Address by
His Excellency Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Sameh Amr
Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of
Egypt to UNESCO

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Mr Mayor,

It is a great privilege and honour for me to take the floor on the occasion of this major event celebrating the 80th birthday of Mr Federico Mayor.

The selected theme for this Symposium reflects well the noble goals of UNESCO and its mandate which is more relevant than ever.

I take this opportunity to salute you not only as the eminent scientist, or as the universally respected statesman or the former Director-General of UNESCO, but also and above all I wish to salute you as the untiring defender of the ideals and the moral principles of this great institution of ours!

While I personally did not have the privilege of collaborating with you while you were leading UNESCO I am still convinced that we collectively benefit from the legacy you left in building our Organization into the well-respected institution it is today!

For twelve years, from 1987 to 1999, as UNESCO’s Director-General you steadfastly piloted UNESCO through difficult and challenging times.

The former Chairpersons of the Executive Board – on whose memory I am duty bound to recall – were conclusive in their description of you “passionate in your work”, with “a determination and devotion to duty”.

Each and every one shared the similar views about you, Don Federico, the ‘humanist’. That you believe in the fundamental good of human beings; through your “intellectual energy” and your “enthusiasm and optimism” you believed in the tenants of our Constitution and you carried the flag for our Organization wherever you went.

Of all the United Nations specialized agencies, UNESCO is that agency above all others with a Humanist agenda one for which you laid the foundation stone, and one which today we still collectively strive to achieve.
Through your leadership, you managed to translate the convictions of our Founders and to lay the foundations which have steadily built the reputation UNESCO has today as a "Soft Power" leader, notably as concerns the fostering of an education for all, especially within the E-9 initiative, the promotion of intercultural understanding, the free dissemination of information, the building of knowledge societies, as well as the ethical use of science and technology ...

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

What we can admire most about Mr Mayor’s tenure as Director-General, is that through his diligence and statecraft he brought the Culture of Peace to the forefront of the international development agenda. Indeed it was he who said time and time again "There will be no development without peace, and no peace without development." This statement rings true even today.

From Yamoussoukro to Barcelona, and from Zanzibar to Panama – meeting after meeting, action after action, and “with the patience of an architect and the craftsmanship of a master-builder”, to quote Mr Chetsanga, slowly and surely Federico Mayor spread UNESCO’s endeavour for peace in the minds of men and women. He successfully translated our Constitution calling on “the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” to establish a peace based on “dignity, equality and mutual respect” into practical action in all fields of UNESCO’s competence.

Dear Mr Mayor,

The end of your mandate in 1999, after a brilliant and illustrious career at UNESCO, did not put an end to your relentless efforts to build peace and contribute to the international debate on this and other central topics, namely through your Foundation “Culture de Paz”.

In 2005, you were designated Co-President for the UN High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations, by Kofi Annan, the then United Nations Secretary-General and more recently, in 2011, you were appointed as the President of the International Commission for the Abolition of the Death Penalty. I cannot but share with you all my sincere admiration for your energy and commitment to such causes.

“Mañana siempre es tarde”, was the title of your book, published in 1987. *Tomorrow Is Always Too Late! This should be added to UNESCO’s logo so as to be duly remembered by both members of the Secretariat and Member States.*

*Time proves you right. Nowadays more than ever, we need to act today, Ladies and Gentlemen, tomorrow is and will always be too late!*

Don Federico, in the name of all members of the Executive Board and in my own name, allow me to wish you a very Happy Birthday. (feliz cumpleaños).

Gracias!