling of our efforts in different areas.

In April 1984, a biennial action programme was drawn up in order to provide a more coherent basis for this co-operation through the comprehensive planning of joint activities.

Our regular consultations on the lines of emphasis, implementation and evaluation of our respective programmes, the regular meetings between the Directors-General and the staff of the two Secretariats, particularly within the framework of a working group responsible for keeping track of joint activities, are evidence of the quality of our relationship, which I am sure will become even closer in the future.

I am especially pleased at this development because I firmly believe that ALECSO and Unesco are centres for dialogue, reflection and action, both present and future, within the Arab world and the entire international community respectively. No valid solution can be found for any of the fundamental problems of our time without reference to education, science, culture and communication. Mastery of science and technology has become an essential factor in the progress of all nations, the guarantee of the independence of all peoples. None of the disparities which characterize the world at present can be overcome while science and technology are unevenly developed throughout the world. But science is not spontaneously generated. It is the work of men and women dedicated to research, and to research and development. It is education that provides the knowledge and skills needed for the training of the research workers, engineers and technicians who contribute to modern development.

But we must recognize that the applications of science and technology are not neutral. They entail forms of organization and are often associated with ways of thinking which have an effect on value systems. Therefore, all scientific and technological developments require a parallel effort in the area of culture. In the present historical period, there is an increasing tendency for problems and patterns of behaviour to become worldwide, and no culture can preserve its essential features if it does not attempt to reassert its deepest values, particularly through education and communication. The subjection of some people's minds to those of others - not to say the subjection of the minds of all to those of a few - would not only diminish diversity, which is an unparalleled source of vitality, but would also threaten the most intangible human quality: spirituality.

Communication is enclosing the world in a net of messages originating from those with the most power, a net so dense that, if we are not careful, it will soon be impossible for any people or even any family to escape from the ideas which it transmits and the patterns of behaviour which it shapes.

Accordingly, Unesco and ALECSO continue to be organizations of essential importance in a world where freedom, independence and progress require a constant effort.

I thus welcome the special interest which the Arab States have shown in Unesco at a time when its universality and its means of action have come under heavy attack. I am familiar with the role played at the last session of the General Conference by the Arab delegations, who were concerned to make a contribution to the widest possible measure of agreement on all aspects of the activities, programmes and lines of emphasis of the Organization. Although it did not put an end to the pressure on the Organization, the agreement reached none the less constitutes a valuable achievement, confirming as it does the

vital importance of Unesco at this difficult time for the world, and also the determination of the overwhelming majority of its Member States to remain faithful.

I welcome the solidarity with Unesco which the Executive Board of ALECSO has shown, and its decision to appeal to Arab intellectual communities to take appropriate action.

For the challenge hurled at Unesco is only an expression of the threat which hangs over the United Nations system as a whole and, more generally, over all forms of multilateral co-operation.

That co-operation, which has grown enormously since the end of the Second World War, has so far not only helped to prevent a general conflict but has also made it easier for dozens of formerly colonized peoples to participate in international life, and in many instances has encouraged the nations and cultures of the entire world to draw closer together.

That achievement is under threat today because the spirit of wisdom, justice, solidarity and progress, which presided over the establishment of the United Nations system four decades ago, is increasingly being called into question. Short-term interests and ideological confrontations are sometimes coming to take precedence over the common aspirations of humanity.

It is becoming urgently necessary to react to this state of affairs, for what is at stake is international peace, the freedom of peoples and the prosperity of the world - in a word, the common future of our species. There is no alternative to multilateral co-operation other than tension, pressure on the most vulnerable and, in the last analysis, general disorder.

The Arab world is vitally concerned with the terms of this alternative: as the heir to a thousand years of history and with its immense aspirations, today it is confronting the many problems connected with the affirmation of its identity, the freedom of its peoples, the management of its development and its participation in world affairs. These tasks demand the consolidation of peace and the strengthening of co-operation, particularly in the various areas of intellectual life.

That is why I think it is so necessary, for the Arab region no less than for the rest of the world, to defend and protect the system of multilateral co-operation, particularly intellectual co-operation, and to extend it in the future.

Accordingly, I welcome ALECSO's constant interest in the various activities of Unesco and the support which it has always provided in various ways, particularly during the past two years. I should like to take this opportunity to express, once again my deepest gratitude, to its Director-General, my friend, Dr Mohieddine Saber, and to express my complete confidence in the future of the relationship between our two Organizations, which is in the interests of the peoples of the Arab world and of the entire international community.