

Session of the Genoa Forum of UNESCO on Science and Society

The session of the Genoa Forum of UNESCO on Science and Society held in Como, Italy, resulted in obtaining official endorsement from representatives of various European and international academies of science of the “Genoa Declaration on Science and Society”, established and launched on 8-9 October 1995.

GENOA DECLARATION ON SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND ETHICS

Recognizing that the future of humanity depends critically on the continued vitality of science and its applications, representatives of world’s major Academies of Science and of the international scientific community have gathered in the City of Genoa, on the threshold of a new millennium, to foster global awareness of science and of its importance for the welfare of mankind.

The last three centuries have witnessed the birth of modern science and its explosive growth. The impact of science now extends to nearly all fields of knowledge and applications thereof, from physics to biology, from agriculture to ecology, from neurosciences to psychology, from material science to information technology, from medical to social sciences, etc.

In this century alone, the conceptual framework of human knowledge and understanding underwent radical transformation. Determinism has gradually given way to a more open vision, one that offers humanity a growing consciousness of its freedom and of its responsibilities.

Moreover, the progressive transformation of the base of technology from empirical to scientific has generated for science a critical role in all activities, ranging from socio-economic and industrial to philosophical, ethical, cultural and political.

Science has contributed immensely to society, even though its applications can be and have been misused at times. However, it is important to ensure that this positive relationship between science and society continues and is strengthened. Among the potential threats to this relationship, which may differ from society to society, are irrationality, various constraints on freedom in the conduct of science and dissemination of the results of science, and undervaluation of the role of science.

Universality, freedom and critical thinking constitute basic elements in the scientific process and form a common bond between all cultures. Accordingly, science can make a significant contribution to constructive dialogue between different cultures and thereby act as a powerful antidote to intolerance and to ideological and racial barriers.

Moreover, the progress and application of scientific knowledge can offer effective means for solving many of the problems which face humanity, including those generated by the misuse of science.

Recognizing the important and distinctive potential of science to contribute to a better future for mankind, in which the culture of peace prevails, we reassert our adherence to the following general principles

- respect for the diversity of cultures within societies and promotion of science as a distinctive and important contributor to bridging such diverse cultures and promoting peaceful coexistence in accord with the principles of freedom, autonomy and rationality;
- mutual cooperation, reflecting the recognition that the production and utilisation of scientific and technological knowledge are decisive for the future welfare of humanity and that science, with its universality, is uniquely positioned to serve as a laboratory in which mankind can work together to achieve a better future in accord with the principles of responsibility, solidarity and respect for the rights of individuals and nations.

Therefore, the Academies and other scientific institutions represented at this meeting reaffirm their commitment to the promotion of :

- the awareness that science, as a product of the history and creativity of mankind, is an integral part of all cultures;
- an increased effort in science education at all levels and in raising the young generations to be guided by a new vision of culture that embraces the scientific “ethos” and the spirit of free inquiry that characterizes science;
- wider dissemination and better public understanding of science and technology;

- balanced development of science and of technology, recognizing that both basic and applied sciences are vital for meeting human needs and for tackling problems such as hunger and disease, environmental degradation, rural and urban decline, and in the long run reducing disparities between rich and poor nations.

International cooperation is a striking feature of the present century. Witnessing the dramatic trend of transition to new socio-economic structures, with the world in search of new goals and approaches, we strongly recommend that particular effort be focused on increasing the scientific and technological capabilities of developing countries.

We are meeting on the eve of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations and of UNESCO, whose Constitution assigns to it the mandate for promoting intellectual and scientific cooperation within the UN Family. We call upon UNESCO to take a lead in implementing the principles and recommendations of this document.

This Declaration was approved at the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Genoa Forum of UNESCO on Science and Society “50th Anniversary of the United Nations and UNESCO: Science for the Dialogue Between Cultures and for Development”, Genoa, Italy, 8-9 October 1995.