

## Message from the Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of World Science Day for Peace and Development

- 10 November 2003 -



The greatest challenge of our time is to create a world where all citizens live in dignity and peace in a hospitable environment that they have learnt to care for. Achieving this will require political will, public support and science. In celebrating World Science Day for Peace and Development 2003, we place particular focus on the role of science, calling attention to the positive attributes and beneficial consequences of scientific research and knowledge.

However, while we continue to marvel at new scientific discoveries and enjoy the benefits of innovative technological developments grounded upon scientific advances, there is a growing unease about science and mounting concern about its adverse consequences. In some quarters, these misgivings have turned into distrust and opposition, reactions which are worrying because they may erode the foundations of public support for science. That support, which is inseparable from public confidence in science and scientists, can no longer be taken for

. Today, therefore, the case for science needs to be re-made, in terms that are convincing to a general public less and less deferential towards the pure intentions of scientists or their greater wisdom. Nor can the case for science rest on past achievements or on promises of future benefits taken on trust. Science will increasingly need to justify itself anew in the knowledge that its evidence and arguments may be subjected to critical scrutiny by a more skeptical public.

Scientists should welcome these developments, especially when they are associated with the proper functioning of democratic processes. At the same time, scientists should work hard at educating policy-makers, opinion-shapers and the general public about science - its purposes, its principles, its methods, its critical and questioning spirit, and its many accomplishments. In this perspective, science education should address not only education in science but also education for and about science, taking the more troubling and contentious issues confronting us into active consideration.

Scientists must become better communicators but this is not just about sending out clear, accurate and relevant messages about science. It is also about listening to the interaction between science and society as well as recognizing the failures and dangers of scientific activities - the days of an automatic equation of "scientific development" with "human progress" are long past. Consequently, the education and training of scientists, which should be considered lifelong in character, must include the ethical, social and political dimensions of scientific activity.

While science is recognized as contributing to some of the problems and looming crises facing our world, this does not mean that viable solutions can leave science out of account. The design of realistic solutions must be undertaken with science, not against it. We need the contribution of science, for example, to analyse the extent to which human activities are responsible for climate change, environmental degradation and other worrying phenomena. And it is scientists and engineers who will help us to prepare for tomorrow's complex problems.

Science must be mobilized globally to address the enormous problems related to public health, agricultural productivity, environmental degradation and poverty. This will require addressing the very real disparities between the developed and developing countries when it comes to producing scientific knowledge and using this knowledge for social and economic benefit. Closing this knowledge gap will require, inter alia, finding solutions to the unceasing exodus of scientific brainpower to the rich countries of the North.

Closing the scientific knowledge gap also requires North-South and South-South partnerships between scientists, institutions and governments. Science is a shared enterprise. The pace of scientific progress and the interrelations between global problems require teamwork and networking. Consequently, national and international partnership and collaboration between scientific institutions, academia, NGOs and other sectors and disciplines are essential.

World Science Day for Peace and Development is an occasion for UNESCO to reaffirm the vision of scientific research as promoting the economic, social and cultural development of nations and peoples and fostering the prospects for peace and a sustainable future. Let us all commit ourselves to working together for greater solidarity in the sharing of scientific knowledge. Without global science, there can be no sustainable development; without sustainable development, there can be no global peace.

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