



Closing Address

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Dear Members of the World Scientific Congress,

First, I would like to tell you that the time for action has come.

Today, at the dawn of this century and millennium, it is urgent to become aware of what we need to do to act upon the excellent diagnosis that we have just established.

Very often, we have the solutions, but we are generally incapable of putting adequate responses into practice so as to address the various challenges that we have nonetheless identified. We have the necessary governance; we have excellent declarations to implement; but, too often, we postpone taking action. Several years ago, I sent out a cry of alarm: societies that produce reports are societies that postpone taking action. In fact, very often, we produce a report, then another one; we establish a commission, then a panel of experts to study what has already been studied and to “recommend recommendations” that have already been made. In effect, these recommendations serve the interests of those who wish to postpone action by asking for yet more analyses and diagnoses. As a former neurologist, I worked on the prevention of infantile mental disorders. I am well aware that the best diagnosis is the one that will enable you to take action and to dream of the result to be achieved, as it is the only way to prevent and avoid illness. If you wait (and sometimes it is a question of ethics), if you request a second diagnosis, it may be too late. Sometimes we bear responsibility when we postpone implementing the resolutions of the diagnosis that we already have.

It is a matter of creating a better world, and what you have in your hands is “Education through love as opposed to education through fear” (Sir Robert Baden-Powell, World Chief Scout). I can assure you that the reason why these recommendations are excellent is because they use the exact words we need, namely: “love” and “brotherhood”. In fact, it is a matter of recognising that the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers us the solution to the majority of challenges we encounter in the world today. All human beings - all of them, without exception - are born free and equal in dignity. Whatever their skin colour, religion, ideology or beliefs: they are all equal in dignity. This is how there will no longer be any problems, nor enemies. It is then that we can help each other.

We must always help everyone whose ideas are diametrically opposed to our own. However, if we believe that our religion is the right one and that the ones in which others believe are wrong; or that our ideology is the best, or that we are better than those whose skin colour is different, then there is nothing for us to do. Allow me to go further with Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: all human beings are “endowed with reason (...) and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. This is exactly what is being said here. What I mean by that is that - like Baden-Powell - there are people who present good recommendations for action, but at the same time there are governments that refuse to listen or change anything at all. They prefer, for example, to remain silent about the values for which we have all fought.

When I think of the 60s, it is always with emotion: a time when young people were fighting for freedom, justice, equality and solidarity. We were at the heart of that struggle. Then, in the 80s, we were suddenly told that, henceforth, the economy would no longer be guided by those values, but by market forces. And the world accepted this change in values that were supposed to guide our action. And, in this reductionist approach that acted like a drug, we could see disparities increasing; a culture of peace was substituted by a culture of war, a war based on a misleading and untruthful concept.

However, the fact is that we already have the solution: it was stated here today. In order to create a better world, we need to follow the path that we already have and we can observe that there are countries (not the people of those countries, but their governments) that prefer to maintain confusion. It is always with emotion that I remember a meeting of the American Physical Society in 1999 in Atlanta. I had already announced that I was leaving UNESCO and when the President, Professor Jensen (another prize winner) was presenting me as the keynote speaker, he mentioned a word in his speech: inertia. He said that inertia was our enemy. It prevents us from adopting new solutions. However, we do need to invent new solutions. Each human is a fantastic being from a biochemical perspective: due to an outstanding, fantastic, capacity for creation and invention. Each human being is a fantastic monument. And it is in this sense that I reacted when I was UNESCO'S Director-General and people talked to me about restoring monuments: I thought that UNESCO should not be concerned about such things. At UNESCO, we should be saying that we need to preserve the quality of each human being, because each human being is the monument that we should be preserving in so much as all human beings are capable of inventing different solutions.

I remember the key phrase of “finding new ways”: if we can't find them, we need to invent them. This is really what we need to do and that is what I perceived in the letter of invitation to take part in the closing of your Congress. In that letter, Eduardo Missoni told me: “We need to take advantage of the opportunity to stimulate change; we are inclined towards inertia; we are attached to the solutions of the past to address current challenges; we are hoping for something that will help us avoid the solutions of the past. We would like to stimulate change; we would like to invent a different world - a better world - for our children and for our children's children and, if that is what we want”, he said, “we need to make the most of promising practices.”

Let's make the most of experience: it's a fantastic resource at our disposal. Your Organization has 28 million members worldwide. You can imagine how strong you would be through being able to make the most of their experience, of everything that they have thought about, imagined and invented in their own lives to try to make a contribution right now - an important moment for the world - so as to not only discover new ways forward, but also to pursue them knowing that treatment is available to help us deal with the challenges we face. The issue is not just about knowing what the solution is; it's about daring to take action.

Dare to take action! I remember arriving in Oxford with Professor Krebs, the Nobel prize winner for biochemistry. The Latin inscription on a coat of arms there is "Sapere aude". As you know, the British are very fond of using other languages in their mottos and "Sapere aude" means "Dare to know". Dare to know in the darkness is a wise recommendation. Two years later, I told myself, beyond daring to know, it would be much better and more useful to know how to dare because, if you just take a risk, it's dangerous, but if you have knowledge without being capable of daring, it's absolutely useless. This is why we need to dare today, and we need to dare tell those who sometimes oppose change, that we consider that now is the right time to move ahead, because - sincerely - we can't bequeath the current state of deterioration to future generations.

In 1979, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences was already stating that attention needed to be paid to greenhouse gas effects. But nothing has changed. Moreover, certain very large multinational corporations have tried to postpone or to hide the NAS's findings. We are now at a time when we can realise that, from a social perspective, the inconvenient truth concerning the environment is much more importantly an inconvenient truth concerning people. I recommend to all you Scouts all over the world to not only consider how the environment is faring in your countries, but also how people live in your countries. I know the situation and I can assure you that it is shameful. It's shameful that a very large proportion of human beings in our world live in such inhumane conditions, whilst three billion dollars are invested every day in armaments. Every day, 60,000 people die of hunger. It is therefore evident that we need to move towards a better world. It's very clear and I must say that, today, you have already come to some very important conclusions in this direction.

The conclusion that I consider most important is when you say that we should not just try to see what is visible, but also what is not visible, as what is visible is brought to us as "news" by the media, and "news" is always about extraordinary events. They never say that people are smiling, that they are doing well, no, I mean that the role of the media is to show us what is out of the ordinary. But we need to be able to close our eyes and see everything that is invisible. To see everything that we cannot see in the media is the only way for us to know reality. This is how we will realise what a terrible situation we are in: a situation in which we spend enormous amounts of money in a culture of war whilst the lives of so many people are becoming so difficult. If one of my sons or one of my grandchildren were in the situation of those I've seen in Africa, suffering from AIDS and without any money with which to buy tritherapy, I can assure you that I might not be able to control my anger. But I think that if we really feel that we are each other's brothers and sisters, we should think about what is happening to that man or woman as if he or she were one of our daughters or sons. We therefore need to change: we need to take action to build a better world.

How can we take action? By creating awareness and sharing it through education. Believe me, education is the solution, and I'm not just saying that because I was the Director-General of UNESCO: it's because it's quite sincerely a belief that is close to my heart. What matters is knowledge and know-how. I'm talking about wisdom. I'm talking about the development of this distinctive capacity of human beings for creativity, inventiveness, imagination and thought. How marvellous! It means that our behaviour is unpredictable and, if it's unpredictable, hope is possible. As you know, today, with an advanced knowledge of the language of life (the genetic code), we can gain knowledge about the behaviour of all living beings apart from one: humans. Why? Because the human being is capable of behaving in a way that does not follow the chemical reactions of complementarity in space that we know so well. We have this capacity. And that's why each individual life is so important for humanity. If we are able to deeply apprehend reality, we can change that reality. If we only know about the surface - superficial perceptions - we can modify the perception, but we can't modify the underlying reality of life. Let's therefore be capable of understanding reality in depth. Let's be capable of grasping the whole picture and not just the part that the media offers us.

I was very impressed by Bernard Lone, President of the American Cardiology Society. When he received the Nobel Prize in 1985, he said: "It's only insofar as we will be able to see the invisible that we will be able to achieve the impossible". This is why this is what you need to do today, evidently for the greatest number of your fellow beings. Yes, it's utopic: it's not a reality. But can you name me a single person that you have known in your lives who has done something really worthwhile?

I need to conclude. I think that the world needs Baden-Powell's thinking and the Scout Movement today more than ever. We have to work together. That's more or less the result of these days here. We all need to advance together, especially with those who are educated, those who can think for themselves, those who are capable of not acting as simple spectators (spending all day getting information from a TV screen, a computer, a games console or mobile phone). This is when we can find time to think a bit, to be ourselves, to acquire this education that can enable us to be ourselves. In the report that I requested on Education for the 21st Century, it states that one must learn: learning is what is important. "Learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together". Learning to live together is the essence of this new perspective of others. And, there are 28 million of you in the world, which offers immense hope! If, moreover, you can cooperate with several universities or educational centres, you will be in a position to amplify mobilisation towards this other truth.

When we get up in the morning, we should think: what can I do today to reduce the gap between us? What can I do to create connections - bridges - between people? Finally, what can I do to substitute force by words, to assure the transition from a culture of force and violence? If you want peace, prepare for war: towards a culture of peace. We therefore now need to change. We need to say: if you want peace, you need to help build it. I always remember this quote of Proust's: "It is a shame that there are so many people who do nothing because they believe that they cannot do very much". We therefore need to do what we can do. But above all we need to remind young people of this. We need to tell young people: you need to care for each other. Every day, the seed of love, the seed of solidarity. Every day, because there is only one fruit that you will never be able to harvest: the fruit of seeds that you did not have the courage to plant.

Thank you for your attention.