

UNIVERSALITY, DIVERSITY, INTERDEPENDENCE: THE MISSIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY

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Mr Prime Minister,
Mr Chancellor of Helsinki University,
Professor Lehto,
Mr President of IAU, Professor Thorens,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished University Leaders,
my Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Kiitos ystäväillisestä kutsusta,

Thank you for your kind invitation to Finland. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be with you today to deliver the keynote address on the main theme of the 9th General Conference of the International Association of Universities.

This important event, which brings together leading figures in higher education from all over the world, has a special significance for Unesco. For the universities, together with the ministries of education, teachers, learned societies and educational associations, were instrumental in the aftermath of the Second World War in the creation of a United Nation's Edu-

cational, Scientific and Cultural Organization designed - in the words of the President of the founding Conference in London in 1945 - 'to clear the channels through which may flow from nation to nation the streams of knowledge and thought, of truth and beauty which are the foundations of true civilization'. The universities are thus, in a sense, the alma mater of Unesco. They are, moreover, through their functions in teaching, training, research and service to the community, one of the chief sources of the ideas, and information that Unesco exists to spread and apply in its varied fields of competence and, as such, one of its major partners in action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to address a special word of appreciation to our Finnish hosts.

Finland has always been a very active member of the Unesco family, and we are most grateful for its support in our endeavours. I should like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution to Unesco's work of Mrs Margaretha Mickwitz, who chairs the Programme and External Relations Commission of Unesco's Executive Board and who is a worthy representative of a great tradition of commitment and service to the international community. Your presence here today, Mr Prime Minister, is very important, as Dr. Thorens has already emphasized, not only in relation to the Helsinki University and all Finnish universities at large, but also to all the universities, as a symbol of the close partner-

ship which must exist between the political power and academia.

We are privileged to be here during the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Helsinki University, which has always played a central role in the development and progress of the Finnish nation, skillfully combining its dual role of servant and critic of society. I am pleased to pay tribute to you, Mr Chancellor and to you, Mr. Rector of a university that is both so ancient and so modern. Thanks to the generous support of the Finnish Government, Helsinki has also become the headquarters of the first research and training centre of the United Nations University - WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research).

On the occasion of its fortieth birthday, I wish to pay a very special tribute to the International Association of Universities. Unesco has always enjoyed excellent relations with IAU and its associate member organizations, many of which are present today, and we look forward to developing our partnership in the years ahead in the interests of closer university co-operation and in the service of the international community. The IAU/Unesco Higher Education Information Centre is a reality to be strengthened, and the USIT (University Based Critical Mass System for Information Technology) and TRACE (Trans-Regional Academic Mobility and Credential Evaluation Information Network), two ongoing projects that can be extremely useful and timely.

I should like to salute the efforts of Professor Thorens, who has not only provided invaluable service to IAU, but whose wisdom and experience have greatly benefited Unesco's activities, particularly our collaboration with the United Nations University, on whose Board he sits, and the work of the European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), of whose Advisory Board he is a member.

The permanent and far-reaching devotion of Dr. Franz Eberhard is a guarantee, as with his predecessor, of continuity and change in

IAU, and I am sure that his co-operation with Mr M. A. Dias will continue under my personal attention with the best results.

The theme you have chosen for this General Conference seems to me to go to the very heart of what a university is. This is a question which must be asked periodically and what better time to do so than on your fortieth anniversary, and at the approaches to a new millennium when one is inclined to take stock of past experience in preparation for new departures. The University is a prominent actor of modern life and its role will be still more relevant as the limits to politics will lead to an increase in the scientific ingredients of the decision-making process. With some sixty million students and university teachers and researchers, the whole higher education community represents a formidable force with a real impact on future developments in all spheres of life.

This question must be asked because the University, with its pivotal position in modern society, needs to have a strong sense of what it is and where it is going if it is to respond appropriately to the powerful pressures to which it is inevitably subject. To borrow Sir Eric Ashby's metaphor, the University is an organism that embodies a heredity and should be conscious of that heredity in its interactions with ever-changing social environment. There will, of course, be different answers to the question of what precisely that heredity is. Few, however, would probably dissent from minimalist formulation proposed by Karl Jaspers in *The Idea of a University*, where he wrote: "Three things are required of a university: professional training, education of the whole man and research". This essential mission - which may be conveniently explored through the concepts of universality, diversity and interdependence - must be constantly borne in mind in pondering the issues confronting the university in the modern world. Perennial questions relating to the social functions of the university, the relevance of curricula, university autonomy, academic freedom, and mass higher education cannot be addressed meaningfully without a clear understanding of the fundamental purposes of the university.

The universality of the university may be understood in a number of ways. First, the university is universal by virtue of its characteristic concern with what would at one time have been called 'universals' or 'essentials' and which we might now identify - with apologies to any Aristoteleans present - with first principles. Transcending the varied forms of higher education, the defining quality of the university may - I would suggest - be equated with the attempt to grasp the principles underlying physical and spiritual reality and, beyond that, the means of defining the nature and content of the good life.

Secondly, the university may be said to be universal by virtue of the scope of its concerns. These in principle embrace the whole spectrum of knowledge, the totality of phenomena, even if in practice a choice may have to be made concerning the range of courses offered.

A third sense in which the university may be said to be universal because it is open to all those who can derive benefit from it. The university - the *universitas studii* of medieval time - is linked to the concepts of freedom of access to knowledge.

Finally, the university is universal in the internationalism inherent in the use of the common language of reason and science. Knowledge knows no boundaries, and the laws of mathematics and science are identical to all, irrespective of nationality or creed.

Universality in the four senses I have indicated seems to me to be part of the heredity of the university. However, that heredity is not static and is always to be found in dynamic relationship with its social environment. In our own century, and particularly in the lifetime of IAU, this has led to some fundamental changes in the way it has been expressed.

For example, there has been a huge increase in the scope of the university's concerns. The time is long gone when the university curriculum was restricted virtually to the propaedeutic study of grammar, logic and

rhetoric and the major subjects of law, medicine or theology. In particular, the explosive growth of new knowledge in this century has vastly expanded the dimensions of the average university catalogue or prospectus. Much of this knowledge is arising at the juncture of two or more traditional disciplines. This interdisciplinarity - posing a structural challenge to institutions traditionally organized, in the words of Sir Eric Ashby again, as "constellations of anarchies" - conjures up images of a universe in expansion not only at its boundaries but also at its interphases, in a process resembling continuous creation.

The second major area of expansion has been in enrolments. As post-secondary admissions approach or exceed 20 per-cent of the relevant age cohort in many industrialized and certain developing countries, attaining more than double that figure in the United States, we move closer to a situation of mass higher education. Moreover, through its adult and extension education networks, the university is expanding in another direction presaging the time when higher education will become a genuinely recurrent form of education, part of a lifelong process of growth. This expansion of enrolments in higher education has obviously posed a number of serious problems, not least those relating to the quality of recruitment and the financing of the facilities to cater for the increase in numbers. These are the parameters that clearly pose limitations - temporary at least - to the expansion of higher education, which has indeed begun to slow down. It seems clear, however, that the basic dynamic, both internal and external to higher education, lies in the movement toward more universal access to higher education.

The transformation of higher education into a key mass medium, central to the training of human resources and the production and distribution of knowledge, has thrown into question its epistemological function, its concern with 'universals'. The combined pressures of government and the market place have encouraged a greater utilitarian and vo-

cational emphasis in higher education curricula. The call on all sides has been for 'relevance'. The contrast between 'relevance' and whatever may be its opposite appears less obvious when one considers that the half-life of knowledge in many domains is becoming so short that an understanding of principles is essential if rapid obsolescence is to be avoided. In this sense, the traditional belief that the university student should master received knowledge as a first step before going on to learn the dialectic between orthodoxy and dissent retains all its... relevance.

This being said, higher education takes place in a given time and place, and it is clearly essential that it should constantly reassess its priorities with reference to a changing local, national and international context, embodying new needs and imperatives. It should do so, however, bearing in mind the essential nature of its function.

The theme of relevance throws into relief the obvious fact that universities, while universal, are also local and therefore diverse. They are rooted in particular societies and cultural traditions that influence in a myriad of ways the content and form of a university education. Diversity is, of course, the very condition of the arts: if the language of mathematics is basically one, the truth of poetry is multiple. Yet diversity is equally necessary to the sciences. The laws of science may be universal but the way they are applied involves - and increasingly so - questions of choice that lead directly into the realms of ethics, aesthetics and culture. Diversity would also seem to be necessary to the generation of new scientific laws, which often - it is now recognized - owe as much to creative insight as they do to purely logical inference or deduction. They are a result of a sensitivity to new facts, of new ways of seeing.

Diversity is as essential to the *form* as it is to the *content* of education. Variety in the type of courses offered and the nature of institutions, corresponding to increasingly diversified de-

velopment needs, variety in the forms of teaching provided in accordance with different social and academic traditions - these and other species of variety ensure that higher education remains a source of creativity rather than a sterile monoculture. The university must be rooted in and reflect its setting. Universities must participate in weaving the social and economic fabric of the surrounding society. Universities are outstanding representatives of cultural diversity and of the unity of objectives and aims: true values, justice, freedom.

The concern with preserving cultural identity - in the face of the kind of cultural uniformity so evocatively described by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *Tristes Tropiques* - is growing throughout the world. Unesco has responded to this concern by playing a leading role within the United Nations in the proclamation and organization of the World Decade for Cultural Development, which is aimed among other objectives at affirming and enriching cultural identities. The academic community might wish to consider what form its own contribution to the Decade should take, since in the universities, as elsewhere, diversity is one of the conditions of originality and a safeguard against those dogmatisms that seek to replace the broad search for truth by the narrow quest for certainty.

Universality and diversity - as the theme of your conference suggests - are not to be construed as opposition but rather a dialectic which has as its syntheses *interdependence*. We touch here upon the *raison d'être* of the IAU and, in a broader context, of Unesco. Both exist to promote - through information, reflection and action - co-operation based on a heightened consciousness of our interdependence.

In this respect, the efforts made by the EEC countries to favour interuniversity mobility are commendable, as are the rapid expansion of pan-European university agreements. The ERASMUS programme, for instance, represents today an exchange of more than 5,000 students. We must take into account not only

the academic advantages of this programme, but also the cultural, linguistic, social and human aspects involved, aspects which will be very valuable to avoid attitudes of xenophobia, exclusion and racism. Many walls of oppression have been destroyed, but many still remain in our hearts and minds. A revolution of minds, an evolution -I prefer this term as a biologist- a rapid evolution is required. However important the inter-European co-operation may be, the greatness of Europe will always depend on its openness to the South.

One of our priorities in the promotion of co-operation in an interdependent world must be to provide help to the poorest, those with the least access to knowledge, those who are most vulnerable. I am particularly encouraged to see this view reflected in the World Development Report released on 15 July 1990 by the World Bank. In introducing the Report, the President, Barber B. Conable Jr., stressed that the fading of the perceived military danger to the industrialized nations should release resources for the war on global poverty. A 10 per cent reduction in military budgets could mean a doubling in development assistance. Will this happen? Will governments, or the people who elect them, heed the warning signs of a new global conflict between the rich and the poor, a conflict which could impoverish us all? Clearly, a reduction in world poverty is not only and above all a moral imperative but a necessity for the survival of even the richest societies, which - we must not forget -have their own pockets of poverty.

In a world in which socio-economic development is becoming more knowledge-intensive and relies increasingly on professional and managerial expertise, the role of higher education is crucial to any development programme. Higher education institutions play a key role in the generation, transfer and application of new knowledge, in training professional, technical and managerial staff, in forging cultural identity and fostering democratic processes. They also provide an important avenue for upward social mobility.

The recent World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, organized jointly by Unesco, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank, highlighted the role of basic education and literacy in national development efforts. Higher education - it must be said - has its own unique role to play in the development process in the modern world. Without adequate institutions of higher learning and research, or without access to such facilities abroad, the developing countries cannot hope to master and apply the latest advances, let alone make their own contribution to intellectual and scientific progress. It is only through the development of local skills and competence that they can reduce the gap separating them from the industrialized countries and thus reduce their dependence on technical assistance. It has been a big mistake to think that the developing countries only need basic education: they also need higher learning facilities, modest as they may be: the existence of a core of professors and scientists is essential for teacher-training, for the training of engineers and technicians, for providing the country with an "all-round" educational system. As Mabub Ul Hug has underlined in the recent report of UNDP, it is not human "resources" but human development -the development of the human being as a whole- that really matters, the development of full collective capabilities in each woman and each man.

There is no need for me to spell out the dire constraints under which many higher education institutions in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America function. Increasing enrolments are not matched by budgetary allocations. On the contrary, the latter have in many cases been cut, sometimes drastically, as a result of reductions in public spending due partly to the heavy burden of foreign debt. Consequently, existing resources and facilities have been stretched to breaking point. Universities are forced to function with larger classes, with inadequate resources (shortages of books and journals, poorly equipped laboratories, etc.).

Moreover, much of the expansion has taken place in the arts, humanities and social sci-

ences, partly because of demand but partly also because such programmes are less expensive to staff and cheaper to equip and run than those in science and technology. In fact, this trend has its origins at the secondary level where, because of the shortage of good science teachers, the schools train, in an overwhelming majority, applicants for non-science courses. This also helps to perpetuate the exclusion of women from scientific fields. The same pressure of increasing enrolments, coupled with lack of funding, has led to diversion of resources away from post-graduate studies and from research because the latter, too, are considerably more expensive.

When talking about universities, we should never lose sight of the most numerous and more diverse group inside any establishment of higher learning: the students. If we strive towards flexible and diverse institutional structures, they should provide an increasing degree of personalization. University leaders and professors must search for the best way to help each person in the learning and decision-making processes: to choose, think and decide on their own, to act by themselves according to their own uniqueness.

The prospects for the future cannot be said to be bright. The young represent a higher percentage of the total population in developing countries than in the industrialized ones. Increasing numbers of these young people successfully complete secondary education and seek admission to higher studies. However, the average annual rate of growth in student enrolments, despite increases in total numbers has actually declined. In Africa, to give one example, it has slowed down from 14.2 per cent for the 1960-1980 period, to 8.2 per cent from 1980 onwards. But the demographic growth rate is much higher: population forecasts, together with other demographic trends in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, indicate that the demand for higher education in these regions will continue to grow. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, the population, which was about 337 million in 1980, will grow to 640 million by the year 2000.

Even those who actually pursue and complete higher education face an uncertain job market. Unplanned growth, coupled with the fact that teaching and research too often lack relevance to the economic, social and cultural context in the countries concerned, reduce the chances of meaningful employment. There is overproduction of graduates in some disciplines and underproduction precisely in those areas which are regarded as crucial to national development. Graduate employment is difficult to ensure when so many countries are experiencing "zerogrowth". Teaching staff, too, have grounds to complain about their status and levels of remuneration. It is certainly not a question of planification of the educational system, but a question of anticipation - anticipation and prospective are crucial functions - and co-operation with industry, both at the methodological and research levels, must be as close as possible. These contacts and these capacities are already elaborated in a number of universities of the developed world. Why not share them with the universities of the developing countries? There is an urgent need to increase international assistance to higher education in the developing countries. I wish, therefore, to take this opportunity to inform you about a major Unesco initiative in higher education - the UNITWIN project - and to request your co-operation and support in its implementation.

At the last General Conference of Unesco, Member States requested the Secretariat to launch an International Plan of Action for strengthening interuniversity co-operation, with particular emphasis on support for higher education in developing countries. The key feature of this plan is the development of a spirit of solidarity, based on twinning and other arrangements among universities throughout the world. Hence the acronym chosen for the programme: UNITWIN. More specifically, it is aimed at making full use of North-South co-operation to set in train a process leading to strong and durable links between higher education and scientific insti-

tutions along a South-South axis. My colleagues, Mr. Power and Mr. Badran, will certainly speak about UNITWIN at greater length during the Conference. I will, therefore, limit myself to presenting some of its key features.

The main goals of UNITWIN are:

- to give fresh impetus to twinning and other linking arrangements between higher education institutions in the industrialized and developing countries;
- to help establish subregional, regional and interregional co-operation networks of higher education and research institutions;
- to develop centres for specialized studies and advanced research by agreement among institutions in the developing countries and with concerted international support. These centres would bridge training and research needs across national frontiers. Such centres of excellence could be built through networks of twinned universities, with a system of Unesco chairs as their nucleus.

Some activities foreseen as components of UNITWIN have already begun. I have been much encouraged by the reactions to this project in my discussions with heads of governments, ministers of education and university leaders. A large-scale programme for research on higher education management and for the training of key university administrators has been started, with Africa being given priority. Existing networks for staff development in higher education will be reinforced, and action in support of institutional and staff development in Africa is now underway, with the ultimate aim of setting up a number of interlocking networks in that region.

A large-scale programme, complementary to what the Organization has already been doing in this field through its Unesco Coupons scheme, seeks to support university and scientific libraries in the developing countries with books, periodicals and laboratory materials, and to develop self-sustainable capabilities in

the production of books and teaching and learning materials in the developing countries.

Unesco is also designing programmes aimed at making full use of the potential for distance higher education created by the very rapid advance in the telecommunications and interactive information technologies.

Let me dwell a little more on the Unesco Chairs, which are a major component of UNITWIN. We conceive these Chairs—seven of which already exist and which have prompted a great many requests and enquiries—as the nuclei of centres of specialization and of advanced studies and research, to be established in the first place in the developing countries.

The programmes associated with these Chairs must be international in nature and they will need to have at their disposal a number of fellowships from a Fellowship Bank which we shall establish shortly. These initiatives deserve at present special attention, together with two other ones: the short-term fellowship scheme already introduced with ICSU, and the intensive advanced courses given in the developing countries at the subregional level, by professors and researchers of prestige, who will be willing to spend one to three months of their sabbatical period or of their post-retirement in such an interesting endeavour.

There is no doubt in my mind about the relevance of UNITWIN to the topics you will be discussing at this Conference. I therefore appeal to the universities and to their associations to work with us, in a spirit of true partnership and solidarity, on this project. Mr. President, forty-five years ago, at the end of the Second World War, there was a lucid rethinking both at the institutional and at the individual level, of the principles on which a more peaceful, freer and safer world could be built. Most of them have proved useful during the long Cold War period. Now, at the end of the Cold War, with the extremely rapid pace of events, we must courageously review at the institutional and individual level, internationally and nationally, strategies, procedures and

attitudes that are no longer valid. And those unable to do so promptly will be progressively marginalized and disappear before long. As the old soldiers, the huge organizations, will not die... but fade away. Only quality will prevail. Starting with the quality of teachers, one problem of particular concern in my own experience as rector of a university and minister of education and science, is to reach permanent positions prematurely. Two or three contract periods before ten years are essential. A continuous effort must also be tirelessly directed towards the identification of mediocrity and incompetence. An institution that is unable to correct and improve permanently the quality of its staff is a sick institution, a declining institution. How can they claim to contribute to the transformation of society if they are incapable of transforming themselves and improving the strategies of learning? Quality is the supreme objective that must permanently guide university life.

Changing conditions in the world demand therefore that Unesco and universities think carefully about the future in order to function effectively. To this end, Unesco and the UN University, together with the International Association of Universities, are undertaking a major project to study the challenges facing higher education as we approach the next century. These challenges include:

- the danger of extremism... Universities are indicators of tolerance, antidogmatism and understanding; how to develop attitudes of change in an evolving world...

- the need for scientists to voice their concerns... Universities can provide scientific elements for decision-makers, especially in environmental matters; most of the diagnoses have already been made and the time of action has arrived; any further delay is ethically inadmissible.

- the need for lifelong education... Universities are centres for continuous training, including intensive advance courses for people of all ages to be recycled...

To sum up, how can universities increasingly participate in an active way in the search for solutions to such problems?

Unesco itself faces some important challenges and it is precisely in order to meet these changes effectively that I have recently instituted a fairly radical set of reforms at Unesco of which you may have heard echoes. The Organization's structure must change in order to bring them in line with programme needs. At its last session, Unesco's Executive Board committed itself to this process and I welcome the new spirit of openness and partnership we have been able to create. There will be disagreement about this or that change and about the pace of reform, but, together, the Governing Bodies and I are resolved to provide Unesco with the management and working methods it needs to be present in its Member States and throughout the world. To be present with our experience and assured capacity when the governments of our Member States decide on matters of our field of competence that is the key of multilateral co-operation, that is the key to succeed to place education, science and culture at the very top of national priorities.

In bringing Unesco back to its founding principles, in promoting the free flow of ideas and fostering professional exchange, in holding to the fundamental importance of individual human rights, we have made academic freedom as much of a priority as freedom of the press: Measures have been taken in the human rights programme and in our joint work with ILO on the status of teachers to place academic freedom at the heart of Unesco's programme. It is not the free market and its rules the winner but democracy and its rules. We are at a turning point in which the essential winds of freedom must remind everyone every day that equity and solidarity are indispensable partners of liberty. Freedom is the main, only gate, but without equity and solidarity no real progress can be achieved.

Only free inquiry can lead to truth and only freedom can truly forge friendship and understanding among different cultures and

political systems. As Director-General of Unesco I look forward to the day when there are no obstacles in the form of prejudice or passion -which prevent us from working with the academic community in all the world's nations on solving the world's pressing problems. The UNAMAZ (Universities of the Amazonia) and the "Blue Danube" programmes are examples of how relevant the universities can be in addressing the real problems of our days in a pragmatic and well-rooted way. The universities on the spot can solve problems that otherwise will remain, on more, as pure rethoric, ethnic distant recommendations.

Speaking to an international conference in 1967, Constantine Zurayk asked a question as pertinent now as it was then: "To what extent will the universities, as the chief institutions of higher education, prove themselves to be the makers, shapers and creators of (tomorrow's) world and not merely its product, instrument and agent?" The role of universities towards the governments and decision-makers fostering dialogue and democracy, and providing advice based on scientific rigour... The role of universities towards youth, providing them with a global vision and forging an attitude of tolerance and sharing; the role of universities towards the generations to come, ensuring their heritage in environment, human rights and cultural identities... Universities are much more than centres of higher education: they represent the most qualified watchtower at the

national level to ensure that the knowledge and lessons learnt from the past will be applied for a better and freer future throughout the world. The universities, like Unesco, do not have the force of the other main political, economic, military actors. No. They have, however, the immense strength of knowledge, the force of the verb. They must be open to permanent dialogue with the power, never under it. Open for all winds to blow in. If in the present situation, full of hope, of possibilities, but also of threats and risks - the universities too consider that the new page to be written in the history of mankind, starting at the eve of the third millennium, is beyond their capacity and influential scope; if the universities do not contribute actively to consolidate the civilization of peace that is emerging; guarantee the human and social dimensions of this starting point; accelerate disarmament and the correct utilization of the peace dividend ...if they do not act, what will be the role of institutions? I have always been impressed and inspired by a plea made by Fichte which he means to serve as a rule of conduct in action: even when the odds are against it, one must act as if everything depended on that particular act, at that particular moment. Let us take Fichte's plea in earnest and act with the conviction that the well-being of humanity will, to a significant extent, be influenced by the capacity of the universities - and of Unesco - to respond positively to the challenges facing it.