

Founding Congress of the Latin American Region

To the first Latin American Congress

Minister of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Chile; Government authorities, members of the diplomatic corps, municipal authorities, members of Human Rights Organisations and of social and political organisations; members of the committee of Humanist International, followers of the humanist parties of Europe, Russia and Asia; members of the humanist parties of America; friends:

Firstly I must give my thanks to Dr Salvatore Puledda for his kind words. I must also give my thanks for being given the opportunity to reflect on some points which may be of interest at this time of the constitution of the Latin American Council of humanist parties.

My exposition will deal with certain ideas which have already been expounded upon at the Foundational Congress of Humanist International in Florence, back in 1989, and some others at the Second International in Moscow and the Moscow Forum of 1993. In the intervening years our world has changed rapidly and it is worthwhile to re-examine some points which at this time present us with important grounds for concern.

To begin: in his message to the first congress of Humanist International, the President said: "The International has made its own, and therefore considers one of its fundamental documents, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on the 10th December 1948 by the United Nations. From that day to this, numerous violations to the dignity of the human being have been carried out all over the world. Human Rights do not have the desired universal applicability because they do not depend on the universal power of the Human being, but on the power of one element over all and if the most basic complaints about ones own government are disregarded everywhere, we can only speak today of hopes and aspirations which will have to become reality. Human Rights do not belong to the past, they are there in the future nurturing our purpose, fueling a battle which revives itself with every new violation of the destiny of man. Because of this, each complaint made in the name of Human Rights has a meaning as it shows the current powers that they are not omnipotent and that they do not have control over the future... Today's world is not organised as the humanists would like it to be organised. Today's juridical system isn't the juridical system that the humanists proclaim. But while all of this is changing, humanists must pledge their forces to better the conditions of the world in which they live."

Thus he proclaimed himself to be for the full application of human rights and for a change in the world juridical system. Moreover, he strongly espoused the world peace process, with these words: "Today's world has pressing needs and we can appreciate positive advances. How can we not support disarmament wholeheartedly ? How can we not fully justify the efforts on behalf of demilitarisation in Europe, the Caribbean, Middle East, Southeast Asia and South Africa? The progressive withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola; the cease-fire between Iran and Iraq; the reduction of aggression in Nicaragua; the beginning of talks between Palestinians and Israelites, are priorities and humanists understand them as such", he stated in the message of the 7th of January 1989 in Florence.

But between 1989 and today, the longed-for disarmament which at one point appeared imminent (remember the Reykjavik meeting), has once more simply not happened. The strategy of a few powers' maintaining a nuclear monopoly has not been successful. Straightforward disarmament has not been brought about and it has been decided instead that a fragile armed peace should be in force - thus not only has conventional war broken out again, as in the Gulf, but nuclear power has in fact been extended as has been shown by the disquieting tests in Pakistan and India which

have as their precedent the unilateral breaking-down of the nuclear moratorium with the Chinese tests, immediately followed by those of the French in Mururoa.

And so it goes on...various other countries possess non-declared arms and continue to perfect their chemical and bacterial weapons. If this proliferation carries on, terrorist arsenals will soon contain the whole paraphernalia of mass destruction which the super powers currently have in their possession. There is no other alternative but total disarmament and the complete supervision of the situation in all countries - not just a few.

Along with the concern for human rights, the necessity for a new juridical world order and the problem of disarmament, in that first congress we were alerted to the growth of misery and injustice in vast areas of our planet. Special mention was made of the global interrelation of countries, and injustice was considered to be a cause for insecurity for all of us, even those who are lulled into a false sense of their own security. We were told:

" What real efforts can be made to avoid the death by starvation of millions of human beings in Africa and certain parts of Asia? What and how great are the real recourses that can be mobilised to get rid of a suffocating and potentially explosive debt in Latin America? In what proportion is necessary technology reaching areas which lack development? What real measures can be taken to assure that terms of trade between North and South America do not deteriorate from day to day? However we do it, answering these questions inevitably involves some elements of effrontery or mockery. But one thing that is clear today is that we are only one world, there are no areas which are cut off from the whole and that a catastrophe in one part of the world will have repercussions on others. That is why, if we try to raise the level of less favoured areas it will not merely be for reasons of solidarity but for the survival of human life".

By the 2nd Congress of 1993 a change of tone had taken place. This was certainly not because the concerns outlined previously had gone away but, on the contrary, because new problems had been added. So, we were told in the General Declaration of that meeting: "We are living through a widespread crisis which is affecting all ambits of human life. The project of constructing a new world without taking the human being into account, and the use of violence as a method, have placed humanity on the edge of a catastrophe. Selfish interests and the mediocre politics of narrow-visioned groups, together with the ignorance in which large sectors of the populace are kept, aggravates and increases the crisis proportions, while hunger and malnutrition lays waste to millions of human beings. Unemployment plays increasing havoc even in the most developed countries while religious and ethnic conflicts affect more and more areas, spreading suffering and unrest. Discrimination grows, affecting above all the most vulnerable sectors of society; ethnic and cultural minorities are more and more affected and their very existence threatened. It is not enough to enumerate the dangers that lie in wait for humanity and report on them via the media. The time has come to undertake urgent, definite measures of solidarity, with the ultimate aim of safeguarding life, guaranteeing the security and the prosperity of our own and future generations; constructing a multifaceted world and affirming the identity of each human race, denomination or group. It is necessary to secure the liberty of the individual in the face of oppression and discrimination; to liberate his creative capacities in the face of dehumanisation; extend the framework of democracy in order to transcend its formal character and transform it into a means of expression and a guarantee of rights for all. We have to extend the practice of representativeness, promoting direct election of peoples' representatives, and empower the common man, giving him complete access to all forms of referenda. Voters must have the right to get rid of their representatives if they lose their trust or do not fulfil their promises. Consensus as a method of resolving conflict is the most appropriate form, not the imposition of the will of the majority now that this practice cannot reflect either the interests or the real will of many human groups. This shows itself clearly in ethnic and religious conflicts where the concept of 'majority' is not, in fairness, applicable. We aspire to the creation of social, economical, political and cultural expression which can guarantee the full use of the capacities and potential of the people. It is necessary to unite the

forces of work and capital to achieve, among other things, maximum productivity on the basis of action and combined management. We aim to move beyond spontaneous protest action, and carry out organised programs in all areas. Our objective is to unite different cultural, scientific, political and social groups with the common denominator of the humanist orientation, uniting our purposes for the achievement of collective work towards the affirmation of human dignity".

Later, at the Moscow Humanist Forum of 1993 it was declared:

"The Humanist Forum intends to establish the bases of future global discussion. Most important will be to keep in mind diverse stances and to understand that in this planetary civilisation which is in creation, the diversity of attitudes, assessments and lifestyles will prevail in the future despite the violence of the uniformed forces. In this sense, we aspire to a universal human nation which can be achieved if diversity exists. No central hegemony can be maintained on the periphery, nor a lifestyle, nor a values system, nor a presupposed ideology or religiosity which is imposed at the cost of the extinction of others. Today we are seeing that centralisation generates secessionist responses because it doesn't respect the true entity of people and regions which could converge perfectly in a true federation of collectives. We cannot believe that economic control can bring about miracles. Or are there still people who believe that for development to take place we have first to reform the state, then legislation, then methods of production, followed by social habits and customs, and at some later point clothing, diet, religion and thought? This naïve absolutism is becoming less and less easy to impose and, as in the case of the secessions noted above, is helping to toughen and radicalise positions in all fields. If, in fact, through the dictatorship of money we could move to a complete society the theme would be worthy of further discussion but if to achieve a decadent society, with no feeling for the whole and for individuals, it is moreover necessary to accept the requirements of a human regression, the result will be the increase of disorder and general misfortune. The Humanist Forum cannot lose sight of the form of diversity, cannot study different cultures with the vision of a primitive zoologist who believes that the culture in which he is himself immersed represents the summit of an evolution which should be imitated by the rest. Far more important is to understand that all cultures make a contribution to the great human construction. However, the Humanist Forum must set its minimum conditions. First, that it cannot inform trends which create a favourable atmosphere for discrimination or intolerance; secondly that it cannot inform trends which favour violence as a methodology of action to impose their thoughts or their ideals, however noble these ideals may be. These would be the only necessary limits. The Humanist Forum is internationalist, but does this mean to say that with regard to its ecumenicalism the regional and the specific are disqualified? How can a person be disqualified because they love their race, their country, their customs, their kin, their traditions? Can we simply label them as 'nationalist' so as to subsequently not have to consider them? Because to love one's own roots is also to be noble with regard to work and the suffering of previous generations. This 'nationalism' is only distorted when its affirmation is to the detriment of the recognition of other collectives, of other peoples. What right has the Forum to rule out the contributions of other tendencies which nurture the ideal of a fair and equal society? Can the Forum act to discriminate against believers or atheists with regard to their respective beliefs? Can the Forum conscientiously support the superiority of some beliefs over others, of certain customs over others? We believe that limits cannot exist apart from the two, and exclusively the two, which we noted before. In such a case, the Forum intends to work in terms of inclusion and not exclusion of human variety."

And thus at this forum began the discussion, with universalising ideology, and an inclination to the rescuing of cultural characteristics, with the realisation that the future of the world will bring a confluence of diversity. We reflect upon these ideas against a background of confrontation which today has already taken on the characteristics of an open battle between different cultures and ethnicities...

And so, what is the message for this International Humanist Congress, in which we put into action the council of Latin American Humanist parties, from those which have gone before? The message, it would seem to me, is this: the current world situation continues to deteriorate in a move towards growing dehumanisation. And along with this process appears the misnomered economic "globalisation" as an instrument of domination. It deals with an unmistakable phenomenon of anti-humanist tendency which cannot be considered as a simple, spontaneous process. It is a process directed from a central authority to points further and further outwards, with the same characteristics that have been seen in previous cultures. This directed globalisation cannot be confused with the process of world-wide expansion of cultural diversity which is sweeping through all regions. World-wide expansion must be considered as the consolidation of cultural regions and this is one of the objectives to be achieved in the short and medium terms. From this moment, the creation of a Latin American council of humanist parties is going in just this direction. In this way the process which leads towards the universal human nation will stand for the structuring of cultural regions, as is clearly seen in Europe and is gradually happening in Latin America. The council of humanist parties, today set in motion, has behind it the force and dynamics of the winds of integration which are blowing to its advantage.

That is all, thank you very much.