

**FACING THE 21st CENTURY:  
THREATS AND PROMISES**

**Conference Outline**

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## **FACING THE 21st CENTURY: THREATS AND PROMISES**

The 20th century confirms Bertrand Russell's observation that "The human race lives in a welter of organized hatreds and threats of mutual destruction." Innumerable natural and human-made disasters, each one seeming to exceed in horror those it follows, dot the historical landscape. Human beings continue to suffer the ravages of famine, ecological devastation, terrorism and war. While the plea for Human Rights echoes throughout the world, the law of "might is right" continues to prevail.

Confronting complex, interconnected global problems demands technical know-how along with moral and intellectual commitment. Technology, which offers at once the greatest threat and the greatest promise for humankind, must be used to preserve our species and our environment, not to pollute the earth or destroy ourselves. The problems facing us in the 21st century must not be left to technological experts alone. Their efforts must be complemented by the efforts of scientists, humanists and political leaders, using their human ingenuity and creativity to discover, in Einstein's words, "a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive."

One group uniquely qualified to join together in confronting such a challenge are the Nobel Laureates. They represent different nationalities, are involved in a diversity of fields of scholarly and human endeavor, and embrace a variety of political and religious

orientations. Nearly 250 Nobel Laureates are living, many active scholars, others retired but still concerned world citizens. Their intellectual and ethical insights, their theoretical and practical contributions to the welfare and development of humankind are universally recognized. They are in a unique position to use their wisdom and their prestige for the benefit of humankind: to diminish human suffering and to strengthen human well being.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE**

**FACING THE 21st CENTURY: THREATS AND PROMISES** is an International Conference that will be convened by the Honorable Francois Mitterrand, the President of France, and Professor Elie Wiesel, the 1986 Nobel Peace Laureate. The conference will be held in Paris, France during the third week of January, 1988.

The purpose of the conference is two-fold: (1) to provide a forum for Nobel Laureates in all fields to address some of the principal moral and political problems that challenge us as we approach the next century, and (2) to enable them to discuss, explore and suggest creative solutions to those problems so that we can face the 21st century with more confidence and greater promise.

## CONFERENCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- G-1 Focusing attention on the principal moral and political challenges confronting human beings now and in the 21st century.
- G-2 Evoking imaginative thinking about the future well-being of humankind;
  - 0-1 To convene an international conference of all Nobel Laureates;
  - 0-2 To invite a number of conference participants to prepare papers on issues/questions appropriate to the conference theme;
  - 0-3 To organize seminar groups on particular topics that will meet several times during the conference;
  - 0-4 To prepare and present a conference report intended to initiate dialogue with world leaders about selected issues of concern;
  - 0-5 To publish the proceedings of the conference;
  - 0-6 To produce a film related to the conference that can be used in educating the public about issues discussed during the conference;

## CONFERENCE FORMAT

The conference format will combine plenary sessions, seminars and informal discussions. It will be designed to maximize the involvement of all the participants so that everyone will be a resource person and all will be principals in the process of reflection and discussion.

There will be formal presentations of invited papers, formal discussants of each paper, seminars, and opportunities for formal and informal discussion. Skilled moderators will guide the discussions, giving all the opportunity to contribute their expertise, ingenuity and insights about issues, questions, problems and challenges facing humankind.

During the conference, participants will sharpen their focus on the identified topics, discuss creative approaches to meeting the challenges that face us, identify the implications of such approaches, and, if possible, recommend policies, principles or strategies for meeting these challenges.

Prior to the conference, papers will be distributed to all participants. Other selected readings also may be distributed to conferees in preparation for conference discussion.

Because ideas and values are transmitted through the arts as well as through scholarly research and discussion, the conference will include an aesthetic component along with the intellectual.

The entire conference will be audio recorded. In addition, some selected plenary sessions and seminars will be filmed and several

individuals will be interviewed, in order to produce a film for educational purposes. An edited book based on the conference proceedings also will be published.

## **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

The conference will focus on several areas: Hate and Tolerance; Political Oppression and the Rights of Individuals; War and Survival; Pollution and Ecological Equilibrium; and Science: Risk and Promise.

**HATE AND TOLERANCE:** The world seems poisoned by hate -- between people and among nations, races and religions. Whether or not it erupts into cruelty and violence is almost irrelevant because hate can destroy not just its object, but the humanity of those who embrace it.

Questions such as the following will be explored:

What is hate and what are its forms? What are some of the ways it is manifested?

Why are there certain strains of hate that seems to persist? Is it possible to eradicate hate?

What are the preconditions for tolerance? How can it be fostered among people who have different ideologies, religions, or are of different races and cultures? Is there a future for tolerance?

**POLITICAL OPPRESSION AND THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL:** Since the end of World War II, political oppression, far from disappearing or declining, has increased. More governments abuse their citizens and violate their human rights than respect and defend them. In many countries, government-sponsored death squads mutilate and

murder political opponents, using violence as a means of controlling their own people. Periodic reports issued by Amnesty International confirm that the use of government censorship, control of the media, the imprisonment, torture and murder of political opponents, and state sponsored terrorism are widespread.

Attention will be given to questions such as the following:

Why do oppressive regimes flourish? What can be done to fight for the rights of individuals, to encourage and support government that serves people rather than demeans them?

Which ideas and what practices encourage and support human rights and freedom?

What can we do to strengthen human rights and reduce the power of oppressive governments?

How can powerful governments be humanized?

What are the pre-conditions for freedom and democracy?

How can Memory be a shield to safeguard the dignity and human rights of people?

**WAR AND SURVIVAL:** Nuclear weapons introduce a quantitatively and qualitatively new factor in human history. No problem is more overwhelming, no danger more unremitting than the potential for and possibility of nuclear war. It is an unimaginable, ineffable disaster which is within the realm of possibility, one which could devastate human life, destroy all human dreams and hopes, every creative work of art -- all that reflects our humanity and helps to make civilization



worth saving. Scientists and humanists must find a way to stand together against death and oblivion and for a sane and humane future for all people.

Questions such as the following could be discussed:

What means can be developed for dealing with disparate power relationships in international relations?

Why has an awareness of the threat of nuclear destruction not forced us to alter our confrontational approach to international affairs?

What are the checks and balances on the human control of technology? What can be done now to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

Can we work cooperatively and collaboratively to apply our human genius and imagination for survival instead of destruction? Is it possible to imagine a world without nuclear, chemical or other high-tech weapons?

Can our commitment to life, to a future for ourselves and our descendents, supercede our disagreements and rivalries?

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND ECOLOGICAL EQUILIBRIUM:** Human beings inhabit two worlds: the natural world and the constructed world. The former is the world of plants and animals, the world of natural resources. The latter is the world of social and political institutions, the world human beings have built. These worlds are interrelated, although human beings are not always conscious of that interrelationship.

Every human decision and action has an affect on the environment and must be considered from an ethical perspective. After accidents such as those of Three Mile Island, Bhopal and Chernobyl, it seems evident that ecological issues and questions must concern not just environmentalists but everyone if Homo sapiens is to survive as a biological species on a habitable planet.

Questions for discussion might include:

What can be done to develop a respect for the earth as an environment suitable for human life?

Are there limits to human ecological intervention that the earth can safely tolerate?

Is it possible that the earth will soon be so polluted that human beings will find it difficult to inhabit the earth?

Are there areas of the natural world that are seriously threatened by pollution? What must be done in the short and long-term to fight these threats?

How can human beings go beyond developing mechanisms designed to prevent or minimize environmental devastation to developing new ways of relating to each other and to the environment?

**SCIENCE: RISK AND PROMISE:** Faced with the questions and problems of their time, some scientists have always questioned whether their work served the interests of humanity. Others, interested only in their own technological competence and professional skill, irrespective of the purpose for which their research would be used, were not concerned about

such questions. Today, however, programs in genetic engineering, the development of sophisticated weapons and weapon systems, the complexity of new diseases, the potentiality of biotechnology are forcing many people -- not just scientists -- to ask questions about the compatibility of science and human rights, and to reflect on the risks and the promises in scientific research and applied technology.

Questions such as the following will be explored:

What is the future of genetic engineering and its consequences on the nature of human beings? Is it ethical to alter the genetic code of animals?

Is Aids a disease like any other, or is it qualitatively different from other diseases? Does the very nature of the disease demand that governments issue policies that may restrict the individual rights of people who have been infected with the Aids virus?

What is the influence and impact of scientists on political debate? What should it be? In what manner must it be conducted to be effective? How can scientists and humanists mobilize the political community in their respective countries to make Aids research a priority?

**PROGRAM OUTLINE**  
(Draft)

**DAY ONE**

1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Conference Registration

7:30 - 10:00 p.m. Opening of Conference  
President Francois Mitterand

Chamber Music  
Reception

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**DAY TWO**

7:30 - 8:30 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 - 9:15 a.m. Welcome

9:15 - 11:00 a.m. Keynote Address: Overall Theme  
Professor Elie Wiesel

Two Respondents

Discussion with Presenter and  
Respondents

11:00 - 11:30 a.m. Coffee Break

11:30 - 1:00 p.m. Two Respondents

Discussion

1:00 - 2:00 p.m. Lunch

2:30 - 4:30 p.m. Simultaneous Workshops

Presentation

Discussion

Summary of the Day's Discussion  
Activities

7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Cocktails  
Dinner

NOTE: At some appropriate moment(s)  
during the day, there will be  
a Performing Arts Interlude(s)

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**DAY FOUR**

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Keynote Address: Theme #3

Respondents

10:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Keynote Address: Theme #4

Respondents

Discussion (both morning sessions)

1:00 - 1:15 p.m.

Summary of Morning Address and  
Discussion

1:15 - 2:30 p.m.

Lunch

2:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Working Sessions  
(Preparation for Conference  
Statement/Manifesto/Document)

6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Dinner

8:00 p.m.

Concert (French Philharmonic)

Reception Follows

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**DAY FIVE**

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Panel of Four Conference Responders

Recommendations

4:30 - 5:00 p.m.	Break
5:00 - 6:00 p.m.	Workshop Reports to Plenary Session
	Discussion
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Cocktails Dinner

NOTE: At some appropriate moment(s) during the day, there will be a Performing Arts Interlude(s)

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**DAY THREE**

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 - 10:30 a.m.	Simultaneous Workshops
	Presentation
	Respondents
10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Break
11:00 - 12:30 p.m.	Continue Workshop Sessions
	Summary of First Session
	Discussion
	Recommendations
12:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 - 3:30 p.m.	Report from Workshop Sessions to Plenary Session
	Keynote Address: Theme #2
	Respondents
3:30 - 4:00 p.m.	Break
4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Discussion

Short Reactions/Comments

Discussion

10:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Presentation of Conference  
Statement with Recommendations

Discussion

Summary and Final Conference  
Statement: Professor Elie Wiesel

Closing Address: President Francois  
Mitterand

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Lunch

Departure