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## F. Mayor's Vision for a Renewed UNESCO

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The election this month of Federico Mayor Zaragoza as the new director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization inspires hope for the future of the agency.

When 142 of 158 member states—an impressive majority—cast their ballots for Mayor, they signaled a common desire that the organization move forward and, in the words of the new director-general, “keep what must be kept and modify what should be changed.” In choosing Mayor to guide UNESCO through that difficult process of restructuring, the delegates chose wisely. Mayor emerged as much more than a compromise candidate. He was seen as a leader able to unite and revitalize UNESCO, one who could reshape it into a more effective and efficient force for global cooperation.

The 53-year-old Spanish biochemist and educator brings an impressive range of skills and experiences to his new office. He served from 1978 to 1981 as deputy director-general of UNESCO and from 1983 to 1984 as a special advisor to the past director-general, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow. Mayor thus has detailed knowledge of the internal dynamics of the organiza-

tion. He knows well both its strengths and weaknesses. As minister of education and science in the Spanish government from 1981 to 1982, he assumed responsibility for a portfolio of large-scale programs embracing two of UNESCO's four areas of activity. His membership in the Spanish Parliament from 1977 to 1978, his current service in the European Parliament, and his many years as a professor and administrator at Spanish universities in Grenada and Madrid, have schooled him in the politics of large organizations. Indeed, he has spent much of his professional life honing just those skills he will now need in dealing successfully with competing interests within UNESCO.

During the heated and potentially explosive nomination and election process, Mayor quietly won over many delegations previously committed to other candidates. He proved himself a conciliator and coalition builder. The extent of his diplomatic talent is reflected in the final tally, which is as close to unanimity as could be hoped.

And, as mentioned, he is a scientist, a biochemist who has specialized in cerebral metabolism and the molecular pathology of the newborn. He earned baccalaureate and

doctoral degrees, both *premio extraordinario*, from the University of Madrid in 1956 and 1958 respectively. In 1963, at age 29, he became one of the youngest occupants of a university chair in Spain—in biochemistry at the University of Granada. In 1966 and 1967 Mayor was a visiting professor and senior fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, where he studied with Nobel laureate Hans A. Krebs. He played an instrumental role in founding the Center of Molecular Biology at the Autonomous University of Madrid and has been professor of biology there since 1973.

Many had expressed the hope, as I did last spring (*The Scientist*, April 20, 1987, p. 9) that a scientist would be chosen to lead UNESCO. The organization's science programs have represented some of its most successful endeavors and have been those least affected by politics. The selection of a scientist as director-general is a clear message that the membership now wishes to emphasize serious and productive work.

### Radical Changes

Federico Mayor offers far more than impeccable credentials. He has a plan for UNESCO, which he has described in general terms during the past few years. In February 1986, at a conference at Rancho Santa Fe, California, sponsored by the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation and the Carnegie Foun-

dation, he delivered a speech entitled "Restructuring UNESCO," in which he called for "radical changes."

Mayor wants to streamline UNESCO by decentralizing its operations, both spatially and by delegating authority. He wants UNESCO itself to focus on only a few major global programs. "The other activities sponsored or encouraged by UNESCO," he says, "should be given their own financial and executive means. In each case, these should be decided in agreement with the respective non-governmental agencies and/or intergovernmental agencies." He also calls for greater oversight and professional management of the Paris secretariat.

Mayor believes that the brain and not the body of UNESCO should be its largest part. So, as he reduces the organization's overgrown administration, he will seek to enlarge its intellectual capacity. He wants UNESCO to be a house of thinkers. He wants to remake the organization into a creative, dynamic consulting and coordinating agency. "To mobilize the intellectual power, the teachers and scientists that each country has potentially available, is the major role of UNESCO," he argues. "UNESCO is the promoter, the watchtower, and the signpost pointing the direction to go in, but it cannot, without running the risk of growing so huge as to be totally inefficient, administer everything it originates."

In that speech and in recent days Mayor has spoken of emphasizing UNESCO's programs in science and

the environment. Without wishing to reduce its efforts in education, communications and culture, he nonetheless recognizes that scientific work "can be approached and decided, even when considered from very different viewpoints, on a purely technical level," whereas "in those areas touching the spirit" the choices are often far more complex and open to confrontation. The pursuit of science is also, perhaps, the best route to convincing the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and Singapore, that continued absence from UNESCO is in neither their nor the world's best interest.

In the scientific arena, Mayor would "count on the consultantship of the International Council of Scientific Unions and other prestigious scientific organizations." And he would place special emphasis on building up science facilities in the developing countries. That is an admirable and astute goal for Mayor to set. It wisely links science initiatives with education and the two together with UNESCO's development mission. Mayor maintains that "with education, science and culture there is no rivalry for first place, but rather, all three, on the same level, influence each other."

Mayor ardently seeks the return of the countries that left UNESCO in 1984 and 1985. However, he steadfastly endorses the principle of one-country one-vote, as mandated by the organization's charter. He is not willing to "pay any price" to obtain

the participation of the United States, the United Kingdom and Singapore. But if he succeeds in reshaping UNESCO in the manner he describes, I believe that the return of those nations will follow.

### **A Firm Hand**

The task Mayor now faces is difficult and perilous. In what he is about to attempt, Mayor will need a firm hand as well as a delicate touch. He will need to make courageous decisions. He will also need the support of the UNESCO staff, of the member nation's delegations and national commissions, and that of our own community. While a group of distinguished scientists played a key role in securing Mayor's nomination from the Spanish government, there has been lately "a low level of participation in [UNESCO's] work [by] outstanding individuals of science," as Abdus Salam recently observed. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, October 16, 1987, p. 17.) If the scientific community collectively and individually will now pledge active support to Mayor, the likelihood of a successful restructuring will be considerably enhanced. Mayor's "house of dialogue, of the mind and of creativity" needs residents. While prospects for a speedy return by the United States and the United Kingdom seem dim, renewed participation by U.S. and U.K. scientists would be an important first step in that direction. ■