

**Václav Havel**  
**Message to 31st ITI-UNESCO World Conference**  
**"Ancestral Roots to New Artistic Routes of Expression: Mobilizing Cultural**  
**Diversity to achieve the UN Millennium Goals"**  
**Manila 22 - 29 May 2006**

Dear Friends,

Allow me to express regret that circumstances have prevented me from attending in person this important conference, which is a historic event, particularly for my beloved Philippines. I therefore wish it enormous success and send sincere greetings to you all.

It was my honour to visit the Philippines in 1995. Although it was part of an official presidential visit, I had the opportunity, apart from duties of state, to get to know important places in that beautiful country, thanks to the friendly care of my partner, President Fidel Ramos. I visited the historical city of Cebu with its Basilica of the Santo Niño, whose cult had a major influence on the Infant of Prague, which, as my friend Cardinal Sin, told me, helped unite the Philippines. I visited Leyte, where General Mc Arthur commenced his liberation operation during the Pacific War. I paid homage to the memory of the national hero Jose Rizal, whose great friend was Ferdinand Blumentritt, a professor from the Czech town of Litoměřice.

And I watched a gala performance of my play *The Memorandum* at the Culture Centre of the Philippines in the company of my friend Corazon Aquino. As you can see, my profession of dramatist came in very helpful in the performance of my presidential duties.

From the above recollections it is clear what an important place is occupied in the human memory by recollections of historical events shaped by our ancestors. Hence the topic of your conference "Ancestral Roots to New Artistic Routes of Expression: Mobilizing Cultural Diversity to Achieve the UN Millennium Goals" is in fact always topical, at all times and in all places on our planet. That awareness of belonging to one's origins gives rise to an awareness of responsibility in every creative individual.

In today's world, which is interconnected in multiple ways, all creative activity, and artistic creation above all, is linked with ancestral roots, although it may not be immediately evident. If we look back at the earliest history of the theatre we see that all the great authors of Antiquity based themselves on the Greek myths and fables, almost all the plays of William Shakespeare and his associates were based on stories and legends from history, and there are plenty of other examples. In fact even my own plays, dubbed absurd dramas and at first sight closely associated with the problems of modern people, are indirectly linked with the legacy of past generations. Each of us and each of the characters of our artistic creations are the resultant of a genetic code evolved over centuries and of biological DNA, and everything we do is fundamentally moulded thereby. In today's world, which modern technologies have caused to shrink, all human beings bring into the societies in which they live the memory of their civilisation, their anthropological roots, their culture and their religion, and this also applies to the work of dramatists.

For that reason, in today's world, which confronts the threat of terror, famine and intolerance, not only politicians, but also artists and dramatists have an ever greater responsibility to help create a world of mutual understanding, in which there is respect for human rights, solidarity and civil society.

It is good that your conference is being held in the Philippines, which, with its history of religious coexistence and its long tradition of democracy, is a good example of cultural diversity and the theme of your conference. Allow me, therefore, to wish your meeting success, which will benefit not only the theatrical profession but also help create a better image of our planet.