

Award Ceremony

SCHOOLS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION – ESPERE TEACHING COMPASSION AND TENDERNESS

**Leonel Narváez Gomez imc
Foundation for Reconciliation**

I give my warmest thanks to the Official Delegation of Colombia in UNESCO that has honored our Foundation for Reconciliation with the nomination for this prestigious award. I thank the judges and especially Dr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO for granting us this Honorable Mention that we so greatly appreciate.

Today, overcome with gratitude, our greatest wish that you may know peace in your heart.

I come from a world in which widows of war cry with eyes full of pain and abandonment, while the children play in fields mined with hatred. I come from a world in which the guitar and the drum dance on the hips of the native and mixed villagers, a world in which the years of solitude measure more than a century yet sing of love to life.

I am here on behalf of the Foundation for Reconciliation to profess once again our irrevocable commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation as the only safe paths to overcome violence and build a sustainable peace.

I am here to remind us that in the globalized world, the politics of education respond more to the need to educate our rational brains to enable efficient calculation of profits, while such things as respectful treatment of others, compassion, tenderness and the emotionally moving inspiration of human behavior are not found in school.

We suffer degrees of emotional ignorance. The events that occur daily permit hatred, rage and the desire for vengeance to become impediments to a peaceful life and to a life of living together in cooperation and progress. A poor person full of rage and rancor is doubly impoverished. While it is necessary to satisfy material needs, it is also imperative to transform the angry soul. Proper rules of existence demand an additional effort from world leaders to strengthen emotional education.

Teaching compassion, kindness in speaking, tenderness and the art of deep breathing is the counsel of wisdom. People in the world are now at a cross-roads of internationalized fear. We need to explore the pedagogies of love so that, in the future, men of war may sit down and talk with the men of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This is why, in our Foundation for Reconciliation, we make face masks of paper painted with the color of hope, to see with different eyes and share our stories of life as we dance around a bonfire in a space known as the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation or "ESPERE".

We understand that without forgiveness there is no future and that justice is not punitive but restorative of the offender and that true forgiveness forgives the unforgivable.

We move forward, overcoming hatred, rage and the desire for vengeance that violence plants in the hearts of its victims. Proposing to move forward with dignity on the road of time, we unchain Prometheus in the lives of those who have not found new narratives to overcome the trauma and are condemned to repeat the past. He who does not forgive remains forever tied to his past and his ungrateful memory impairs his ability to reach for new skies and new lands.

Today, in Colombia as in the rest of the world, we strive to forge strong ties of fraternity and spiritual embraces that illuminate the pathways of social justice. Those of us who belong to civil societies are invited to form a grand assembly of peoples. Our best ally and the only indispensable tool for this task is the kind word and walking peacefully.

The Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, or "ESPERE", are places where kind words, active listening, tenderness and compassion are cultivated. Moments of patience are also fostered in which listening and soft spoken words are peacefully employed to educate the impetuous soul. Understanding of emotions is taught, and the following ideology is suggested: ***"Against the irrationality of violence we propose the irrationality of forgiveness and reconciliation"***.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your company. Here, there is no solitude. A multitude of spirits in solidarity forms a choir that illuminates those who sow new beginnings. Together, we will reap a friendlier world; from heart to heart, we will educate the dignity and character of those who forge the future. This is the Foundation for Reconciliation that gratefully accepts the HONORABLE MENTION UNESCO EDUCATION PEACE PRIZE FOR 2006.

I invite you to pause for a moment with your hands over your heart. There you can feel the gently palpating heart of a body capable of charity. Now let us embrace those who accompany us and recognize with that gesture the common humanity that motivates our lives.

Without forgiveness there is no future, not for me, not for you, nor for the nations on this earth!