

ANNEX I

Opening address by Mr Andrés G. Delich, Minister of Education of Argentina

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day to you all. It is a very great honour for me to preside over the beginning of the opening meeting of the 46th session of the International Conference on Education. I should like to begin by expressing a few thoughts.

Introduction

In recent decades the world has undergone profound and increasingly rapid changes that have affected in irreversible fashion the lives of individuals and countries. As never before in history, the process of economic globalization, the development of communications and population mobility have interlinked the destiny of our societies. This new human condition confronts us with the challenge of reinventing ways whereby all the countries, cultures and inhabitants of the planet are able to live together.

The focus of this 46th session of the International Conference on Education could not be more appropriate and timely. This meeting of education officials from all over the world affords us the opportunity once more to learn with others and to exchange experiences in the context of international cooperation.

We have come together to discuss and agree on how schools and education systems can contribute to the improvement of human coexistence in the twenty-first century. We believe in the transforming power of education. This is why we are here. But it must be said that we are aware of the enormous difficulties and obstacles facing the development of an educational project for coexistence in a world divided by the growing distance between regions and countries.

Inequalities, interdependence and multiculturality

The gaps between rich and poor countries seem to have become unbridgeable gulfs. The average income of the richest countries was 11 times higher than that of the poorest countries in 1913, 35 times higher in 1950, 44 in 1973 and 72 in 1993. The richest 5% of humanity earns 85% of the world income, while the poorest 5% shares 1%. The total wealth of the poorest one thousand million human beings is equal to that of the one hundred richest.

The accelerated transnationalization of economic flows has increased wealth production. It has also caused wealth to be concentrated in a few regions of the world and to be enjoyed only by a small minority of humanity. We have entered the third millennium and millions of people are dying each year from hunger, diseases of social origin or armed conflict among or within countries.

The external debt has become a very difficult obstacle to overcome for many countries with a low or medium level of development. As you know, my country is facing a complex situation arising from the burden of the high interests on its debt and the difficulties experienced in selling its products to countries that strongly protect their markets while exerting pressure for more open trade on politically less powerful and economically less developed nations.

Human development is consensually defined as the process of broadening people's options. But if they do not have those basic opportunities, many other opportunities become unavailable. In countries and continents like mine, which are marked by profound inequalities in life opportunities,

education has not yet become a right for everyone. Every boy and girl born today in one of the poor population groups of Latin America, Africa, Asia or other continents has few chances of gaining access to adequate education and is very likely not to find work that would make it possible to live in dignity or dream of a better future.

Education is a basic tool in building a more just and humane future. But progress in achieving peaceful coexistence will be difficult if the growing inequalities in economic development continue unchanged.

How is it possible to live together peacefully in a world in which inequalities plunge entire nations into despair? In the absence of a more rational pattern of consumption and a fairer distribution of wealth it will be very difficult to educate for living together. If the extreme utopia of freedom that finds expression in the global economy is not counterbalanced by policies of justice, equity and fraternity, there will be no true coexistence. The fact is that the freedom of action of a minority has been growing at the cost of the right of the majority of humanity to a decent life.

The rapid expansion of communication networks is bringing events that were previously regarded as distant and remote to every corner of the world. These processes are pushing societies in two opposing directions, accentuating simultaneously the trend towards the international standardization of lifestyles and the quest for a community specificity that reinforces local and regional identities and sets itself apart from others, perceived as sources of threat or danger. The disappearance of old lifestyles causes anxiety and a deep sense of loss. Today there is no lack of examples of forms of nationalism that encourage extreme political separatism or incomprehensible genocides in the name of ethnic cleansing. We must work to overcome ethnic and religious fundamentalism, state fundamentalism and market fundamentalism. If we aim to live genuinely together, we must realise that the problems of humanity cannot be solved by closing physical and cultural borders – much less by seclusion or indifference to the poor or those excluded by the new world order.

It is certainly the case that signs of disquiet and impatience abound. Societies have sensed that a linear projection of current trends does not augur well for a happy or peaceful future.

The role of education

In view of the growing tendency for the social bond to be replaced by individualistic impulses, learning to live together is one of the main tasks of education today.

We must conceive and promote new forms of building the future of societies through education. The challenge facing this Conference is precisely to reflect on the contribution of education to human coexistence at the turn of the twenty-first century. The question that we must consider is whether the schools in each of our countries are helping to prepare the rising generations to live together in the twenty-first century. I should like to make three points in this connection.

1. Educational inclusion policies must be strengthened and transformed, particularly in the developing world

It is clear that there will be no significant advances in human coexistence worldwide if there is not a massive increase in social, economic and educational opportunities for the most disadvantaged population groups in the next few years. Ensuring that all children and young people have access to and remain in basic education should be the first priority of the less developed countries. If people's right to adequate educational opportunities is not guaranteed, it could be a

pointless exercise to think about educational strategies for living together in the twenty-first century.

This priority has been identified as a global imperative for more than three decades now. It found expression in the pledges made at the Jomtien Conference, among other fora. But while educational coverage continues to expand, the proposed goals are still very largely unmet: the dark areas on the map of basic education provision coincide with the geography of extreme poverty, economic underdevelopment and social inequity.

At the same time, in recent years, reforms have emphasized the idea that education systems must make progress in developing policies to improve quality. This goal, which is necessary to adapt education systems to today's challenges, has in many cases entailed a shift in the focus of attention on the inclusion of the poorest.

Our education systems are faced with a set of highly complex tensions. The priority of catering for those who have the fewest basic education opportunities comes into conflict with other economic, political and social requirements in most developing countries. Our countries need highly qualified staff; they also need to create a body of informed, active and responsible citizens. The demand for resources to finance the universal provision of basic education has to be set against the investment needed for specialized training linked to the world market and to systems of innovation, science and technology.

How can the tension between equity and competitiveness and between social inclusion and the strengthening of sectors with the highest growth potential be resolved? In the first decade of the twenty-first century, education systems will have to show flexibility in order to find trade-offs and strike balances between these two demands.

Countries with a medium and low level of economic development experience great difficulties in ensuring the universal provision of quality basic education while adopting the same parameters and the same strategies as the main developed countries. The costs are difficult to sustain and, despite the efforts made, the results are not at all encouraging. Efforts to promote educational inclusion must therefore be accompanied by alternatives to traditional schooling, making use of community resources and energies, open and flexible methods and a variety of technologies, methods and materials. A great deal of experience has been gained over the last few decades, but national policies have not acted with sufficient conviction upon the lessons learnt in this domain. It seems clear, however, that the less developed countries' policies to promote inclusion and increase opportunities in basic education should pay closer and more systematic attention to the school system's non-traditional institutional resources and technologies.

2. We must promote systematic human rights education and its reestablishment in each country and culture

Human rights provide a very important normative foundation for education for living together. They constitute the basic reference in the promotion of education in and for human coexistence at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The sphere of influence and normative force of human rights have increased considerably in the last few years. This reflects a change in the sensibility of societies compared with the confrontational styles that prevailed even a few decades ago. However, alongside the victory of these ideas, there is some scepticism or weariness regarding the chances of achieving their effective realization.

We must look at this process in its historical perspective. In the last part of the twentieth century, we have made great strides in building international agreements and consensus about what we consider valuable and what we consider unacceptable for humankind. The human rights tradition is based on the belief that over and above distinctive characteristics, people from different countries and cultures are capable of sharing basic values and of agreeing on a few common commitments.

The universality or specificity of human rights has been much discussed. No one holds the monopoly over the interpretation of cultures and values. We must understand that human rights are one of the traditions that we have devised in order to communicate with each other and debate on a core of ethical issues that affect all human beings. Alongside this tradition in the process of construction, different cultures and ways of seeing the world can coexist and dialogue.

Human rights education should be a priority at all levels of education. Education should promote new ways of understanding and cultivating human rights. While substantial progress has been made, this priority needs to be reflected in curricula and in the training of teachers and educational leaders in every country. One of the goals of this conference should be to conceive clear commitments in this regard.

3. We need to define the outlines of a global education based on knowledge of diversity, dialogue and cultural mixing

We human beings tend to overrate the qualities of the groups and cultures to which we belong, and to nurture prejudice against the others. Will it be possible to design a form of education enabling conflicts to be avoided or resolved in a peaceful manner, by promoting knowledge of others, their culture and spirituality.

The main problem is that the education systems within which education for living together must be provided have historically been based on the glorification of the national culture. They are nearly always based on principles that stem from beliefs that prevailed before the planetary era. In the school systems of many countries, there are still substantial problems regarding the ideas that are taught. Racial prejudice, neo-colonialist visions, one-sided conceptions of science and knowledge continue to be presented to the young generations, impeding awareness of the basic unity of the world around them.

In the last few decades educational policies based on the premise/postulate of a homogeneous national culture have been subjected to critical review, which has given rise to the expression of cultural diversity in schools. However, our schools today are still very limited instruments for promoting the new model of thought that is now required to enable humanity to coexist in peace.

Education in the twenty-first century has a twofold mission: to teach about diversity and the problems of the human species and to help to raise awareness of the similarities and interdependence that exist among all human beings. If the young are taught to adopt other people's point of view, misunderstandings that could lead to hatred and violence in adults can be avoided. But is it merely a question of inculcating feelings of tolerance? Will this be sufficient to overcome the brute force of indifference?

How much time is devoted in schools to learning about and interacting with the realities of other social groups, cultures or countries? Through schools we must cultivate the idea that the peaceful survival of humanity depends on the promotion of global sensibility and knowledge. To educate people to live together, it is necessary to bring about a reform of the way in which schools represent the world and the destiny of the peoples that inhabit the planet.

It is an immense but inescapable task. The development of the peaceful coexistence of humanity demands that we reconstruct the core of moral education. And this core cannot be based only on the cultivation of fine feelings: it must touch upon the structuring of scientific knowledge and the aesthetic, social and philosophical experience that schools promote.

Perhaps the greatest cause for concern is not what is taught but what is not taught. Throughout the world emphasis is being laid once more on the school's role in the development of moral values. But can one value, cooperate and coexist with someone one does not know? If the realities are not known, affections cannot be cultivated. There is no feeling of cooperation or fraternity that can grow when tended by the hand of ignorance.

In the last few decades the need to reflect on cultural diversity has become obvious in a world in which strong manifestations of the tendency to extol the local culture exists alongside one another and are sometimes accompanied by a dangerous rejection of those who think and act differently or possess different cultural values. Peaceful coexistence in tomorrow's world will only be possible if we can build shared values founded on the celebration of our differences.

The significance of this conference

The three ideas that I have put forward concerning the role of education for living together in the twenty-first century point to the need to reaffirm the principles and objectives recognized by the international community and at the same time to re-evaluate the strategies and instruments that we use for achieving them.

From the global standpoint, we do not lack the intellectual, technical or economic resources for addressing the problems. But only intellectual cooperation, renewed in spirit and endowed with greater resources, will be able to generate the instruments that we need. Sustained and resolute action by the international community, States, non-governmental organizations, groups and individuals all over the world are the means to secure the basic conditions for the full development of harmonious relationships on the part of each human being. Through cooperation we can transform the globalization of problems into a mobilization of educational energies worldwide.

Institutionalized education has a key role to play in building human coexistence. But we should not deceive ourselves. Bringing about the necessary conditions for living together in tomorrow's world does not depend only or mainly on education.

The human species is a large and diverse family. Differences of race and religion, nationality and ideology, gender and sexual preference, economic and social position must be rethought in terms of that fundamental unity. Will we be able to direct our educational efforts along this path?

We share the earth, we share development. That is the basis on which education will be able to make its contribution to living together in the twenty-first century. Today we are being given a new opportunity. Our task is to turn it to account.

Thank you.