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**Learning: the Treasure Within  
The Relevance for Palestinian Higher Education**

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure for me today, first to be once again in Palestine after a separation of twenty years, and equally to present to you the report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty First Century. It was my privilege to have been nominated by his Excellency Mr. Jaques Delors, Chairman of the Commission, as one of its members representing the Region, to participate in the valuable efforts of both UNESCO and the European Union sponsors of this Conference in promoting international understanding and co-operation.

This Conference convenes in Nablus at a crucial moment as we strive to lay solid foundations for a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace. What bases could be more effective for building, solid ground for peace and international co-operation than education? It is therefore equally pertinent to commend the ongoing efforts of the Steering Committee of the Palestinian/European Academic Co-operation in Education, their diligent efforts to promote international co-operation with Palestinian universities and to channel international support are invaluable in consolidating peace in a spirit of genuine academic solidarity.

In presenting the Commission's report, I shall concentrate, on **higher education and international co-operation** which is the subject of our Conference; but higher education cannot be taken in isolation of the preceding levels, since its success depends on the ability of students to interact positively with it. The pursuit of excellence in education is a standard that must be applied at all levels, and indeed the principles and strategies of the Commission's report that apply to all stages of Education. I have selected from the report certain themes to discuss with you today. Among these themes are: the role of education in society, a glimpse of the background, formation and mandate of the Commission, its methodology, the stages and bridges of learning from childhood to higher education, education for women and girls, technology in the service of education, the central role of the teacher, and reform strategies.

**The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century** was formally established by UNESCO at the beginning of 1993, working with the assistance of a secretariat provided by UNESCO, but completely independent in carrying out its work and preparing its recommendations. Chaired by Mr. Jacques Delors, former President of the European Union, the Commission comprised a group

of fourteen other figures, from all over the world and from a variety of cultural and professional backgrounds.

In accordance with its mandate the Commission studied and reflected on the challenges facing education in the coming years and formulated suggestions and recommendations in its report which can serve as an agenda for renewal and action for policy and practice which are both innovative and feasible, while taking into account the wide diversity of situations, needs, means and aspirations existing in countries and in regions.

In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. And in this context, our Commission affirmed its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. While the Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, it looks to it as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. The Commission focused its reflection on one central and all-encompassing question: what kind of education is needed for what kind of society of tomorrow? It considered the new roles of education and the new demands made on education systems in a world, of accelerating economic, environmental and social change and tension. It studied the implications for education of the major trends in the evolution of contemporary society; it attempted to keep at the heart of its work those most intimately involved in education: learners of all ages, first of all, and those involved in fostering learning, whether they be teachers, parents, members of the community, or other participants in education.

The method adopted by the Commission was to engage in as wide ranging a process of consultations as was possible in the time available. It held its working sessions in the five regions of the world. Gathering representatives of a wide range of professions and organisations directly and indirectly related to education. A series of presentations by distinguished individuals enabled the Commission to hold in-depth exchanges on a wide range of topics related in various degrees to education. Individual consultations were carried out, face-to-face or in writing. A questionnaire was sent to all the National Commissions for UNESCO, inviting them to submit documentation or unpublished material: the response was very positive and the replies were studied carefully and made use of. Non-governmental organisations were similarly consulted and in some cases invited to participate in meetings.

The report covered several outlooks, principles and directions. It highlighted the following major ideas:

1. The coming century, dominated by globalisation, will bring with it enduring tensions to overcome, but whatever the diversity of cultures, and systems of social organisation, there is a universal challenge of reinventing the democratic ideal to create, or maintain, social cohesion.

2. In this context of inevitable globalisation, learning throughout life will be one of the keys to meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. To that effect, all societies aim to move towards a necessary Utopia in which none of the talents hidden like buried treasure in every person are left untapped.

The Commission proposed four pillars that are the foundations of education - *learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together*. The far reaching changes in the patterns of life require of us a better understanding of other people and the world at large, they demand peaceful interchange and indeed harmony - the very things that are most lacking in our world today. Having adopted this position the Commission has put greater emphasis on one of the four pillars that it proposes, that is learning to live together in the "global village".

But how can we learn to live together in the "global village" if we cannot manage to live together in the communities to which we naturally belong- the nation, the region, the city, the village, the neighbourhood?

The world had been faced with so many misfortunes caused by war, crime and underdevelopment. There is every reason to place renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to understand the world's erratic progression towards a certain unity.

A fresh approach is proposed to the stages and bridges of learning whereby the paths through education systems become more varied and the value of each is enhanced. While universal basic education is an absolute priority, secondary education has a pivotal role to play in the individual learning paths of young people and in the development of societies. And, higher education institutions should be diversified so as to take into account their functions and duties as centres of knowledge, as places of professorial training, as the cross-roads for learning, throughout life and as partners in international co-operation.

The Commission stresses the importance of the Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) in respect of women's education. The Declaration outlines the different factors of discrimination practised against women and girls, particularly in regard to education and training, and sets a number of fundamental goals for the international community: to ensure equal access/ by women to education, to eradicate female **illiteracy**, and to improve access for women to **vocational** training, **science** and **technology** education. The central role of teachers, and the need to improve their training, status and conditions of work, are also stressed. While the psychological and material situation of teachers differs greatly from country to country, an upgrading of their status is essential if "*Learning throughout Life*" is to fulfil the central function assigned to it by the Commission in the advancement of our societies and the strengthening of mutual understanding among peoples. Their position as master or mistress in the classroom should be recognised by society and they should be given the necessary authority and suitable resources. The Commission stresses the importance of exchanges of teachers and partnerships between institutions in different

countries. As confirmed by current activities, such exchange and partnerships provided an essential added value not only for the quality of education but also for a greater receptivity to other cultures, civilisations and experiences.

Getting the reform strategies right, by a broad-based dialogue, and by increasing responsibility and involvement of stakeholders at every level, will be a crucial element of educational renewal. The main parties contributing to the success of educational reforms are, first of all, the local community, including parents, school heads and teachers; secondly, the public authorities; and thirdly, the international community. The countries where the process has been relatively successful are those that obtained a determined commitment from local communities, parents and teachers, backed by continuing dialogue and various forms of financial, technical or professional assistance.

**Higher Education** is at one and the same time one of the driving forces of economic development and the focal point of learning in society. It is both depository and creator of knowledge. Moreover, it is the principal instrument for passing on the accumulated experience, cultural and scientific, of humanity. In a world where resources of knowledge will increasingly predominate over material resources as factors in development, the importance of higher education and of higher education institutions can only grow. Moreover, the effect of innovation and technological progress means that economic development will increasingly demand competencies that require high level studies.

Universities would contribute to this process by diversifying what they offer:

- \* as scientific establishments and centres of learning, from where students go on to theoretical or applied research or teaching;
- \* as establishments offering occupational qualifications, combining high-level knowledge and skills with courses and content continually tailored to the needs of the economy;
- \* as some of the main meeting places for learning throughout life, opening their doors to adults who wish either to resume their studies or to adapt and develop their knowledge or satisfy their taste for learning in all areas of cultural life; and
- \* as leading partners in international co-operation, facilitating exchanges of teachers and students and ensuring that the best teaching is made widely available through international professorships.

In addition to these four functions, the universities should also be able to speak out on ethical and social problems as entirely independent and fully responsible institutions exercising a kind of intellectual authority that society needs to help it to reflect, understand and act.

In this way, universities would transcend what is wrongly held to be the conflict between the logic of public service and the logic of the job market. They would also reclaim their intellectual and social vocation as, in a sense, guarantors of universal values and of the cultural heritage. The Commission sees these as cogent reasons for urging greater university autonomy.

Having formulated these proposals, the Commission emphasises that these issues take on a special significance in poor countries, where universities have a decisive role to play. In developing countries, universities must learn from their own past and analyse their countries' difficulties, engaging in research aimed at finding solutions to the most acute among them. It is also incumbent on them to propose a renewed vision of development that will enable their countries to build a better future. They must provide the vocational and technological training of the future leaders and the higher and middle level education required if their countries are to escape from their present tread mills of poverty and underdevelopment.

Institutions of higher education are ideally placed to use globalisation as a tool for bridging the knowledge gap and in order to enrich the dialogue between peoples and between cultures. Co-operation among scientists working in the same discipline transcends national boundaries and is a powerful tool for the internationalisation of research technology, ideas, attitudes and activities.

To that end the twinning of research institutions in industrialised countries with their counterparts in developing countries will benefit both sides, as greater understanding of developmental problems is essential in solving, problems in the "global village". South-South co-operation also holds out great promise: work done in Asia or Latin America has enormous relevance to Africa and vice-versa.

The economic sector also needs to set up partnerships with universities in both the developed and the developing world to carry out research on problems related to development in the digest regions. International donors can also give a fresh impetus to these kinds of partnerships. In a world increasingly dominated by technology, emphasis must be placed on ways both to use technology in the service of education and to prepare people to master it for living and working.

The Commission obviously could not discuss the major societal choices facing education without considering the new information and communication technologies. The issue goes beyond their simple use for teaching purposes; it calls for central consideration of how knowledge will be accessed in tomorrow's world. The subject can be merely touched upon here, since it is still too difficult to form an accurate idea of these technologies' effect on knowledge and learning. The Commission wishes to stress that these technologies are in the process of accomplishing nothing short of a revolution before our very eyes; one that is affecting activities connected with production and work just as much as those connected with education and training. The inventions that have left their stamp on the twentieth century (records, radio, television, audio and video recording, computers, or air, cable and satellite broadcasting) have a more than technological dimension; their significance is

essentially economic and social. Most of these technologies have become sufficiently miniaturised and cheap to have penetrated into most homes in the industrialised countries and to be used by a growing number of people in the developing countries.

There is a very good reason to believe that the impact of the new technologies, consequent to the development of computer networks, will very rapidly make itself felt world-wide through the use of:

- \* multimedia equipment;
- \* interactive information exchange systems, including electronic mail and on-line access to libraries and public data bases;
- \* computerised simulators;
- \* virtual reality systems.

Using these tools, both students and teachers are equipped to become researchers. Teachers then coach their students to evaluate and use effectively the information they have gathered for themselves. This is far closer to real life situations than the older styles of teacher transmission of information to students. A new partnership is developing in the classroom.

The progress of the new information and communication technologies should give rise to a general deliberation on access to knowledge in the world of tomorrow. The new technologies could be used in:

- the diversification and improvement of distance education, in adult education and especially in the in-service training of teachers;
- the strengthening of developing countries' infrastructures and capabilities in this field and the dissemination of such technologies throughout society. These are in any case prerequisites to their use in formal education systems.

### **International Co-operation**

Globalisation highlights the scale, urgency and interconnected nature of the problems facing the international community. The accelerated pace of population growth, the wastage of natural resources, environmental damage, the chronic poverty in much of the world, and the oppression, violence and injustice from which millions still suffer, call for large scale remedial action that can be implemented only by reinvigorating international co-operation and putting more resources into it. Globalisation, henceforth, irreversible, and calls for global responses: building a better or less bad world has become as never before everyone's business.

Education is without any doubt one, perhaps the most fundamental, of these responses. Co-operation in education should thus be viewed in the broader context of what the international community must do to stimulate awareness of all the problems



requiring solution and achieve a consensus on the issues needing concerted action. This action will involve international and intergovernmental organisation, governments, non-governmental organisations, business and industry, professional and labour organisations and, of course, in the area which concerns us directly, those actively participating in the education system and the intellectual community, all working together as partners.

### **From Aid to Partnership**

We are currently witnessing a shift in the conception and functions of international aid. The conventional forms of aid and co-operation are being contested and acknowledgement of the need for changing, 'assistance' into partnership' is gaining ground. Both beneficiary and donor countries are looking for new forms of co-operation genuinely, based on exchange and mutual benefit.

The Commission does not underrate the force of **financial constraints** and it advocates the bringing into operation of public/private partnership locally and internationally. In developing countries, the public funding of basic education remains a priority, but the choices made must not imperil the coherence of the system as a whole, nor lead to other levels of education being sacrificed.

**The role of political authority**, which has the duty clearly to define options and ensure overall regulation, making the required adjustments is reaffirmed: education is a community asset which cannot be regulated by market forces alone. It is essential that funding structures be reviewed in the light of the principle that learning should continue throughout individual's lives.

The report to UNESCO of this independent Commission is the result of a world-wide process of consultation and analysis over a period of three years. It closes with an emphatic plea for more resources to be devoted to education, nationally and internationally, and for invigorating international co-operation in education, with UNESCO as key player.

Publishing of the report is not the end of the Commission's noble mission, since UNESCO has set up a Task Force that will ensure the follow-up to the Commission's work, by publishing the background material and studies looking more closely into aspects of the Commission's deliberations or recommendations, by helping to organise, at the request of governmental or non-governmental authorities, meetings to discuss the findings of the Commission and by taking part in activities that will attempt to put into practice some of the Commission's recommendations.

In the twenty-first century everyone will need to exercise greater independence and judgement combined with a strong sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals. It needs to be stressed further imperative: **none of the talents which are hidden like buried treasure in every person must be left untapped.** For the title of the report which is "Learning, the Treasures Within" the Commission turned to one of La Fontaine's fables, The "Ploughman and his children".

*Be sure (the ploughman said), not to sell the inheritance our forebears left to us. A Treasure lies concealed therein.*

Readapting slightly the words of the poet who was lauding the virtues of hard work, and referring instead to education- that is, everything that humanity has learned about itself- we could have him say,

*But the old man was wise  
To show them before he died  
That learning is the treasure.*

Before I conclude, let me reiterate again my honour and pleasure to be with you today, to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to the PEACE Programme and An-Najah University for the kind hospitality and the meticulous organisation of the Conference and my sincere wishes of continued success to all Palestinian institutes of higher education in achieving their goals in preparing the Palestinian youth for a promising future on the eve of the twenty-first century.

May I also wish our guests from outside Palestine a safe trip home, and to thank you all for your attention. God bless you.