

II. Congress of the Humanist International

Opening speech of the Humanist Forum

Dear Friends,

The Humanist Forum's objective is to study and establish its position with regards to today's global problems. From this viewpoint it is a cultural organisation, taken in the widest sense of the word, concerned with establishing structural relationships between phenomena in the fields of science, politics, art and religion. The Humanist Forum maintains that freedom of conscience and ideological absence of prejudice are the essential conditions to work on the understanding of the complex phenomena of today's world.

The Humanist Forum has, in my view, the aspiration of becoming an instrument for information, interchange and discussion amongst people and institutions belonging to the most diverse world cultures. It intends also to establish itself in permanent activity so that all relevant information may circulate amongst its members in an immediate way.

It could be asked whether other already existing institutions could carry out this task more successfully given their experience, financial affluence and their professional and technical resources. It could be thought that public and private universities and even cultural organisations within the United Nations would be able to provide the appropriate means to undertake important research to later disseminate the conclusions providing they had some value. We do not discard co-operation and interchange with a variety of institutions but we need great independence and a great freedom of judgement to formulate questions and to establish the areas of interest. This may not be so simple when working with institutions that carry their own dynamics and, of course, their ideological and material dependency.

The Humanist Forum intends to set the basis for a global discussion in the future. It cannot disqualify *a priori* the contributions made to this day by different currents of thought and action, regardless of their practical success or failure. It would be of greater interest to consider different positions and to understand that in this planetary civilisation in gestation a diversity in positions, values and lifestyles will prevail in the future in spite of the assault by currents promoting uniformity. In this respect we aspire to a universal human nation possible only in the presence of diversity. Central hegemony upon the periphery will not be possible nor will it be a system of values, or religious or ideological assumptions imposed at the expenses of the disappearance of others. Today we already see how globalisation has generated secessionist responses due to its lack of respect for the true identity of peoples and regions which could otherwise converge easily towards a real confederation of communities. It should not be imagined that economic power can make miracles. Are there also those who still believe that granting credits for development can only be done following the reform of the State, then the laws, the form of production, later on customs and social habits, some time later clothes, the diet, the religion and the thinking? This naive absolutism is finding growing difficulties in its attempt to impose itself. It is also contributing to strengthen and radicalise positions in all fields as seen in the cases of the above mentioned secessions. If, in fact, the dictatorship of money could be the way to a more fulfilling society the theme would allow more time to ponder but if only a decadent society may be achieved, meaningless for the whole and for the individual, which furthermore demands the acceptance of human involution, then the consequences will be generalised disorder and misfortune.

The Humanist Forum cannot lose sight of the guiding lines of diversity nor can it study different cultures with a vision based on zoological primitivism according to which one's own culture represents the pinnacle of a type of evolution that must be imitated by all others. Of far greater importance would be to comprehend that all cultures make a contribution to the human

construction. The Humanist Forum must establish its minimal conditions. The first one is that it cannot give participation to those currents that promote discrimination or intolerance; the second one is that it cannot give participation to those currents that promote violence as a methodology of action in order to impose their conceptions or ideals no matter how elevated they may be. Except for these limitations, there is no reason why there should be any others.

The Humanist Forum is internationalist but, does this mean that based on its universality it disqualifies what is regarded as regional or local? How could anybody be disqualified by reason of loving their people, their land, their customs, their traditions? Could we call them by the simple epithet of "nationalist", to push them aside? Loving one's own roots is also to be generous in considering the work and the suffering of previous generations. This "nationalism" only becomes distorted when one's own affirmation is done at the expense of the acknowledgement of other communities. What right would this Forum have to ignore the contributions of those who feel socialist, who pursue the ideal of achieving an egalitarian and just society? What could be rejected other than one of the many possible models where the ideal becomes deformed by the imposition of an uniformity-inducing tyranny? Why should this Forum exclude that liberal who considers that his economic model is an instrument for everybody's well being, not just for a few? Should the Forum work discriminating against believers or atheists by reason of their respective conceptions? Could the Forum sustain in good faith the superiority of some customs upon others? I believe the limitations can be none other than the two exclusively mentioned above. In any case the Forum shall express itself in terms of inclusion rather than exclusion of human diversity.

I cannot expand more in this presentation other than to mention some themes about which we all want to have a clear understanding, and for which we need to find the best practical formulae for action. These themes are, in my view: the growing racism and discrimination, the increasing intervention of supposedly peaceful organisations in the internal affairs of other countries, the manipulation of human rights as a pretext for intervention, the true state of human rights in the world, the increase in poverty in a variety of regions and different layers of opulent societies, the progressive deterioration of health and education, the action of secessionist forces, the increase in drug addiction, the increase in suicide, religious persecution and the radicalisation of religious groups, psycho-social phenomena of alteration and violence, the real dangers, dully prioritised, of environmental destruction. We would also like to have a clear perception of the de-structuring phenomenon which beginning in social and political groups ends up compromising interpersonal relationships, the integration of culture and all projects that require common action in humans groups.

I would like the organisers of the working parties to draw attention to the fact that the Forum will not require a complex organisation but rather a mechanism for contact and circulation of the information; that it will not need enormous resources to fulfil its function and that the economic issue will not be decisive for this type of organisation; that it should count on a regular informative medium in the style of a bulletin rather than a formal journal; that it should connect people and institutions that are keen to work on a common production but who are unable to do so due to long distance and , finally, that it should count on a agile body of translators. Perhaps one of the Forum's working parties may constitute itself as the world centre for Humanist Studies and this will contribute to give permanence to activities at the same time that, after setting priorities, it may establish a calendar of forthcoming tasks.

A fraternal greeting to the members of this Forum and my best wishes to all for the accomplishment of the works that begin today.