

**Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director
Investiture at University Camilo José Cela
Madrid, Spain
February 26, 2016**

Her Majesty, Queen Sophia. Honourable Chancellor Martin-Barbero. Members of the faculty. Ladies and gentlemen.

Muchas gracias por esta cálida bienvenida. [Thank you very much for your warm welcome.]

It is a special honour to be invested as Doctor *Honoris Causa* by the University Camilo José Cela.

In accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989 — a wonderful day for Spain — Cela indicated that the award was “out of all proportion to my skill and ability.”¹ A sentiment I fully share in accepting this honour today.

Cela also paid tribute to previous Nobel laureates, whose lives were guided, always, he said, “by the same praiseworthy

¹ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1989/cela-speech.html

aims which distinguish and characterize all of us: peace in our heads and our hearts, and solidarity between human beings and among peoples.²”

This school, which shares his name, also shares this spirit of peace...of solidarity — and above all, responsibility.

Responsibility within national borders and beyond them. Responsibility to make the world a better place for the world’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Responsibility to today’s generation of children — who will, after all, shape tomorrow’s world. A responsibility to solidarity.

But as we look around the world today, we’re confronted with an uneasy truth. That in country after country, in neighbourhood after neighbourhood, we have failed to live up to our responsibilities not only to our children, but to the future of our world. A spirit of solidarity seems, ever more, a scarce commodity.

Our world has become more chaotic and brutal than at any time since the Second World War. It is a world engulfed

² ibid

in a rising tide of deadly, seemingly intractable conflicts. A world degraded by a changing climate that causes hurricanes, tsunamis, droughts, and even conflicts among communities competing for dwindling resources. A world of emergencies that send millions fleeing their homelands in search of safety — sparking the refugee and migrant crisis spilling across borders and around the world. A world scarred by inequality, disadvantage and prejudice.

We most clearly see these challenges in the faces — in the lives — of children. From the newborn, starting his first days without a vaccination against disease. To the adolescent girl forced to stay at home and do chores, denied a schoolroom seat beside her brothers. Children trapped by conflicts in Syria, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Iraq, Yemen or elsewhere. To the families waiting for the next flood, tsunami or drought to strike their neighborhoods. To the children of poverty facing yet another day without adequate nutrition...without education...without protection against abuse and exploitation... without childhoods.

Our world is at a hinge point — a point at which a new direction can and must be possible...if we choose to take it. Now.

If we do not, surely these challenges will overwhelm us. Because each failure, every denial of the solidarity of which Cela spoke, lends further momentum to a dark current that threatens to pull humanity from the harbor of hope into an abyss of mistrust and fear. A fracturing world of uncertainty and danger, in which more and more of our citizens seek certainty and safety in their own nations...in their own political parties...in their own religions and ethnicities... at the expense of all the others.

Rather than embracing responsibility, we are increasingly seeking refuge in nationalism...in blinkered, fundamentalist interpretations of religion...in xenophobia, intolerance, anti-intellectualism, and denials of scientific truths...in narrow avenues of thought that leave no room for the plight of neighbours, let alone the challenges faced by people living in distant lands.

All at the cost of our shared interests. Because the result, most certainly, will be that conflicts grow in number and intensity. Inequalities and poverty will deepen. Climate change will degrade our planet with increasing rapidity. And children will grow up without knowing the health, the education, the opportunities and the love that every child, in every society, deserves — hardening their hearts and narrowing their minds.

Certainly, these challenges resist easy answers. The Sustainable Development Goals...global summits...technical discussions on development...while important, offer programmatic change at a time when we also need a cultural change, from a culture of *saufe qui peut* to a culture that restores some sense of solidarity around the belief that we can build a better future for everyone. For us all.

Only an optimist on the order of Don Quixote — the immortal hero of Cervantes, whom Cela revered as his “teacher” — should believe that we can resolve our conflicts and repair our broken world within one decade, or even in this generation.

But the next generation can — if we prepare it to do so. We know that progress is possible, because despite the world's turmoil, development efforts in recent decades have lifted millions of people out of poverty, and delivered them from hunger and early death from preventable diseases. Progress animated — and results achieved — not when we looked inwards, but outwards...in a spirit of co-operation and common, practical purpose...and with a commitment to focus our efforts on those who will shape our world in the future: our children.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda represents our generation's opportunity to continue this progress, by giving every child a fair chance in life — to grow, learn and thrive...to work hard, and carry herself as far as her talents and energies will carry her...to lend her energies and spirit to making her society stronger for the future.

We have an opportunity to replace a vicious intergenerational cycle of inequity and inequality with a virtuous cycle in which today's poor children — if given a fair chance at health and education — can, as adults, compete on a more level playing field with the children of richer families. Thus making not only their own lives better, but their societies richer in every sense of the word.

But as we take action for those being left behind in every society — as we reverse the vicious, intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage in every country — we must do the same for the vicious spiral of hopelessness that is withering our spirit of responsibility to each other.

Academic institutions like your University play a critical role in this effort. That is why I am so honoured by today's occasion.

At a time when reason and science are under constant suspicion, denial and threat, academic institutions are our first line of defense not only against ignorance, but also against intolerance and a narrow, shriveled view of the world.

And more. Academic institutions foster in young people not a vague spirit of Quixotic optimism about the future — but more importantly, a deep and informed belief that we can meet our responsibilities to future generations.

A belief that when we help a boy access the medicine and nutrition he needs to grow up healthy and strong, we in fact strengthen his society.

A belief that when we educate a girl, we give her the tools and knowledge she'll need not only to build her own life and make her own decisions, but to strengthen her family and her society in the future.

A belief that when we provide education, shelter, counselling and protection for a Syrian refugee, we mend her heart and her mind, building her ability and her willingness to take on the task of shaping a better future for her country.

A belief that we can move closer towards Cela's plea for "peace in our heads and in our hearts, and solidarity between human beings and among peoples."³ To build a world of reconciliation, not revenge. A world that celebrates, not denigrates, diversity. A world in which learning is prized, in which facts — and science — matter. A world of intergenerational responsibility — each child growing up healthy, educated and loved.

Excellent academic institutions like yours not only prepare young minds to tackle the challenges of tomorrow — they prepare their spirits to meet their civic responsibility. To lend their hearts as well as their heads to the work of mending our societies.

Which is why I am so deeply honoured to become part of your faculty today. For there is no work more important than yours.

³ Ibid.

As Cela said: “*Hay dos clases de hombres: quienes hacen la historia y quienes la padecen.*” [There are two types of men: those who make history and those who endure it.]
And I should add: *Y las mujeres.*

So that is the grand task with which you are charged: to teach — and to inspire your students to make, rather than simply to endure, our common future.

Gracias.
