The World Conference on Science in June 1999 sought to strengthen the ties between science and society. As the incoming Director-General of UNESCO and President of ICSU, we should like to pay tribute to our respective predecessors, Federico Mayor and Werner Arber, for this ambitious endeavour.

The Conference came in response to a dilemma: public support for science appears to be wavering and yet scientific research and technological development have become more necessary than ever to solve some of the most pressing problems facing humankind. This situation calls for a new commitment - a new social contract - whereby scientists pledge to be responsive to these needs and governments pledge support for research.

This commitment appears clearly in the two key documents adopted by the Conference. We believe they will prove to be precious tools in the years to come for all stakeholders committed to seeing science harnessed more effectively for the promotion of human well-being and sustainable development. For our part, we pledge our own personal commitment and that of our respective organizations to fostering wide implementation of the Conference recommendations.

UNESCO and ICSU will continue to assume their complementary roles as catalysts of this new commitment. Mobilization first requires widespread dissemination of information. The outcome of the Conference, including the publication of the present Proceedings, will be transmitted via our respective networks. UNESCO, with its national commissions and field offices, not to mention its close ties with sister organizations of the United Nations system, is rightly proud of its extensive intergovernmental network and of its important relays at the grass-roots level through ties with hundreds of non-governmental organizations around the world. ICSU links hundreds of thousands of scientists worldwide through scientific academies and research councils, scientific unions and associates and is thus representative of the world scientific community.

Time will tell if the World Conference on Science has succeeded in its aim of fostering closer mutual ties between the scientific community and society at large. A better awareness of each other's needs and expectations should translate in the next decade into a myriad of concrete initiatives. We hope these will include the orientation of science towards sustainable human development and the better management of the environment. We also hope to see greater funding of science education and public research, and more frequent recourse by scientists to communication through non-specialist media.

Initiatives reflecting this new commitment need not be top-down. Rather than waiting for national policy changes, for example, it is hoped that the practitioners of science will launch initiatives themselves in teaching and research, which should then attract government support.

The Budapest Conference has already triggered a number of new projects and partnerships. We expect there to be a multiplier effect over the next few years. UNESCO and ICSU will monitor progress in the implementation of follow-up - as they were asked to do in the Conference recommendations - including a joint analysis of the first outcomes to be completed by the end of 2001. We are counting on all the stakeholders in science to make that a very full report.