

OPENING OF THE CONGRES

BY THE CHAIRMAN, DR. J. P. VAN PRAAG



DR. J. P. VAN PRAAG, born May 11, 1911 at Amsterdam. Studied Dutch Language & Literature, History, Paedagogy and Philosophy at Amsterdam University. After a career as a secondary school teacher, he became in 1954 a member of the Provincial Government of the Province of South Holland. Since 1946 he has been the Chairman of the Dutch Humanist League, and since 1952 also the Chairman of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Publications: 'Modern Humanism, a renaissance?' (1947) and various brochures and articles on Humanism.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Meine Damen und Herren,
Mesdames et Messieurs,
Min Damer og Herrer,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this congress with some words of cordial welcome. It is a great satisfaction that so many humanists are present from 22 countries, among whom the representatives of 21 affiliated organizations.

In the latest issue of International Humanism Mrs. Morain wrote about the significance congresses like this can have for personal contact between members, and I am convinced that this congress too can provide an enriching inspiration in this field, if we only develop our capacity for really meeting our fellow-men from other parts of the world, with their backgrounds, their aspirations and also their desire for contact.

But I hope that you will allow me to address first of all some words of gratitude to our Norwegian friends for their great devotion and care in organizing this congress.

Norske venner,

Vi er dere meget takknemlige for den store innsats og omsorg, som har gjort det mulig for oss å organisere vår kongress i disse vakre omgivelser. Vi er fullstendig klar over at forberedelsene til denne kongressen har medført en mengde ekstra-arbeid for dere alle, men dette arbeidet vil sikkert baere frukter: Det at dere her er de høyt ansette vertskap for så mange medlemmer fra 22 land med representanter fra 21 søsterorganisasjoner vil utvilsomt øke forbundets prestisje her i landet.

Dieser Kongress ist den weitgesteckten Zielen des Ethischen Humanismus gewidmet.

Humanisten aus 22 Ländern, darunter die Vertreter von 21 angeschlossenen Verbänden, werden sich während einiger Tage tiefgehend, hoffe ich, mit diesem Thema befassen, nicht sosehr um eine allgemeine Theorie zu entwickeln, sondern vielmehr zur Besinnung auf ihre greifbare Aufgabe in der Welt und auf den dazu zu leistenden Beitrag. Wir wissen, dass unsere materiellen und organisatorischen Möglichkeiten beschränkt sind, aber wir sind uns bewusst, dass wir uns gegenseitig in Ergebenheit neue Wege weisen oder alte bekannte Wege gangbarer machen können.

Réunis ici avec tant d'humanistes de tant de pays, parmi lesquels les représentants de 22 organisations-membres, nous aurons à examiner ce que nous pourrions réaliser, avec des moyens modiques et avec un grand dévouement, en vue des buts à long terme de l'Humanisme Laïque.

Il ne s'agit pas de théories dans le vague mais plutôt de la détermination de notre tâche. En tant qu'organisation à statut consultatif auprès de L'UNESCO nous avons de grandes obligations à l'égard de l'épanouissement de la culture humaine en général et de l'éducation à une humanité sincère en particulier.

Nous savons que notre organisation française, La Ligue de l'Enseignement peut nous assister en cela de toutes ses possibilités et nous espérons qu'elle voudra s'occuper en particulier de notre représentation auprès du Siège Central de l'UNESCO à Paris.

Since our last congress in London our prestige and our influence have considerably increased. The number of affiliated organizations and contacts has been greatly extended.

We are recognized as an organization with consultative status with Unesco, but this fact also imposes upon us the obligation to accept our task in the international society. We bear a concrete responsibility for such international activities as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the F.A.O., for the international exchange of thoughts in the field of the Humanistic Studies and for the chances of human development in the world.

Besides and on top of that we are together here to discuss the Long Range Goals of Ethical Humanism. In this connection general theory is not so much involved, as are our concrete possibilities, limited but meaningful.

What unites us, is not in the first place a common theory but our common attitudes, aims and commitments. Notwithstanding all differences in philosophical interpretation this determines our common conviction. I hope that nobody will overlook this when in the next few days we start trying to find concrete answers to the practical questions of the terms of reference.

Unsere gemeinsamen Stellungnahmen, Ziele und Verpflichtungen sollen uns zum Sieg über unsere allzumenschlichen Beschränkungen führen. Hüten wir uns davor, dass nicht Ansehen, Eigenwille oder überlieferte Einseitigkeit unser Verhalten in diesem Kongress bestimmen, sondern die Erkenntnis, dass den gleichen menschlichen Reifheits- und Freiheitsbestrebungen in vielerlei Weise Geltung verschafft werden kann. Ich hoffe, dass diese Erkenntnis uns führen kann bei der handgreiflichen Beantwortung der praktischen Fragen aus den Fragestellungen.

L'inspiration de l'Humanisme Laïque doit nous permettre d'utiliser notre organisation pratiquement pour la cause de la maturité et la liberté humaine. Partout au monde il y a des humanistes qui, dans leur situation nationale et avec leur tradition culturelle, veulent se dévouer au développement des possibilités humaines.

This congress can become a landmark in the development of the I.H.E.U. provided all narrow-mindedness is set aside.

Ethical Humanism is no doctrine, but an inspiration; this inspiration should enable us to overcome the human limitations of prestige, stubbornness and traditional one-sidedness. It should enable us to make us really subservient to the cause of human maturity and personal and social freedom; sober and ingenious, critical and enthusiastic.

In this spirit I bid you welcome and in this spirit I hope that we shall approach each other with the will to come to mutual understanding and to explore our way for the years to come.

CHAIRMEN OF PLENARY SESSIONS

Sidney H. Scheuer
New York



Prof. dr. G. von Frankenberg
Hanover

