

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1. Never before in history has the world experienced upheavals so far-reaching and so rapid as those that have taken place in this final decade of the twentieth century, giving rise at once to great hopes and urgent challenges.

2. Great hopes were engendered by the end of the East/West ideological divide, which removed a number of obstacles to the attainment of the goals for which the United Nations system was created. The increasingly universal demand for the exercise of human rights, the progress of democracy, the abolition of apartheid, the signature of the Israel-Palestinian Protocol Agreement, the initiatives taken by the international community to prevent conflict and maintain peace, and the boost that a substantial reduction in armaments could give to development - all these are grounds for hoping for a better future.

3. The moves towards regional or subregional integration currently under way in different parts of the world - in Europe and around the Mediterranean, in Asia and around the Pacific, between North and South America and within Latin America - also constitute new opportunities for peace and development. Dictated in the first instance by economics and trade, these initiatives offer potential frameworks for co-operation in culture, education, the sharing of ideas and the transfer of knowledge, thereby opening the way to increased mutual understanding in a spirit of tolerance and respect for difference.

4. At the same time, our world is in search of adequate responses to persistent or renewed threats to its security. Violence, intolerance and discrimination, and the upsurge of extremism, are the most dramatic signs of divisions affecting the cohesion of society. They are above all symptoms of other threats, often obscured by ideological confrontation, which now force themselves upon our attention: the widening gap between North and South; intolerable inequalities at international level and within nations; the escalation of poverty and exclusion, even within industrial societies; excessive population growth which, when combined with situations of extreme destitution, produces unprecedented migratory flows; the alarming pollution of the planet; new pandemics and mounting drug abuse.

5. The adoption of a planetary viewpoint has today become the paramount condition of our survival. It is vital that we radically change our behaviour and criteria with regard to the consumption of energy and raw materials, to production, to employment and to material well-being. We must learn as a matter of urgency to invest in peace what we have previously invested in war. This is the message that UNESCO, as the intellectual organization of the United Nations system, must spread in order to prevent a return to situations of mistrust or confrontation that would seriously jeopardize the fragile prospects for peace and development and the very future of generations to come.

## I. UNESCO'S MISSIONS

6. The reform of the United Nations system is on the agenda: it is for each institution as well as for the system as a whole to re-examine their priority objectives so as to adapt them to new challenges and opportunities. UNESCO has been engaged in this exercise for some years, but the preparation of the Medium-Term Plan for 1996-2001 should be the occasion to take this process a step further by delineating a UNESCO more focused on its priority missions and on the tasks it is best qualified to perform, having regard to its distinctive characteristics.

7. In this respect, the twenty-seventh session of the General Conference marked a significant advance: a broad consensus emerged on the need to concentrate efforts on the two objectives common to the United Nations system as a whole: the consolidation of peace and the promotion of