

ADDRESS BY MR. JUAN VELA VALDES, MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA AND HEAD OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION TO THE 34<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE

Mr. Chairman,

The increasing commoditization of education, sciences, culture, sports, communications, and information is a distinctive and alarming feature of the current world.

More than 800 million people are illiterate and 115 million children do not attend primary school. Moreover, 850 million people go hungry every day; 1,100 million do not have access to drinking water and 2,600 million lack sanitation services. The widening gap between industrialized and developing countries together with the global environmental crisis give way to increasing South-North migratory flows and growing xenophobia and discrimination in recipient countries.

The intergovernmental debate on the recommendations made by the Panel of High-level Experts, promoter of the System-wide Coherence, is taking place within the framework of the United Nations. We believe that no reference to these recommendations should be made in the Draft of the Mid-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 of UNESCO, until the study is not completed and has obtained intergovernmental approval.

South-South cooperation is a complement to international cooperation for development and not its substitute, as pointed out in the Strategic Plan, which labels South-South cooperation as the valid alternative for the fulfilment of the basic functions of the Organization. UNESCO should develop and budget programs to create capacities in underdeveloped countries, far surpassing the role envisaged in the Strategy as a supervising agency. We see with great satisfaction the decision adopted to give priority to Africa in this period, and we

believe that the program of the Organization should be based on an approach to development which takes into consideration the grave economic and social situation in that continent, particularly concerning health.

Cuba considers it a crucial matter to condemn and put an immediate end to the disloyal practice of brain drain exercised by rich countries, since this practice deprives developing countries of talents needed to increase the well-being of our peoples. President Fidel Castro recently stated: "In the past 40 years, more than 1, 200, 000 professionals from Latin America and the Caribbean emigrated to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom."

Mr. Chairman,

It has come to our attention that neither in the Draft Program and Budget for 2008-2009 nor in the Draft Mid-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 mention is made of the activities by UNESCO in support of the Cuban literacy method *Yo Sí Puedo*, about which the 175 Meeting of the Executive Council of the Organization adopted an important Decision on its positive and efficient implementation. This recognition was enhanced by the King Sejong Award, granted by UNESCO in 2006. It is currently being used in 28 countries and more than two million people have already learned to read and write with this method.

Cuban higher education has been immersed in a process of universalization with ongoing transformations since the Revolution triumphed in 1959. With university campuses expanded to all municipalities nationwide, and with a pedagogical model that responds to the new challenges of university and life-long learning for all, Cuba --- with a population of a little over 11 million inhabitants--- shows at present an enrollment of 730, 000 undergraduates.

Cuban universities have shown their solidarity by training professionals of other nationalities, mainly from Third World countries. More than 50,000 students from 129 countries have

graduated. At present more than 30,000 young people from 118 countries are studying in Cuban universities.

The objectives of UNESCO related to science and technology should not concentrate on developing access of less developed countries to existing knowledge. It is essential to increase their capacity to generate knowledge and to transform it into goods and services of high social demand.

The Organization should support the project known as Initiative for Open Access by fostering free access to scientific publications via the Internet.

Promoting equal rights between men and women is one of UNESCO's loftiest objectives. We make a proposal that, whenever mention is made of the statement of gender equity as an objective of the Organization, an objective to reduce the development gap between regions and countries should likewise be considered and explicitly expressed. .

Mr. Chairman,

Cuba considers that the Right to Culture is essential for the well being and cultural identity of all human beings and all countries.

The intercultural dialogue is an essential constituent in the concept of the cultural policy advocated by the Cuban government. All sectors of society participate in its design and implementation. It is a political dimension directly linked to the defence of cultural diversity which, in turn, is viewed as a system of relations enhancing the social structure and the protection of our cultural identity.

Cuba does not consider that there is a one, single hegemonic model. Social cohesion implies the right of each people and country to construct, without any interference whatsoever, its own model of

socio-economic development and its own system for the political participation of its citizens.

This concept also prevails in the context of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, as shown in its Ministerial Conference on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity recently held in Teheran.

Hegemonic approaches prevail over communication practices on a global scale, as an expression of the prevailing unfair international economic order. The concentration in private hands of the ownership of the mass media, far from contributing to developing a real information democracy, restricts access of citizens to truthful information.

While lying has become an imperial practice, a pretext to initiate wars and other coercive actions, information ceases to be a citizen's right to become a weapon subordinated to the interests of economically dominant groups and the centres of imperial power. UNESCO must close ranks in the struggle for democratizing information and should continue implementing actions to favour the respectful and safe practice of journalism. Likewise, UNESCO should promote the defence of audiovisual spaces by Member States so as to ensure that their cultural identity and sovereignty are not jeopardized.

Mr. Chairman,

Cuba has been the victim of a blockade and an economic, trade, financial, and genocidal war waged by successive US administrations, all of which has seriously affected my country in every sphere of our lives for more than 47 years.

Never before has humankind been more in need of joint efforts to pool knowledge and will to attain a human sustainable development for all nations. We have to work together for the actual fulfilment of the objectives for which UNESCO was created, in the firm belief that only with greater social justice will the human race be saved.

Thank you very much.