

International Theatre Institute ITI

World Organization for the Performing Arts

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Sophocles said that among all the wonders of the world, none deserved as much admiration as man. For two thousand five hundred years countless artists, philosophers, rulers and politicians have espoused the idea of the great Greek poet.

One could say that the history of humanity is the history of human rights and the realization of the humanist vision of the world.

However, today as we near the end of the twentieth century, it is humanity's future that gives us cause for concern and anxiety. Indeed not a day goes by without our learning of increasingly cruel acts of violence and terror, of dangerously tense situations and armed conflict. Every day we witness the growing hatred of one human being for another, mutual intolerance and brutal violations of human rights which, in the field of international relations become transformed into threats of catastrophe.

A self-destructive fever seems to have humanity in its grip. In our attempt to prevent these catastrophes we have resorted to a tragic and paradoxical form of therapy; struggling to maintain life we undermine its roots; declaring peace we accelerate the insane arms race, protecting people's freedom we violate their sovereignty; solemnly proclaiming the Charter of the Rights of Man we trample human dignity underfoot.

The UNESCO Constitution asserts that wars begin in the minds of men and that it is in their minds that peace must be built – a lasting peace founded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity.

What does the reality lie ? For 35 years, right from the end of the Second World War, funds devoted to culture and art have decreased from year to year, in inverse proportion to increasing expenditure on weaponry.

And yet it is culture and art, it is the artists that are called to prevent the degeneration of humankind. Only Culture enables us to maintain a balance between technical progress and the intellectual and moral development of humanity. Art is the conscience of the individual and the society. Right from its beginnings, the theatre has always been engaged in the debate of the human soul torn between good and evil. It has stigmatized lying and hypocrisy, pride and selfishness, and condemned violence and the hunger for power.

Right from Aeschyles - through Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht and Beckett - up until contemporary writers, dramatic art has tried to penetrate the mystery of human existence, seeking the key to the conscience and the soul in order to protect the life and dignity of human beings.

Theatre is only theatre in as much as it reflects life and its epoch. It is only theatre if it has learnt to understand the complex soul of its audiences, if it is capable of judging its conscience and fighting for its rights," said one of the great figures in Polish theatre, Leon Schiller. Creating such theatre is the duty of the contemporary artist. In such theatre, humanity's moral sensibility, stifled by the world around us, is capable of being revived. Such a theatre engenders intellectual and spiritual solidarity in its audience.

In this year 1980 we should celebrate the 18th World Theatre Day with the motto "Theatre defender of peace and the dignity of humankind". It gives us the opportunity to invite governments throughout the world to grant theatre its rightful place in the nation, there where this is not yet the case, and to call for a world in which Antigone, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet will no longer be doomed to die, a world in which nothing will deserve as much admiration as human beings.

Translated from the French text by Jennifer Walpole