

**Allocution of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás S.J.
to the World Congress of World Union of Jesuit Alumni/ae
(Bujumbura, Burundi, 26th July 2009)**

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be among you today, alumni and alumnae of the Jesuit schools of Africa and other continents, as well as among my dear Jesuit companions who are responsible for accompanying former students.

It is also a great joy for me to find myself in Africa for the second time, today in Bujumbura, and to take this opportunity to thank all those who have organised this Congress and who have welcomed us to Burundi.

For the Superior General of the Society of Jesus it is a special joy to meet former students who represent the Jesuit schools of the entire world, because your assembly is a testimony to the significant commitment of the Society and its academic institutions in the field of education. Your group, because of its international character, offers a significant example of the criterion of universality which the Society of Jesus professes and implements in its educational mission. Your assembly is a testimony of your desire to continue the universality of a pedagogical tradition with a view to service, service to the whole of humanity.

The World Union of Jesuit Alumni/ae wanted not only to hold their meeting on African soil, but also to include the dimension of “service for Africa.” This dimension coincides with a decision of the Society of Jesus, which since 2003 has included Africa as one of its five apostolic priorities.

The programme of your Congress puts at the centre of your reflections this threefold question inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius:

Alumni/ae of Jesuit Schools for a better Africa:

What have we done?

What are we doing?

What ought we to do?

I hope you succeed in answering these questions with both objectivity and enthusiasm. I hope that your contribution will be life-giving for alumni/ae of Africa and of the world, and that the proposals and commitments of your Congress will also be a challenge for the Jesuits themselves.

We know that Africa has a human, cultural, linguistic and religious wealth that is truly amazing. The Christian way, and within it, the Ignatian way, consists in welcoming this diversity so that we might know it better, respect it, promote it and place it at the service of all. Our African schools themselves embrace this great diversity, and the vision of Ignatian pedagogy includes the desire to respect this cultural and religious diversity. Having already visited two schools in Nigeria, and in particular the one in Abuja, I was able to see for myself that many of the pupils and teachers were of different religions or of different Christian traditions. That is what I have experienced in our Jesuit institutions in Japan where only 20% of

the professors and 1% of the students were Christians. There is no contradiction in making our Jesuit institutions places of inter-religious collaboration. Indeed we have every hope that if young people of different cultures and religions come to know each other from their earliest years in school, then they will not feel threatened by diversity later on. They will have already acquired attitudes of respect, listening, friendship and a spirit of cooperation.

This universal vision of the Christian mission was recently brought to the attention of the Jesuits by Pope Benedict XVI in his address to the General Congregation on the 21st February 2008. He stated that today "the new peoples, who do not know the Lord or whose inadequate knowledge of him is such that they cannot recognise him as the Saviour, are distant today not so much geographically as culturally. It is not oceans or immense distances that challenge the heralds of the gospel but the boundaries resulting from an erroneous or superficial vision of God and the human person that stand between faith and human knowledge, faith and modern science, faith and the commitment to justice." My meetings with the Holy Father have manifested to me that one of his major concerns is the report of the increasing distance between the modern culture and the Christian values.

In this call of the Holy Father, I would like to emphasise the call to take the risk of going beyond the visible frontiers of the Church. Today, apart from geographical frontiers, there are all sorts of frontiers to be crossed, not only to meet people whom we have never met before, but also to overcome all the natural limitations within which we are always in danger of confining ourselves because of our lack of openness to change in our world or our failure to appreciate its diversity.

In order to act globally, however, it is not enough to cross frontiers; one also needs to patiently create different styles of collaboration. This collaboration, already desired by Father Kolvenbach, could be expressed in this way: " while it is true that the ideal of a good education relies on the fact that when you become a responsible adult, you have no further need of your former teachers. However, we, the Society of Jesus need you; we need your collaboration in Our apostolic commitments. These commitments aim at improving the welfare of all men and women most especially the marginalized and weak. We do this in a spirit of Christian Humanism."

The Society of Jesus is more and more aware that it cannot work in isolation. It cannot work effectively to bring about a more just world without collaboration with others and in particular collaboration with you, our former students. We realise that collaboration amid diversity does not just happen. It calls for openness and serious formation on the part of those involved. The Jesuits themselves need to be formed in order to collaborate, and they have the obligation to offer formation to their former students and to help bring to new life the initial formation which these students received in the schools in order to face the ever new challenges of the changing world for the good of our contemporaries.

How is this collaboration between past pupils and Jesuits being lived today? How could it develop in the future? In particular, how can it develop so that together we can do something with and for Africa? How do we prepare ourselves both individually and together? What might be our first pioneering project? I do not have an answer to these questions, but your congress will be able certainly to outline concrete projects.

A few years ago you created the Arrupe Foundation through the Arrupe dollar. This Foundation still continues to be a response of the World Union to wide ranging needs. What will be the next step in this type of commitment? The many challenges we must take up in today's world can be expressed in terms of "contracts". The first challenge concerns the "natural contract": it is about how to provide for everyone a healthy environment to live in. The second challenge concerns the "social contract" which implies working for justice for all. The third challenge concerns the "cultural contract" which aims to educate all. Finally the fourth challenge concerns the "ethical contract": how is it possible to offer a better life for all?

The challenges of a worldwide commitment, like all challenges of collaboration, have their demands. If I refer to similar challenges within the Society of Jesus, it is only to draw your attention in a brotherly way to some of these demands so that you may be aware of them when they arise.

The first demand concerns each of us personally: a belief in the values and the ways of proceeding that we acquired in our Jesuit education. We all recall the phrase which Fr. Pedro Arrupe often used, "men and women for others" and which was enriched by Fr. Kolvenbach as "men and women for and with others". Jesuit education is not a guarantee of privilege, but a term which cannot be used truthfully unless it refers always and everywhere to persons of service, men and women ready to give of themselves in a spirit of gratuity.

One, of course meets in many places and in various professional sectors, remarkable former students who's education has born the fruit of Christian Humanism and evangelical generosity. I wonder, however, how effective your associations are in attracting these alumni/ae? I also ask you to make your associations more appealing to younger generations so that you can benefit from their dynamism. This presupposes that initially such initiatives are undertaken at the local level and, as they develop and mature, would be offered to other institutions through the national and international organizations. I dream of a synergy between past pupils and Jesuits so that this spirit takes shape concretely on African soil with the support of the other continents.

The second demand concerns structures. If the Society of Jesus is concerned about changing some of its structures in order to breathe new life into its apostolic mission in the Church, it may be useful to ask if the World Union has the structures adapted to the effective collaboration about which I spoke earlier. Some of your leaders have told me that several Associations with long serving presidents have become moribund, lacking vitality and that collaboration among Associations in their respective federations or confederations has left something to be desired. Yet at the same time these leaders challenged me with their desire that the Society of Jesus provide the Associations with spiritual guides who are available, active and creative so that a new style of collaboration between former students and Jesuit institutions might be brought about. You are challenged, and we Jesuits are challenged. It is in this condition that we will put into practice the wish expressed by the last General Congregation:

"We encourage the Society's government at all levels to explore with other communities of Ignatian inspiration, both religious and lay, ways to promote and support an 'Ignatian Family' or 'Ignatian Community' which will have a common vision of service, will promote networks of mutual support, and

will foster new and closer forms of collaboration locally, regionally, and internationally. We encourage Superiors, especially Major Superiors, to seek ways to support and accompany CLC and other Ignatian inspired autonomous associations locally, regionally, and nationally". CG 35, D. 6 # 29. Together we need to choose to take a step forward so that we may ensure a collaboration that is qualitative, effective and enduring.

But to act in this manner one must respect the diversities of each continent as well as each country within a given continent. Coming from Asia, I note major differences which exist between Asia and Europe, the USA and Latin America.

It is a fact that contacts are much easier today by the modern means of communication, but the use of these methods must be accompanied with a triple consideration. First: the importance of in-depth communication. What often missing in the use of these new means is precisely this depth, however we must go in-depth. Second: we must also demonstrate a certain level of creativity. One cannot be satisfied with old formulas. Finally: our use of these means must express the "life of the Spirit ". Without this "spiritual" dimension we can be effective but we lose the "heart" of what makes our work ministry.

Some have suggested that the desire for the renewal of your Associations be expressed through a change of name. For them, talking about "Alumni/ae Associations" calls to mind an outdated approach which discourages younger generations from joining their seniors. It has been suggested to name the group "alumni/ae and friends of the Society of Jesus". It is not for me to take a position on this matter; that is for you to do. I only want to lend my support to the desire to be active, creative, collaborative and inclusive of all the life-forces that have benefited from the Ignatian educational tradition. As the Americans say it: "We want to sell our product". If our product is not selling, one should not hesitate to change the label.

Dear Friends, my meeting with you has been brief, but our conversations with one another will bear testimony to the new life which is emerging from Jesuit communities and their educational institutions and which is rooted in the mission of Jesus Christ. I know that you will inform me in a timely manner about the results of your discussions and the action plans that will follow. I want to assure you that the Society of Jesus will respond to the World Union of Jesuit Alumni/ae, not by taking solo initiatives, but by searching for ways in which we can work together.

I have heard about the strong expectations which were expressed in your congress for a contribution of the Society to higher education. There are obviously great expectations in your regions for such a contribution. The Society is open to the reflections you have begun. May these reflections be made in collaboration with those in charge.

I reiterate my deep conviction: the Lord is at work in your meetings. He wants to bring about new responses for meeting the needs of the continent of Africa and the universal Church. With this end in mind, He is seeking new forms of collaboration. I ask the Lord to bless your work and everything that will come from it. Thank you.

*Adolfo Nicolás S.J.
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