

Inaugural Address
Third World Congress of Basque Collectivities
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Lehendakari Ibarretxe, distinguished officials, ladies and gentlemen:

I am humbled and honored to be here with you and to have this privilege to address you, as a daughter of emigrants and survivors of the bombing of Gernika who departed for Boise, Idaho in 1960, and from the perspective of an academic researcher who has investigated Basques around the world. I have visited your Basque Centers and participated in your community activities. I have interviewed several hundred Basque diaspora leaders from twenty different countries and have enjoyed years of fieldwork in your Basque communities abroad. Many of you have hosted me in your homes and extended great hospitality and friendship, for which I am sincerely grateful and very happy to be with you again.

At the First World Congress of Basque Collectivities in 1995, Professor William Douglass presented the question of “*Nora Goaz?*” “Where are we going?” and in response we have titled this Congress “*Aurrera Goaz*”. *Bai, aurrera goaz*, but toward what? Rather than moving haphazardly in any which direction, if we first decide our destination then we can create a map to get there. Let us not pretend that this is a homogeneous diaspora. We are admittedly and proudly heterogeneous from our experiences in Europe to the Americas to Australia and the Philippines, and there are of course many different ways to organize and manage a Basque community. However, we have agreed and decided that one of the directions we all want to take is to educate and attract the interest of the youth of our communities. My research with the homeland and diaspora institutions and with the Basque populations abroad demonstrates that there are certain paths with higher rates of success.

Perhaps our final destination could be transnational and cosmopolitan Basque identity: a traditional and simultaneously contemporary manifestation of our Basqueness. Like the Basque whalers who stretched their mental limits of geography and of imagination, this generation of leadership must do the same and reinvent the euskal etxea. Diasporas tend to live at the intersection of history and the future, therefore, the euskal etxeak must provide for both. You will promote Basques as the explorers on the oceans and on the Internet; Basques as the innovators in shipbuilding and in today’s aerospace engineering, Basques as the authors of cave drawings and Oteiza sculptures. We are both traditional and post-modern, and our diaspora institutions must adapt to today’s realities. Exactly what is your organization doing today to provide for its own future? Exactly what are your leaders doing to protect and maintain your Basque collective memory and past? How are you educating the children and newly associated Basque ethnics? What do you offer for the “born again Basques” who

wish to return to the community? Exactly what mechanisms does your membership have in place for democratic evaluation of the existing organization, or federation, and its programs?

Our responsibility this week is to draw the map and the subsequent itinerary to our destination. It is not a straight line, and there are numerous paths that arrive to the same objective. You must focus on creating an appropriate map for your own community and its own needs. The homeland is plural, and so is the diaspora. We are embarking from different places, with personalized realities and locally grown communities, therefore, all the more reason we must help each other on this journey.

We must respect the elderly generation of economic and political exiles in our communities and recognize their hardship. Emigration and exile are traumatic experiences of suffering. Our children must hear the oral testimonies and must know and understand what those before them have endured. It is essential to remember and understand our common past, and then—because we live in the present and prepare for our futures—we must rejuvenate and reinvent our identities. Ethnic identity is a social construction and new circumstances require new concepts with each generation reconstructing its own existence.

The *euskal etxeak* are in the next phase of institutional development and have graduated from protecting Basque culture for ourselves exclusively, to promoting it in the greater society. Historically, the Basque Centers introduced the emigrant to the new host country and assisted with networks for employment, housing, and socializing etc. Today, the organizations must introduce the later generations to *Euskal Herria*, and teach them about their own culture, past and present. Diaspora communities can formulate a projection of Basque culture to their own immediate micro-communities, but also to the wider world. Centers can utilize the tools of technology and interconnectivity to their advantage to advocate and foster Basque studies, language, political awareness, cuisine, sport, art and music, and tourism. Think of your Basque association as a hub, as a center of activity, which you merely help to direct. These are democratic structures and your customers and members decide what they are interested in and you must do whatever possible to provide it. Ethnic identity maintenance does not emanate from top-down management, but rather is a daily decision of democratic participation. You must listen to your members and to others who are not members. Why are they not coming to the Center? What is lacking in your offerings that they need in order to fulfill their own personal definition of Basqueness? In addition to polling your current members, you should seek out other Basques in your cities and ask them why they do *not* participate. Diasporas cannot build the future on memory and myth alone, they need activity and social interaction for the re-creation of ethnic community. Public institutions and private enterprise constantly renovate, and the speeded interactions of globalization demand vision and strategies for the future. The leaders of the Basque Centers need to establish programs that give the youth, and others, a reason to actively participate in that community. The reasons might be combinations of educational, emotional, psychological, existential, and instrumental objectives.

Institutional relationships that in the past have been only bi-directional between the Basque Country and one diaspora community, or a federation, and vice-versa, could be expanded so that Basque communities are interacting among each other to solve common problems and to give each other ideas. This takes time and planning, and the changing circumstances in today's globalized reality invite new thinking and novel solutions. This may require a slight re-organization or re-structuring

of your Euskal Etxea, and the subsequent opportunities would increase.

Ultimately the euskal etxeak have to be prepared to provide answers to the classic question of “What does it mean to be Basque?” The homeland is attempting to recover from, and to cast-off, its recent repressive history and it wishes to portray a Basque ultra post-modernism. The diaspora already lives in post-modernity and is more interested in Basque history. Diaspora Basques often are not enthusiastic about the contemporary foreign art displayed in the Guggenheim Bilbao, but prefer the Basque Museo Etnográfico in the Casco Viejo. They are not as interested in the new metro as they are in the Camino de Santiago. The Basque Government wants you to see the Kursaal in Donostia, but most of you would likely prefer to see an operating baserri. The answers to defining “Basqueness” are personalized individual answers. I believe it would be an error to try to confine our identity to only one time period, either the futuristic Euskal Herria promoted by the homeland institutions, or the no longer existent historical Basque Country maintained in the imagination of the diaspora. It is not beneficial for any of the communities to focus on only one set of Basque behaviors, traditions, or ideology. We must encourage both traditional and contemporary “Basqueness” from the poets, artists, chefs and musicians in our Basque Centers. We could encourage commercial interactivity, and we must enhance intellectual and academic studies and research projects that produce results utilizing stringent scientific methodology and theory to provide sociological, political, economic, and anthropological explanations for our Basque diaspora phenomenon.

If we are preparing the youth of our communities we should be equipping them for the future and their future interactions with each other and with the homeland. In the Basque diaspora, the questions, “Who am I?” and “What does it mean to me to be Basque?” have often actually been interpreted as “Who are my parents? How can I replicate their memories and definitions of Basqueness?” I challenge you to utilize this week to look forward. The imagined Basque diaspora is a creation of our desire to maintain ethnic solidarity, and it can be recreated and redesigned, and it should be. If not, it runs the danger of becoming a museum culture, and a museum diaspora. We should look and move forward and not base our identity solely on history, but also on a shared vision for our joint and collaborative tomorrows.

This includes a more serious commitment from homeland institutions as well. For example, the governments in Navarra and Iparralde have not one single officer or program dedicated to the Basque diaspora. University institutions in the seven provinces do not offer one single university course in Basque diaspora studies. There is not one single scholarship specifically designated for researchers to go to the diaspora communities to conduct investigations. Primary and secondary school curricula are devoid of teaching about the Basques abroad. Many museums in Euskal Herria completely omit any mention of emigration from their displays and exhibitions. Yet the centuries of emigration have affected the economies, the role of women, the politics, and the psychology and sociology of the overwhelming majority of Basque towns and families. Even for the Autonomous Community of Euskadi the Basque collectivities could be an important instrument of foreign policy if additional resources were dedicated for personnel and for programs.

In other ethnic diasporas, such as in Hungary, the Office of Hungarians Beyond the Borders has such programs, and they are actively lobbied by Hungarian diaspora organizations. The World Federation of Hungarians has called for diaspora Hungarians to be represented with a deputy in the country’s

national parliament. India has an entire permanent government committee designated for its diaspora issues. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have government programs for dual-citizenship, benefits, political and economic rights, and institutional communications with their diaspora populations. Croatia's legislative assembly even reserves twelve elected seats for their diaspora (almost 10% of the total). Russia, Azerbaijan, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Eritrea and Nigeria each have congresses with their diaspora leaders giving direct input to their homeland legislative and executive branch officials in legislative debate and in elections voting. In the Cape Verde Islands, the Presidential candidate even campaigned for a ministry level representative of the diaspora. The International Romani Union—representing the 15 million Gypsies around the world—has Advisory Committee status at the United Nations, and is asking for a 'European citizenship.' Israel is attempting to attract one million new immigrants over the next ten years, and they have targeted Jews in Argentina enticing them with airfares, all relocations costs, plus \$20,000 per person for Jews to move to Israel. Scotland has created a global census of people with Scottish heritage. The Polish parliament pays for the repatriation of Poles to their homeland, covering travel costs, setting up a home, educating children, and even a daily allowance, and Poles abroad also vote in homeland elections. Kurdish diaspora television, Medya TV, reaches 40 million Kurds living away from their homeland. As the Armenian specialist, Dr. Razmik Panossian, will describe for us tomorrow, in many of the Armenian communities around the world, diaspora political parties have formed, and there are lobbies in the host countries attempting to influence foreign policy toward Armenian issues. Like the Basques, the Armenians also have had two world congresses, and they have established specific diaspora commissions in their Foreign Ministry with representatives from the communities abroad. The Galician vote from their diaspora is so high that it actually decides the election outcome in Galicia.

These are merely a few examples of what is happening in diaspora-homeland relations around the world. We are one of many ethnic groups fighting to maintain identity and networks with a homeland, and we can learn and selectively choose from other examples.

“Aurrera” has many definitions, and during this next week I expect we will create and reinvent ourselves and the word, because “aurrera” means “forward”—in activities, in expanding our memberships, extending our hands to other ethnic diasporas in our cities and towns, in educating ourselves and others, and in strengthening connections to the Basque Country and to other Basque communities. Perhaps you should debate the desirability of exclusivity, and instead open the doors, stop hiding, covering, and not sharing what we have to offer. The world is not coming to Euskal Herria, so we will have to take Euskal Herria to the world.

In the same way that we have to educate the diaspora about the homeland, we need to educate the homeland about the diaspora. Although living in different places, we are all Basques. The attitudes of being “more,” or, “less” Basque, “authentic,” or “just folkloric” must be superseded with new thinking.

Like brothers who have not seen each other for decades, we need to re-introduce ourselves, and educate ourselves about each other. Basques living in the seven provinces should learn about their family members who departed. Basques living in the Basque Country are quite naive about those who emigrated. They know almost nothing about the conditions and the crisis of political and economic migration. Many believe that thousands of Basques simply left Euskal Herria and went to the

Americas and became rich. We have to document our experiences and personal testimonies and record the Basque witness to history—to our common Basque history. What did we suffer, what did we supercede, and what did we accomplish? In the same manner that we could educate ourselves about our homeland, we need to encourage the homeland to learn about us. Institutionally we can design the infrastructure, but ultimately we need individual people to carry out the projects. In the end, the Basque diaspora is about individuals, it is about those of us sitting here today re-inventing opportunities for our communities to share their love of the Basque Country. From the intellectual William Douglass—who has dedicated his entire adult life to promoting Basque studies—to your most recent young dancer, that ten year old girl standing shyly and watching the txistulari with curiosity, our institutions must provide the access and avenues for all individuals to realize their interests and manifest their Basqueness in their own manner. You are not the definers of what it means to “be Basque,” you are significantly the facilitators to help others achieve their Basqueness.

We have a very important and busy week ahead of us, and your decisions will impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of Basques. Always remember our past, but as architects you must think and make plans going toward the future. Reinvent. Reconstruct. Redesign. Reexamine. Be innovative and be creative. “Nora Goaz?” We, the next generation, are here to proudly answer you, Professor Douglass. With faith and with determination, aurrera goaz. Aurrera, to the future.

Good luck to all of the delegates, and thank you for your attention.
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