

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Federico Mayor

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the closure of the
Second World Climate Conference

Geneva, 7 November 1990

Distinguished Prime Minister and
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Executive Heads of the Organizations sponsoring the Second World Climate Conference, I have the pleasure and privilege of saying a few concluding remarks to you during this closing session.

Let me first of all express the great satisfaction which we, as sponsors of this Conference, feel at this moment of the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration. I wish to express also our deep gratitude to all delegations, as you have all contributed to make this Conference a significant step forward, as well as to all the scientists and other experts who have worked so hard during the scientific and technical sessions of the Conference last week and during the negotiations and discussions of the ministerial delegations in more recent days. We know that some of you would have liked the Ministerial Declaration to go beyond the consensus views and recommendations as regards the need to stabilize emissions of greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer; and as regards the necessary second step of achieving reductions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions. However, on such a global issue, solutions need to be found through globally concerted action. Globally, consensus can only be achieved through a process of debating the issues without fear or favour - with realistic prognosis and remedy as our only concerns. I believe this Ministerial Meeting and the Conference as a whole has been an important milestone in this process.

There are three streams of international activity which deserve your full support and the continuing support of the sponsoring organizations in their different capacities:

- (1) increased efforts in the area of global measurement and research designed to reduce scientific uncertainties;
- (2) the continuation of the International Panel on Climate Change in order to support the negotiation of, and provide inputs into, a Convention;
- (3) the development of a Convention on Climate Change.

We in UNESCO and IOC are most concerned by the priority areas for scientific activities as identified in the scientific Conference Statement. We are committed to contributing to the World Climate Programme and to the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme. We will also strengthen related international scientific activities within the programmes of UNESCO and IOC. The IOC's role will be crucial in the establishment of a global ocean observing system as part of the Global Climate Observing System.

There was agreement in the scientific and technical sessions in recommending to you and to all governments that the relevant international observations and research programmes be implemented in full. Increased national support for, and substantially increased funding of, these programmes is required if progress on the necessary time-scale is to be made in reducing the present gaps in knowledge.

A second area of investment needed relates to the technically feasible and cost-effective opportunities that already exist to reduce CO₂ and other gas emissions in all countries. Notwithstanding the scientific and economic questions requiring further clarification, nations should take immediate actions to control the risks of climate change, with initial emphasis on actions that would be particularly beneficial and are particularly urgent for other reasons as well.

Developing countries are being asked to participate in the alleviation of the environmental damage inherited from previous industrialization. In order to enable them to participate in this global action, developing countries must be assisted in various ways. First, developing countries - particularly the most vulnerable ones - should be helped to build up their scientific and technical capacities. A major training programme will be needed, as well as financial support for the creation of relevant institutional capacities. Second, there is a need for increased transfer of technology. Developing countries must be helped to 'leapfrog' ahead directly from a status of underdevelopment through to efficient, environmentally benign technologies.

People in industrialized and developing countries alike need better information and education on the crucial role climate plays in development and the additional risks posed by climate change.

Mr Chairman,

Climate change is one of a number of global problems confronting humanity - others including poverty, illiteracy and the risk of war. Moreover, these major problems are - as we know - interlinked. Such interlinkages will be the focus of the more comprehensive United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in 1992. We must work - all together, synergically - to ensure that the time between now and the 1992 Conference is used to achieve a consensus among the nations of the world on the need for the international community to make a solemn commitment in Rio de Janeiro to redressing the present situation and trends in environment and development.

This part of the speech was pronounced in Spanish.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,
Colleagues,

Any initial step, however timid, is of crucial importance because on it depends the direction of the whole journey. Despite the extreme caution which still characterizes the agreements reached, it is clear that great strides have been made during the past few months and that the prospects are good. The decisions which have been adopted and those which are shortly to be adopted by governments require two major ingredients: knowledge and public awareness. I shall not stress the importance of scientific rigour nor the gratitude we owe to all those who, sometimes working in difficult circumstances, have made

their tiny contribution to the heritage of world knowledge, but I do not wish to leave out all the organizations and associations of all kinds which, demonstrating their concern for the environment in the most varied ways, have contributed to the creation and strengthening of public opinion.

Mr Chairman,

In a number of countries where the population growth is the most rapid, young people make up 50 per cent of the population. It is they, it is the coming generations, to whom our thoughts, discussions and decisions are mainly directed. Given the possibility of the production of irreversible changes in the quality of the biosphere not only by natural catastrophes and events but also as a result of human activity, a new facet of human rights is emerging, namely, the rights and responsibilities of future generations, and the rights and responsibilities existing between generations.

The legacy that we inherited from our forebears and that we must pass on to future generations has many different strands - cultural, natural and intellectual - and is a legacy of values and principles. To guarantee that our present has a common future, it is essential to safeguard the future of our common past.

To the deterioration of the environment, to ignorance and types of behaviour and habits which adversely affect the quality of the biosphere, there can only be one response: invest in research and education, invest in a future with more freedom and justice. This investment should constitute a genuine bid for a future with greater sharing, secure more active participation by each and every person and lead to an awareness which is genuine, profound and devoid of élitism. And these investments - as you can see, I say investments and not expenses - must be made without conditions. May I say quite clearly: democracy and respect for human rights will be the result of solidarity and not its prerequisite. I employ the word solidarity because I would rather our actions still retained the moral weight which should guide them, and not be merely the result of an emergency strategy to face a common threat.

Mr Chairman,

We are accustomed to paying the price of war, but not the price of peace. We shall have to make great efforts in order to face the new threats to world security with the same industriousness and resources that we have learned, throughout the centuries, to use in warfare. These efforts should be made clear-sightedly and fully. The new threats require a very substantial change in our policies, institutions and procedures.

Let me also say here, at the end of the Second World Climate Conference, that the United Nations bodies involved take pride in having offered another example of the capacity of the organizations of the United Nations system to work together as well as in partnership with the international scientific community represented by the International Council of Scientific Unions. An interdisciplinary approach is required in order to provide the data needed to fill the most urgent gaps and to improve our prediction capacity.

In fact, this partnership is indispensable in dealing with an issue which has such a major scientific dimension. Moreover, as a scientist, I cannot pass up the opportunity to say - and I know my colleagues share my view - that the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and this Conference, with its built-in links between science and policy, represent only the first steps on a long road along which scientists and world leaders will have to move together in ever closer consultation and dialogue.

The industrial NGOs have expressed their wish to become NGPs (non-governmental partners) which will imply a joint effort to effect a gradual shift from 'doing business as usual'. I am sure that we all welcome this.

Mr Chairman, on behalf of the Executive Heads of the Organizations sponsoring the Second World Climate Conference I would like to thank you all again - including of course the host country - for making this Conference an important step in the right direction. What we now need jointly is a long-sighted and courageous attitude so as to ensure that the legacy we are duty bound to pass on to future generations is not irreversibly damaged. As I said in my speech at the opening session of the Conference, 'Our descendants will not judge us on our hopes and recommendations, but on our actions'. Here and now.