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**Climate Change
and Arctic Sustainable Development:
scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges**

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[Opening Speech by Professor Jean Malaurie - 3 March 2009](#)

Your Highness; Director General of UNESCO , my dear friend Koïchiro Matsuura; distinguished scientists of ocean, ice, rock and air; and dear experts on the original peoples - Inuit, subarctic Native American, Sami, Yakut, Chukchi, Nenet – that have come from so far away.

Your Highness, it is my duty to express, on behalf of all delegates, joined by many observers, our deep gratitude as scientists. These words should be pronounced at the beginning of our discussions, which will certainly prove to be intense and perhaps even passionate. Your Highness, you were 3 years old when for the first time, you admired the portrait of your renowned ancestor, Albert I, explorer of the cold seas, and felt the strong desire to leave your mark in the land of eternal ice. In the style of a Medici prince, you declared yourself a friend of Arts and Sciences, many of whom are, as we all know, solitary and anxious men. Monaco, sovereign State of the Mediterranean Sea, will go down in history thanks to your contributions to the polar saga. As a friend of the environment, through the Albert II of Monaco Foundation, you are proving yourself to be a resolute defender of the rights of the native peoples of the arctic.

Mr Director General of UNESCO, I thank you for welcoming my recommendation, on my appointment as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the arctic regions (in the areas of Sciences and Culture), of the urgent need for an arctic conference putting mankind at the centre of its reflections.

On the 8th of March 2007 I inaugurated the The 4th International Polar Year in France under the patronage of the Head of State, Jacques Chirac. This took place in France the prestigious National Museum of Natural History, point of departure for so many expeditions to the Far North – that of naval Officer, Jules Dumont d'Urville, discoverer of the Adelie Land, 19 January 1840 and of the magnetic pole, which was approximately determined, or Commander Jean-Baptiste Charcot, captain of the famous Pourquoi pas? Unfortunately, however, our work that year, in privileged experimental science, somewhat neglected the peoples of the Far North and their right to be heard.

Throughout your brilliant mandate as the Director General of UNESCO you have sought to oppose ethnocentrism, and we thank you for presiding at this conference, which we all believe crucial in contributing to current conceptions of the arctic.

All peoples possess the same genius, yet at different stages of their history, and perhaps in a Shintoist spirit, you judged it important to promote work on the intangible, on the invisible, that a century of dialectical materialism had a tendency to deny. The Arctic way of thinking is completely opposed to Durkheim and Marxism, as for that matter are African, Oceanian and scholarly thought. Roger Bastide, master of Brazilian Candomblé, observes that: "Social morphology does not command nor does it explain religion, but quite the contrary, mysticism commands social structure." Who can say whether the native peoples are not the yeast of an ever evolving history of mankind? Yes, we must convince ourselves that these people of the Far North are the holders, not only of a culture, but also of a precious and fragile civilization with a unique philosophy. Therein lie treasures of thought, of art and sources of reflection on the future of our greatly threatened western civilization, which UNESCO has strongly defended and illustrated since its inception, with Julian Huxley and Rene Maheu.

I should like at the outset and in the holistic tradition of UNESCO, which brings together representatives of experimental sciences and social and political sciences in a single mandate, to recall that nothing is more damaging than the compartmentalisation of the sciences and their desire to specialise, which often generates misconceptions as they set themselves up in isolated systems and ideologies.

First example: we are in a democracy under the sway of liberalism and we all believe, after the disastrous experiences of state socialism, that free competition and laissez-faire allow those in the strongest positions to act in the interest of all, and lead the world

and peoples down a path of progress: a form of social Darwinism. I recall the terrible statement uttered by Louis St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, 8 December 1953, at the Senate, Ottawa: "Apparently, ladies and gentlemen, we have managed these vast spaces of the North since 1877, in a state of almost continuous distraction." This continuous distraction resulted in the laissez-faire granted to a monopolistic fur company, the powerful Hudson Bay Company. Its control of prices led in some sectors to the bankruptcy of companies that for whatever reason did not take part in its commercial administration and in its economic dictatorship. This laissez-faire also resulted in a lack of management in the vast North-West Territories: no state schools with education being left to confessional schools that were not at all inclined to paving the way for indigenous animist spirits to create an independent philosophy. And these grave errors occurred during decades of suffering with hunting and fishing crises caused by unpredictable environmental changes; a procession of deprivation and even famine in the postwar years up until 1958, the fatal consequences for the Inuit people of which I studied in the field for the Ministry of the North, in a Canada that was yet so rich and powerful..

Second example of misconception: In a place like Canada, which claims to be multicultural and federal, it became clear to the northern authorities that the young illiterate students of the Far North should be rapidly "Canadianized". It was considered appropriate in a modern spirit of immersion, to gather the children in boarding schools in the South, far away from their families and the government handed over responsibility for this to religious congregations. I shall not dwell on the personal tragedies that were experienced. Protests against this treatment have never stopped since that time, and that is why on 11 June 2008, the Prime Minister made this painful statement: "In over a century, Indian boarding schools have torn over 150 000 indigenous children from their families and their communities. (...) On behalf of the Government of Canada and of all Canadians, I stand before you to offer our apology to indigenous peoples for Canada's involvement in Indian boarding schools."

In the colonial history of Great Britain, France and Holland, encounters with indigenous peoples have often been unfortunate and ill-considered. Please do not imagine that I have any deliberately unpleasant thoughts towards any particular nation. We are fully aware of the prompt reactions of the great democratic nation that is Canada and we all know with what leadership, generosity and determination Ottawa established the promising self-governing territories of Nunavut and Nunavik.

Third example of misconception: it must be remembered that our conference is likely to reflect the legal and military tensions that continue to worsen at the top of the world. They are concerned with maritime law in the Arctic Ocean. Nothing would be more damaging than a Cold War in these days of a major climate crisis, and I wish to recall that the first victims of such conflicts are indigenous peoples. In 1951, during the Cold War, serious tensions occurred in Korea opposing the free world to the soviet world. Under the aegis of the United Nations, it became necessary to organize the protection of the free world at a highest latitudes. I am referring to the Dew Line. I was the only foreigner to witness one of these operations, which took place with an absolute contempt towards the peoples of the Far North of Greenland, the Inughuit that have lived in these territories from time immemorial. In June 1951, after having spent a year with the Inuit, I was in the North Star bay, north-west of Greenland, during this powerful operation, firstly by air followed by a naval force consisting of 100 ships, which resulted in the creation of a nuclear air base. The creation of such a base had not been permitted by the Inuit people of Thule who never received any authorization request, and a fifth of whose land was thereby expropriated. Thule, in the Apollonian spirit, is the land of Hyperboreans. This is one of the most sacred myths of western philosophy, from Plato to Hölderlin and Nietzsche. This mythic place was violated. The answer to this evil violation was terrible: on 29 January 1968 in very low temperatures, a B52 crashed in the middle of the polar night carrying four H-bombs, three of which were pulverised by the crash, contaminating these pristine seas forever, and one of which remains unaccounted for below the ice.

The world is facing a major threat, climate disorder: global warming is a reality, despite all the controversies; this warming is the result of human activity. If the oil and gas exploitation that is projected after the melting of sea ice is not regulated, these industrial and naval activities can only worsen the effects of global warming: accelerated melting of glaciers, universal rise of waters, tsunamis and earthquakes, always consecutive to the shocks of nature. Sovereign nations are faced with these dangers. We independent experts seek to advise governments as best we can, but it is also our duty to provide guidance to the unfortunate victims of this programmed disaster, the circumpolar peoples who live in these territories from time immemorial. We must remember that they have a say.

In this huge Arctic theatre, undoubtedly the main polar island is Greenland. Five times as large as France, it has a particular geopolitical destiny. Thanks to a wise Danish administration, over the last two and a half centuries a Greenlandic Greenland has been established, the language has been preserved and heritage protected, with well-trained executives working within an established administration employing modern means. Yes, Greenland is likely to become the first Inuit nation, and further to a recent referendum in favor of "enhanced self-governance", Greenland is clearly moving towards some form of independence. Nuuk, the capital city of Greenland, happens to be the crossroads of circumpolar peoples in terms of geography and history. And while reflecting on this, we must refer in particular to the policy followed by this young nation, which adopted a cautious and pacific postcolonial model over the last fifty years. On this occasion, I wish to salute two eminent personalities, both present at this conference: the first Prime Minister of Greenland, who negotiated the autonomy of the big island, step by step, with Copenhagen, Mr Jonathan Motzfeldt and also Mr Aqqaluk Lynge, a very dear and old friend, President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) of Greenland.

We are now in a position to better appreciate what threatens major emerging indigenous nations. The experience of Indian reserves remains in our memories. And we know also, with reference to other parts of the world, the dangers of the vagaries of financial capitalism. In the Arctic desert of ice and tundra, the last desert of our hemisphere, it becomes clear that some hope must be placed in the creative imagination of technologists to invent a green economy with advanced technologies, futuristic architectures, in short, an economy that is useful not only for the peoples of the North but for the entire universe. Undoubtedly, the sustainable development of the Arctic is one of the greatest challenges given to the United Nations, to all its partner organizations, to all the Academies of Sciences and major universities of sovereign countries such as the United States of America, Canada, the Scandinavian nations, Russia, but also the great nations of the world, such as those of the European Union, Japan and China, which should contribute to reflecting on how to allow science and technology to serve sustainable development in a futuristic spirit. Such is the challenge: develop nature, but also protect it, never forgetting traditional peoples who live in this nature, as well as the ever increasing groups of immigrants that constitute a new people of the North.

Let me mention a very original Polar Institute recently established in Uummannaq, Greenland. The Institute seeks to combine traditional hunting and fishing with the latest

technologies - computers, plant and animal biology, economics, law and film - within the training of the young elite of Greenland. It also seeks to launch a mentoring program that aims to complete the education of this young elite for six months to one year in major European countries and the United States. I also commend the Polar State Academy in St. Petersburg, established under the Presidency of Mikhail Gorbachev, on the initiative of the Academic, Dimitry Likhachev. I am one of the founders and the Honorary President for Life of 1600 students, both indigenous and Russian. While certainly not perfect, at least it exists. I also commend the University of the Arctic universities in Rovaniemi and, in Canada, the University of the Arctic. Everywhere initiatives are increasing. I must mention the intense work of the ICC commissions, the advanced investigations conducted by the Sami, by the subarctic Aboriginals of America, notably the Dene and the Cree of northern Quebec, which are a lesson for all of us. UNESCO has the enormous merit of being informed by the greatest scientists, but also by indigenous peoples in emerging countries, themselves represented by their own experts who seek by all means to convey the wishes of the one million men and women in the circumpolar north who have suffered over forty years from one of the most brutal civilizational shocks in history.

I belong to a family of free minds that never tried to conceal the dark sides of the history of western civilization. Therefore it was necessary, ladies and gentlemen, on the verge of our meeting, to identify the weaknesses and the errors of colonialism. How can we not mention the high rate of suicide that the Arctic continues to experience - one of the highest in the world - and that this shows how much teenagers crave another form of society? It is both a philosophical and political response: a categorical no. Teens in the Arctic cities are too often out of control. Alcoholism and drugs are scourges which we have to think over. However, we should not deny the great positive contributions made by the West, which through dedicated and talented administrators, have opened these societies and civilizations to thoughts of progress, advanced technology, medicine and all the advantages that science may provide. We must identify what has proved positive in the administration of these peoples and reflect together on what should be applied more widely.

The history of men is tragic and it is our responsibility to not make it lethal, not only for these peoples, but also us as we precipitate the destruction of nature. Every story has its cemeteries and nations are born out of tragedies. Furthermore, it is my duty to insist that just as we all agree that maintaining biodiversity is vital, and that climate control is an

overriding obligation, we must remember that multiculturalism is a matter of urgency; and that while the first issue requires positive response, and while climate protection needs a general mobilization, multiculturalism requires a double affirmation.

It all begins and ends with man, as my teacher and friend Fernand Braudel said. The peoples of the North come from a time so distant a time when they were hybrids, in symbiosis with animals and with nature, of which they are the sons; and before Darwin, they show us, through their myths, their rituals, through the metamorphoses that they experienced in their shamanism, that there is a spirit world living above us. Since prehistoric times, during his slow evolution, mankind has reflected about death and this questioning is endless. The original peoples, which our Russian friends honorably call the roots peoples, demonstrate an animist philosophy that could be summed up in the quote by Spinoza: "Nature, all of nature, nothing but nature!" But at the end of this slow evolution, they ask themselves daily: Why is man nature's project and what is the mystery behind his creation?

Everything in this modern world must contribute to an intercultural dialogue. Our museums must not be only cemeteries of so called past civilizations, but living spaces where one reflects on the philosophies and conceptions that lie at the heart of an art that astonishes the twenty-first century man. This million men and women, these fifty groups of people are alive and well and they want to enter the next century at their own pace and with their own ideas, showing their determination to participate in history. Moreover, they want to remind the West that wisdom should prevail and that they feel highly concerned by the developments of modern industry, which they often see as threatening nature's balance. These evangelized men, abused by atheist regimes, pushed around by mercantile economies, threatened by the Chernobyl cloud, like the Sami of Scandinavia, resisted, despite all opposition, against the dialectical materialism that denies the sacred, but also against religions that consider their philosophy as an expression of the ignorance of peoples lagging behind history. Let me repeat that this is all credit to UNESCO for having instigated such a vast reflection on the intangible and the invisible world.

My last words are to think of problems that could be neglected, that appear to fall outside our expertise. The first of these problems results, I believe, from history. The Arctic is no longer the scene of exploration. There was a time when scientists traveled to the pole to discover it and to study it; today, their aim is to conquer, exploit and colonize

it.

And one of the most serious problems that threatens these indigenous peoples is probably what makes these spaces so powerful: their oil and gas wealth that has created a massive immigration from the south. These areas supply large quantities of minerals, oil and gas. They lie on major future shipping routes: thanks to global warming, the northern Siberian route makes the connections shorter between major ports of western Europe such as Hamburg, Le Havre, London and Yokohama, Shanghai or Hong Kong. The same applies to the Canadian Northwest Passage, making the connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans faster. This massive immigration, already significant in Alaska, northern Scandinavia and Russia, could overwhelm the indigenous peoples, however well protected they may be by law as in Nunavut and Nunavik. What can we do? This might be, together with global warming, one of the fundamental problems our conference is confronted with.

Second problem: the political tensions. With UNESCO as the hosting organization, we belong to one of the United Nations' agencies. Men of my generation have experienced the war. While I and my comrades in the resistance fought, we fervently believed in a new chapter, after the horrors of Nazism: peace. Sweet and happy peace! Sixty-four years of miracles. We must protect it as it remains under threat. We cannot turn a blind eye to the rivalries over the Arctic Ocean that already exist between the West and East and with the question of Japan and China. We cannot disregard the tensions between sovereign states, each of which seeks the recognition of its specific rights in a written agreement, while at the same time concerned to maintain with principles of international law in the Arctic Ocean.

It is important to recall that a third force exists among the tensions between sovereign nations: Mother Earth and consequently indigenous peoples who have always been connected to nature through environment and spirituality. Yes, it is important that throughout the coming days, we take time to meditate on the dramatic dangers that threaten Mother Earth. The pride of knowledge can seriously affect terrestrial and marine balance. Nature is the supreme arbiter. It is crucial to remember that nature is our master.

Upon his return from Amazonia, during the Conference for Global Ecological Governance "Citizens of the Earth", held at the Palais de l'Élysée in Paris on 2 and 3 February 2007,

his Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople declared that Christians still had much to learn from the animist peoples. While flying over Amazonia and its forests, while preparing to travel through and fly over Greenland, he wondered about the translation of Genesis. Have the sacred words been correctly translated, not in the letter but in their hidden spirit? These Scriptures need to be rethought according to the famous Talmudic principle that consists in opposing a question to another question.

No, men are not on Earth to harness Nature, but to respect it.

Thank you.