"EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS"

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Your Excellencies, the Ministers of Education and of Higher Education,
Fellow Teachers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Dear Monsieur Germain,

I have just been given far too great an honour, one I neither sought nor solicited. But when I heard the news, my first thought after my mother, was of you. Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the poor child that I was, without your teaching and your example, none of this would have happened. I don't make too much of this sort of honour. But at least it gives me the opportunity to tell you what you have been and still are for me, and to assure you that your efforts, your work and the generous heart you put into it still live in one of your little schoolboys who, despite the years, has never stopped being your grateful pupil. I embrace you with all my heart."

This letter was written by Albert Camus in 1957, a few days after receiving the Nobel Prize for literature. Camus's unfinished last novel entitled "The First Man" is both a penetrating portrayal of poverty, and an eloquent tribute to M. Germain, the primary school teacher whose commitment created a Nobel laureate.

All young people need teachers like M. Germain. As José Martí and Thomas Jefferson knew, each country must strive to build a free public education system accessible to all – an education which is broad and humane as well as rigorous, which respects cultural diversity while building social cohesion, and which creates responsible citizens who are able to think critically and act independently.

The fate of our society – both the individual countries from which we come and the emerging global society to which we all belong – depends, in large measure, upon the extent to which we provide an appropriate quality education to all citizens. And our capacity to educate, in turn, depends on our ability to attract, recruit, train and support competent, caring and committed teachers.

In essence, my first and most important point is that:

"Teachers and education are of crucial importance in preparing young people and societies for the future. Investing in education and in building a strong teaching profession makes good sense. Denying teachers the essential means to foster learning in the classroom is a crime against our children’s future and violates international law."

But before going too deeply into my address, I should convey to you the greetings of the Director-General of UNESCO to this Conference. We have been greatly impressed not only by the sheer size of the Conference (over 6,300 teachers from 40 countries), but by the opportunities it provides for teachers of all types from the region to share their experience, research and ideas.

For us in UNESCO, Cuba has always been a strong ally in the cause of education, the most recent example of which was the very successful Regional Conference on Strategies for the Reform of Higher Education held here in November last year. I should like to pay tribute to Cuban educators for the role they have played in helping UNESCO and teachers in other countries, especially in Africa, to improve the quality of education.

Fellow teachers,

Let me reiterate my first point, that teachers are crucially important, and move on to the second point:
Education is strongest in those societies which value and support their teachers and public education systems, and in which the morale of teachers is high.

I am very proud that I am a teacher, that like M. Germain I have dedicated my life to the cause of a quality public education accessible to all. After nearly thirty years of working in classrooms, I still know of no greater reward in life than seeing the wonder in the eyes of a child in my science classroom, of watching young minds grow, or of learning of the achievements of one of my graduate students.

In my experience and international comparative studies, the strongest education systems are those in which most teachers are proud to be a teacher, and encourage their best students and their children to join what is a high status profession.

Having worked in tough ghetto schools in Chicago, with nomadic tribes in the Australian desert, in a remote village in New Guinea and in decaying universities, I know too from first-hand experience of the frustrations created by over-large classes, an irrelevant curriculum, the lack of textbooks and teaching materials, and graduate unemployment. Too often, I have seen public education systems and the teachers in them under attack for the wrong reasons. Sadly, in a number of countries which once prided themselves on equality of opportunity, quality education is again becoming the preserve only of those who can afford a private school. In time, as a result, these countries will become increasingly unequal, conflicted and polarized.

Brothers and sisters, we must fight, even sacrifice in the way that M. Germain did for Albert Camus, to make sure the rights of all children to a decent education are not denied. And we must stand behind our colleagues in difficult situations and support them in their struggle to equip their students with the knowledge, skills and values needed to create a culture of peace and to sustainable and equitable development.

Since the World Conference on Education for All, UNESCO has joined with organizations like UNICEF, ILO and Education International to overcome the barriers which prevent about 110 million children from attending any school at all, and those which lie behind the intolerably high levels of dropout and repetition in this region. You can be sure that, in turn, UNESCO will continue to support you in your struggle to improve the status of teachers and conditions of learning in the classroom.

While teachers cannot succeed with every child and avert every social ill, they are central to our hopes of building a better world. Whatever the problems, teaching is a wonderful vocation. As I told the World's Ministers of Education at the International Conference on Education in Geneva last October, teachers lie at the heart of education. No government or community can claim to care for its children, if it does not look after its heart – if it does not also care about its teachers. If we look at the results of recent international studies on educational achievement in science and mathematics, we can see that the best results were achieved by countries which respect teachers and learning the most, and which have a high quality public teaching service.

My own country belatedly has recognized that it has under-estimated the importance of its teachers. A recent national enquiry by the Council on Education concluded:

"It is essential that all governments in Australia recognize that in any strengthening of Australia's schools, the quality, morale and status of teaching services will be a key, if not the most important element. The Council recommends that the Commonwealth government accords the highest priority to its policies and actions in this area."
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My third point emerges from the global challenges facing all societies at the end of this century. We are in the midst of massive economic, social, technological and political transformations as we move into what is commonly described as a knowledge-based society. Thus:

**Given the challenges facing society, teachers are being required to take on new roles and must have the knowledge, confidence and resources needed to fulfill legitimate expectations of the community. Teachers must also learn throughout life and develop new skills if they are to be effective in teaching others to learn to know, to do, to be and to live together.**

Three recent events in UNESCO's programme are particularly germane to this theme of new roles demanded of teachers and thus to Pedagogía '97. They are:


(b) the seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean held in Jamaica in May 1996, and

(c) the 45th session of the International Conference on Education held in Geneva in September 1996, which dealt with "Strengthening the Role of Teachers in a Changing World."

UNESCO is encouraging its Member States to initiate a debate involving all groups in the community on the global challenges and recommendations the Delors Report puts forward. For UNESCO, the Report is not intended as a blueprint to be followed, but as a launching pad for a democratic process of dialogue leading to a shared vision of the changes needed in education in the future.

In my view, the Delors Commission is a welcome change from the obsession with short-term and narrowly-economic analyses and the global prescriptions of neo-colonial super-powers. At last we have a report which reminds us of the deeper meanings and purposes of education. It forces us to look to the longer-term issues of individual and societal development and to consider issues seen through the eyes of many cultures. Importantly, we have a distinguished and independent International Commission which mounts a defence of public education systems and their teachers.

The Delors Commission has a vision of learning that goes well beyond formal education – learning throughout life is not merely a slogan intended to encourage access to further training but a vision of education in which we all must continue to learn throughout life and across a broad range of dimensions of human activity. The concept of lifelong learning, of teachers learning throughout life, of schools and universities as learning organizations, and of a learning society takes on a particular meaning today when patterns of life, citizenship and work are changing very rapidly indeed. We must find ways to make sure that the doors to learning, to knowledge, to formal and non-formal education are never closed.

Clearly, teachers must be models of what they advocate: they must themselves continue to learn, and must have the opportunity to do so by participating in events such as Pedagogía '97. Certainly as this Conference demonstrates, many teachers in this region are committed to their own professional development, and are prepared to make financial sacrifices to do so. And so I must salute you for the commitment you are showing to your own learning, while calling on governments and development agencies to also play their part in making professional growth opportunities, such as this Conference, possible.
Keeping in mind the global challenges facing us, the Commission proposed a broad definition of the foundations of education, suggesting that it be constructed around four pillars — **learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be**.

In the 21st Century, learning to live together is the greatest challenge. We must want to understand each other, to live together in mutual respect, to work in teams, to resolve our differences in peaceful ways — or perish. If we wish, through education, to learn to live together, we must reflect on the way in which history, geography, languages and civics are taught, and our policies of inclusion and exclusion from schooling, higher education, training and employment.

Learning to live together is not easy. We are under global pressure towards greater and greater economic competition, and have a rapidly changing and uncertain labour market within each local community. Thus, there are both global and local tensions in the struggle to survive. In order to participate in a global society we must better understand our roots. At the same time, we must be capable of living together in the communities to which we naturally belong, in harmony with the neighbours with whom we may or may not share a common language, history, religion or worldview.

Today, the vast majority of conflicts are within, rather than between countries. We have not succeeded in learning to live together. We live in a world in which the wants of the individual and the greed of the rich and powerful are destroying the social fabric of many communities and the cultures of many marginalized groups. Basic social institutions such as the family, the Church and the community are under threat. Global problems such as drug abuse, the arms trade, child prostitution and violence increasingly invade our shores.

For the Delors Commission, teachers have a crucial role to play in both protecting and developing cultures while at the same time systematically educating for social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Teachers have a central role in creating a culture of peace through education. As teachers, we must ourselves co-operate, share our teaching materials, research and work together if we are to be more successful than we have been to date in facing this challenge.

To help teachers in their efforts to promote inter-cultural understanding, to find effective ways of teaching tolerance and to live together, UNESCO is promoting grass-roots co-operation among schools through its Associated Schools Project, among technical colleges through the UNEVOC project, among universities through its UNITWIN and UNESCO Chairs programme, and among researchers and teacher educators through its regional networks. We are also developing resource materials, teaching guides and kits in most areas of the curriculum. If you are not already part of these co-operative ventures, please contact your local UNESCO National Commission or office.

Learning to be is the title and principle theme of the Faure Commission, which reported to UNESCO twenty-five years ago. This noble concept is just as vital today as it was then — we must encourage the fullest development of the creative potential of each individual, in all its richness and complexity. In the words of one member of the Commission, education is first of all an inner journey, that leads to the construction of one's personality. Education for M. Germain and Albert Camus was far more than conveying information — it was about this inner awakening, about learning to think critically and creatively, about the actualization of individual talents and potential.

Learning to know today means more than acquiring a specific body of knowledge, but also an approach to learning itself, while learning to do means more than just skills but also the application of knowledge in new situations, and the linking of learning with doing throughout life. For we do not know what knowledge will be of
most value in the future. Thus, we need to build a broad base of knowledge and skills and create a love of learning and a fearless dedication to the pursuit of truth which will ensure that our students continue to learn throughout life.

We live in a knowledge-based society, one in which the new information technologies are destined to change the ways in which we access and process information and communicate, and thus the ways in which we learn to know and to do. UNESCO has been actively promoting reflection on how best to use the new technologies to reach the unreached and on how to avert the creation of information subways. This was one of the issues highlighted at the International Conference on the Role of Teachers and a World Conference on Education and Informatics organized by UNESCO in Moscow last July.

We have established a UNESCO website especially for education and are working with education NGOs to promote the sharing of ideas and materials among the world's teachers. I believe that in the future we will begin to learn to distinguish between good and poor educational software and to learn how best to use the new technologies to facilitate learning to know, and to a certain extent, learning to do. The question, however, is one of having both good teachers and good educational software, not one or the other. We must undertake research and development programmes on how best to use the new technologies to give teachers more time to devote to challenges of promoting learning to be and learning to live together – after all, these are essentially human tasks, demanding an outstanding teacher like M. Germain. They can never be done by a machine.

Many fundamental changes in the role of teachers are needed if they are to fulfil their mission in preparing young people for the future. To be sure, the community has high, even if often unrealistic expectations of its teachers and schools. We will be held accountable by the communities which support us and depend on us to help their children to learn to know, to do, to be, and to live together. Our commitment as educators to ensuring quality and high standards within our own profession is crucial to improving quality in education and ensuring that we play the new roles expected of us. In this region, these expectations were clearly laid out in the recommendations of MINEDLAC VII. As time is pressing, and as you have a copy of this report in your conference materials, I will not elaborate other than to refer you to Recommendations 30 to 33 on performance-linked professional upgrading of teachers. Similarly, the recent International Conference on Education sets about the task of rehabilitating the nobility of the teaching profession by enhancing the status, roles and training of teachers, including the need to take advantage of the possibilities offered by new methods of communication.

My final point is that teachers have a crucial role to play in not only the execution of any educational reform designed to help societies prepare for the future, they must be intimately involved in the conception and design of reforms from the outset. As the MINEDLAC conference insists, the reform of education must be a democratic process involving all of the stakeholders in the process and outcomes of education. I know of no educational reform which has succeeded without the intimate involvement of teachers from the outset. And so-called educational reform cannot claim to be a truly educational reform if it does not make a positive difference where it counts – in the classroom.

In conclusion, let me finish by reiterating the key points I have tried to make:

1. Education and teachers are of crucial importance in preparing young people and societies for the future.

2. Education is strongest in those societies which value and support their teachers and public education systems.

3. Teachers must take on new roles and responsibilities: they must be lifelong learners and help others to learn to know, to do, to be and, especially, to learn to live together.
4. Teachers must be intimately involved from the outset in the design of educational reforms, as well as in their implementation.

Last year was the 30th anniversary of the 1966 UNESCO-ILO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers. Hence, the theme of the International Conference and our concern about improving the status and morale of teachers, and the recruitment, pre-service and in-service training of teachers. And our concern about promoting solidarity and grass-roots co-operation among teachers and schools. One of the best grass-roots movements of UNESCO is our Associated Schools Project. It links about 3,600 schools from 130 countries in a project designed to promote international understanding. Last year we asked the children from these schools what makes a good teacher. I was moved to see the deep respect and real affection children all around the world have for their teachers. As one 11 year-old from Mexico said:

"The teacher is to students what rain is to the field."

And for a 10 year-old from Portugal:

"A good teacher not only gives lessons, but much more than that, she gives us new ideas and explains to us our doubts."

Yes, good teachers do make a difference. But to make a difference, they need the support of their colleagues and the community. They must have the necessary tools to fulfil their mission. So this year, we want to make International Teacher's Day, October 5th, a day where teachers demonstrate in concrete ways their solidarity for brothers and sisters in difficult situations. Can you help us to ensure that on October 5th this year, the message that teachers make the difference is heard by the media and decision makers in your country? Can we not begin to collect materials to send to our brothers and sisters in need on October 5th? Can we not inform the world of the real situation in classrooms and education systems in which the conditions needed for learning are totally inadequate?

In the 12th century, the Persian poet Saddi wrote:

"You who remain indifferent to the burden and pain of others do not deserve to be called human."

The 6,300 teachers at Pedagogía are human: you are here because you care about your students, you care about education and you care about your brothers and sisters working in difficult circumstances. Join us in creating a worldwide movement in support of teachers in difficult circumstances. As is said in the sacred book of the Maya *Popol Vuh*:

"Que no sean ni uno dos ni tres. Que todos se levanten. Que nadie se quede atrás". "Let it not be two or three. Let all rise. Let no one be left behind."
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

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1967-1977 University of Queensland. Senior Lecturer in Education.

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