



WORLD CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE

Australian Statement

Delivered by Hon Gareth Evans QC MP

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One hundred years ago a group of intellectual leaders met to predict the features of a new century. They concluded that it would be a time of profound peace, not - as it proved to be - the bloodiest and most destructive in world history. They did not predict flight or computers. They did not foresee the splitting of the atom, interplanetary exploration, the discovery of DNA, cyberspace, lasers. In short, they failed to see the leaps of science, both for good and for evil in their impact, that have marked our century.

So we should be modest in our claims to predict the coming century; much less the new millennium. But Australians believe that we should be bold in this Conference - if not bold enough to predict the future, at least bold enough to try to *shape* it. We should, coming out of this Conference, commit ourselves to nothing less than a new global contract between science and society:

- a contract based on new and higher levels of trust and mutual understanding between science and society; and
- a contract in which, in return for community support, science and scientists accept some clearly defined obligations.

A social contract of this kind was the key message that emerged from the Asia Pacific Science Conference in Sydney last December, which brought together in preparation for this World Conference 23 nations representing more than half the world's population.

An important opening point in the Sydney Communique (and one that appeals particularly to me as a social scientist) is that in thinking about a new relationship between science and society, science must be seen in holistic terms. It must be seen, in other words, as embracing not just the natural sciences, technology and engineering, but the *social* sciences as well - recognising that science in all its dimensions is an integral part of society and impacts upon every aspect of it.

At the heart of the new global contract, as we see it, are five key obligations which, in return for community support, must be accepted by science and scientists, and those

who make policy for them. All those obligations have emerged very clearly in the course of this conference, and they can be described in these terms:

- the obligation to communicate;
- the obligation to educate;
- the obligation to cooperate;
- the obligation to be inclusive; and
- the obligation to be responsible.

The **obligation to communicate** means just that. Fundamental science must be seen as an international public good - a good which can only be of universal benefit if it is universally available. Generally, there must be a much broader commitment to the free flow of scientific data and information within the global scientific community, not least on the state of the global environment. The WMO has taken a lead through its resolutions on exchange of meteorological and hydrological data, and others should follow.

The **obligation to educate** is at the heart of UNESCO's mandate. It means a commitment to science education initiatives, both formal and informal, that effectively develop the scientific and technological expertise and decision-making capacity of our diverse populations. It means preparing all our citizens to better understand and benefit from the extraordinary pace of technological change. The new contract between science and society must be built on new commitments

- to developing public understanding of science and technology at all levels; *and*
- developing a humanistic and social understanding amongst scientists and engineers.

The **obligation to cooperate**, in the way that UNESCO and ICSU have done so marvellously in convening this Conference, is another supremely important element in any new global social contract. The development of partnerships in science is vital at the global, regional and national levels if the world is to benefit more effectively - and if the North and South are to benefit more equally - from the enormous reservoirs and rivers of expertise and knowledge within the scientific community worldwide. Governments, multilateral bodies and non-government organizations all have important roles in building the partnerships that will make this possible.

The **obligation to be inclusive** means, for a start, that women must be included as fully as men in the scientific enterprise, in every country in the world. And science must recognize and respect the claims to special attention of many other categories of those too-often neglected: the young, indigenous peoples and people in developing countries. By being inclusive and open-minded, science and scientists can only benefit - new talent pools, new ideas, and exposure to new ways of thinking are all critical to the advancement of science. One of the happiest themes to emerge from this Conference, as it did in Sydney, is that science has much to be respectful of, and much to learn from, indigenous and localised knowledge - particularly on the use of natural resources.

The **obligation to be responsible** is perhaps the most fundamental of all the elements that should be enshrined in a new social contract between science and society. It is what

underlies in many ways the obligations I have already mentioned - to communicate, to educate, to cooperate and to be inclusive. But it has some additional dimensions as well. It means recognising that the world of research and the world of policy-making are not worlds apart, but inextricably linked. It means that scientists must squarely confront their ethical responsibilities to humankind, and be constantly aware of the human rights implications for both individuals and peoples of new science and technology they are creating.

It means recognising that while technological innovation is an essential ingredient for wealth generation in both developed and developing countries, development has to be sustainable - in harmony with and respectful of the natural world. And it means both the scientists and the policy-makers of the developed world recognising that their responsibilities don't end with further improving the lives of their own already privileged peoples. They extend to making life possible, and a decent life possible, for hundreds of millions of people in the developing world who barely have at the moment any life at all.

Yesterday I spent a little time strolling in this famous and lovely city, which has hosted this Conference so warmly and well. My footsteps took me to the Opera House. I couldn't resist touching the door handle of the conductor's entrance, thinking that a hundred years ago the great composer Gustav Mahler had put his own hand just there. And I have to say I asked myself the question: will our Declaration be worth a single note of Mahler's immortal music conceived in Budapest a century ago?

The answer to that question I think is this. Only if we ensure that our governments and peoples commit themselves to a new social contract between science and society. And only if the United Nations and UNESCO so commit themselves. If, at this Conference, we can contribute to that end, the outcome will indeed be a century of great harmony. We will enter not just a new century - but a *just* new century. And a just new century not diminished or destroyed by its science, but gaining strength and confidence and a better world for all its peoples from science and from what scientists do.