

# Humanist Forum, Silo

MOSCOW, OCTOBER 7, 1993

My friends, it is the goal of this Humanist Forum to study and develop positions on the global problems affecting the world today. From this point of view, the Forum is a cultural organization in the broadest sense, concerned with developing structural relationships among the phenomena of science, politics, art, and religion. The Humanist Forum considers freedom of conscience and freedom from ideological prejudice to be the indispensable conditions for this work of understanding the complex phenomena of the contemporary world.

In my view, the Humanist Forum—in addition to aspiring to become an instrument for information, exchange of ideas, and discussion among people and institutions from the widest possible spectrum of the world's cultures—can play a permanently active role in which all pertinent information circulates rapidly among its members.

One might ask whether today there aren't numerous institutions already in existence that—given their experience, their financial solvency, and their professional and technical resources—might not be able to carry out this work with greater success. One could think that universities and their continuing education programs, private and public foundations, and even the cultural organizations of the United Nations might be appropriate avenues for important research of this kind and for the dissemination of conclusions reached, supposing that they were of some value. While we do not disregard the possibility of collaboration and interchange with all such entities, we do require a high degree of independence, a great liberty of judgment in the formulation of questions and in establishing areas of interest, and these concerns are not so simple to address in the case of institutions that have their own dynamics and, of course, their own existing material and ideological dependence.

The Humanist Forum would like to lay the foundations for a future, worldwide dialogue. But it must not discard, a priori, the important contributions that have been and are being made by many diverse currents of thought and action, independent of the practical success or failure they have had. It would be of much greater interest to consider those many positions and to try to understand that, in this planet-wide civilization that is beginning to be born, a diversity of positions, value systems, and ways of life will certainly prevail in the future, despite the onslaught of those currents that wish to make all things uniform. In that sense, we aspire to a universal human nation, which we recognize as possible only if diversity exists. No central hegemony that dominates the peripheries, no lifestyle, no system of values, no ideological or religious agenda imposed at the cost of the abolition or disappearance of other forms of thought and being, will be able to sustain itself. Today we can see clearly that centralization tends to generate secessionist responses, because it does not respect the true integrity of peoples and regions that might be able to come together perfectly well within a real federation of collectivities. Nor should we think

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that economic control somehow works miracles. Or are there still people who believe that if they are going to grant loans for development, this entitles them to dictate changes first of the State, next of the legislature, and then of the mode of production, and later on changes concerning customs and social habits, and finally changes regarding dress, food, religion, and even thought?

Even as this naive absolutism meets with greater and greater difficulties in its attempts to impose itself, it is, as in the case of the secessionist movements noted earlier, contributing to a hardening and radicalizing of positions in all fields. If through the dictatorship of money we could in fact arrive at a fully realized society, it would be worth discussing the subject a little more. If, however, it is necessary, on top of everything else, to accept conditions that lead to regression in human development, the result will be only an increase in disorder and general misfortune.

The Humanist Forum must not lose sight of the principle of diversity or study other cultures from the standpoint of a zoological primitivism that declares one's own culture to be the zenith of an evolution that must be imitated by others. But while it is far more important to recognize that all cultures make their contributions to the great edifice of humanity, the Humanist Forum does need to establish some minimum conditions. The first is that it does not admit the participation of those who foster discrimination or intolerance. The second is that it does not allow the participation of those who foster violence as a methodology of action for imposing their concepts or ideals, no matter how elevated these concepts and ideals may be. Beyond these, there is no need for any other restrictions.

The Humanist Forum is internationalist, but does that mean that because of its ecumenicism it must reject the regional, the local? How can we reproach someone because they love their people, their homeland, their customs, their traditions? Should we really simply label such people with the epithet "nationalist" so that we can then dismiss them? To love one's roots is also to be generous in valuing the work and the suffering of the generations who have come before. That "nationalism" only becomes distorted when the affirmation of one's own nation or people is made at the expense of, or discriminating against, other collectivities, other peoples. What right would this Forum have to disparage the contributions of those who identify, for example, with socialism, with the ideal of creating a society that is egalitarian and just? What would the Forum be rejecting but one of the many possible models in which that ideal has been distorted through a tyrannically imposed uniformity. Why would this Forum ignore that liberal who considers his economic model an instrument for the well-being of all, and not just of the few? On what basis would this Forum discriminate against either believers or atheists on the basis of their respective approaches? Could in good conscience the Forum assert the superiority of some customs over others? In short, I believe that the limits set by the Forum should be the two and only the two mentioned above: the rejection of discrimination and intolerance, and the rejection of the methodologies of violence. In this way the Forum will be based on the inclusion, and not the exclusion, of human variety.

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I do not wish to take up any more time with this speech; I would simply like to mention some issues about which all of us would like to have a clearer understanding and regarding which we need to find the best practical formulae for action. These issues are, in my view: growing racism and discrimination; the increasing intervention by putative peacekeeping entities in the internal affairs of other countries; the manipulation of human rights as a pretext for intervention; the true state of human rights in all parts of the world; the growth in unemployment worldwide; the increase of poverty in many places and various sectors, even in wealthy societies; the progressive deterioration of health care and education; the activities of secessionist forces; the increase in drug addiction; the increase in suicide; religious persecution and the radicalization of religious groups; the psychosocial phenomena of alteration and violence; and the real threats of environmental destruction, duly prioritized. We would also like to have a clear picture of the phenomenon of destructuring that, beginning in larger social and political entities, ends up affecting everything, even down to the level of interpersonal relationships, the articulation of culture, and every project of common action among human groups.

In closing, I would like to point out, for those of you who will be putting together the various working groups, that the functioning of this Forum will not require a complex organization—rather, what is key is some mechanism that will allow ongoing contact and circulation of information. Nor will it need large resources in order to function, and the problem of funding will not be decisive for a group of this kind. It should have some sort of periodical, more in the style of a bulletin than a formal journal. It will need to find ways to make connections among people and institutions who could work together but may be hindered by distance. And finally, it will need to have an active corps of translators. Perhaps one committee of the Forum could be made up of the World Center for Humanist Studies, which will give some permanence to all these activities and, establishing priorities, maintain a schedule of the tasks being carried out.

I would like to extend a fraternal salute to the members of this Forum, and to express my best wishes to all of you for the work that is beginning today.