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Third Philosophy Day at UNESCO

Address by
Ambassador Hans-Heinrich Wrede
Chairman of the Executive Board

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Good morning!

Let me express to you my gratitude for the invitation to participate in the opening of Philosophy Day. I would like to make just seven short remarks :

- (1) The first remark is the most important one : thank you for Philosophy Day! Thank you for organizing this event, offering us a real “embarras de choix et de richesses”. I am sure you all agree that Mr. Sane and his collaborators have again organized a most attractive programme, displaying the broad spectrum and diversity of philosophical views and perspectives.
- (2) Before I came here, I was reminded of the following questions to answer in order to make a conference successful :
 - Do you know the purpose of this meeting?
 - Do you have an agenda?
 - Do you know your role?

The purpose of this Conference is clear, the agenda as well, and my very own role is limited, indeed, quite modest. Of course, I am not daring to offer you any deep philosophical insights in the presence of so many distinguished philosophers from all over the world. Although I am not sure whether so many of them are already here at his early hour. You might remember, however, Immanuel Kant always got up at 4 o'clock in the early morning.

- (3) I deeply appreciate UNESCO's involvement with philosophy. It began already in 1946 and is based on our Constitution adopted a year before in 1945. Let me recall for you the following points : The Constitution encourages international cooperation in all branches of intellectual activities. UNESCO is committed to prepare the children of the world for the responsibilities of freedom, and, thirdly, one of this Organization's truly noble, very ambitious and still ongoing mission is the “Education of Humanity for Justice and Liberty and Peace”. Accordingly, UNESCO has created a unique philosophy programme since 1946 with these four tasks :

- fostering philosophical research
- promoting education in philosophy
- establishing a forum for philosophical and intellectual debate
- stimulate philosophical reflection on global issues.

Considering today's programme, dear Friends from the Social and Human Sciences Sector : you have succeeded again in addressing these formidable tasks.

- (4) I feel privileged to be able to benefit today from the contributions by so many distinguished thinkers, representing an amazing number of different cultures and philosophical traditions. Like all of us, I look forward to the exchanges, certainly to be lively and even controversial. But I am equally sure that there will be dialogue – at the same time an aim and a means of philosophy. One of my personal philosophical “heroes”, Hans-Georg Gadamer observed : “Whoever enters into a dialogue, must be willing to accept that the other might possibly be right.” We are learning from the philosophers’ erudition, from their insights and rigid thought processes. They are grappling with questions posed already several millennia ago. Professor Gadamer actually once remarked that he only reads books that are older than 2000 years. These questions are still valid, the answers change again and again, trying to adapt to different circumstances and new realities. Of course, philosophers might not even be interested in giving final answers, otherwise they would lose their jobs. What I do hope for today, but also in general, is that philosophers do not just conduct their discourses on the highest level of esoteric professionalism. I think we have the right to require from them to contribute to the actual solution of current problems by offering their unique expertise, knowledge and insights. With Immanuel Kant , I would agree that we don’t want our

philosophers to be our rulers because, as Kant put it so succinctly : “The possession of power inevitably corrupts the free use of reason”. However, Kant also wrote – and how could I disagree with him? – that philosophers and kings should entertain an exchange, enlightening each other.

- (5) Yes, philosophy is absolutely relevant to everyday life, to global problems and certainly to UNESCO’s work as well. Edmund Burke stated it : “Politics is philosophy in action”. Indeed, philosophers have always made concrete proposals to improve society and the way we live together. They have not ignored reality. Hegel himself made the observation : “For the thinker, the newspaper is a realistic blessing in the morning”. The philosophers participating today are certainly doing this, too : they read the newspaper and get involved in public affairs as well.
- (6) We are honouring today, among other most distinguished philosophers, Jacques Derrida. In a magazine only yesterday, I read that, just a few months ago here in Paris, Jacques Derrida spoke of dreaming that another world is possible and he added : “Des milliards d’hommes et de femmes dans le monde partagent ce rêve. Lentement, avec les douleurs et les labeurs de la naissance, ils le mettront au jour, un beau jour ».
- (7) Let me conclude with my seventh and final remark. Conveniently, it is “phrase 7” of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus Logico – philosophus” : “Whereof you cannot speak, you must be silent”. In more contemporary language, that may mean what the pop stars Simon and Garfunkel used to sing : “Silence is golden!”

Thank you very much for your patience and attention, both qualities indispensable for philosophical dialogue.