

IÑAKI AGUIRRE'S SPEECH AT THE CONGRESS OPENING CEREMONY

Lehendakari Jauna, Euskal Etxeetako Ordezkariorok, agintariok, jaun-andreok, agur eta ongi etorriak izan zaitezte guztion.

This event kicks off the Fourth World Congress of Basque Communities. It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to welcome Euskal Etxeak representatives from eighteen countries who have come to the fourth edition with the best of intentions to draw up a plan for action for the next four years. Eskerrik zuen jarreragaitik eta hona etorri aurretik egin duzuen lanagaitik.

I would also like to extend a very special welcome to the thirty young people who have taken part in the annual GAZTEMUNDU program. I hope that your contributions to this Congress will also be helpful in defining and developing the Four-year Plan Cuatrienal. Eskerrik asko eta Zorionak zuei ere.

Eta zuoi beste guztioi ere nire agurrik beroena munduan zehar bizi diren euskaldunokin bat egitera etorri zaretelako ekitaldi honetara. Eskerrik asko denoi.

Thirteen years ago the Basque Parliament passed the law which governs the relationship with Basque Communities. There was not a single dissenting vote. The law represented public recognition at the highest level of the importance of the euskal etxeak for Basque society.

This recognition by Basque Parliament expressly stated that every four years a world congress would be held. Article of the law reads:

“Every four years a World Congress of Basque Communities will be held in order to promote the encounter and relations among the Basque Clubs and Communities and the Basque institutions”.

In our modern world of major waves of immigration and increasingly closer international relations, by sharing opinions, technology and projects we are building a new way of working together in programs of mutual interest. Therefore, our slogan ZUBIGINTZAN (BUILDING BRIDGES) is the perfect reflection of Article 13.

The history of the Basque centers spans several centuries, from 1612 when the first center, the *Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu*, was opened in Lima, to the most recently opened center in Washington, officially recognized by the Basque Government only a few days ago. Basques living outside Euskadi or Euskal Herria have always shown an interest in expressing their love for their homeland. Without them, without you, our country would not have the international profile it enjoys today.

The Basque Government is aware of the important efforts carried out by generations of Basque men and women. It is also aware of the growing importance of international relations, which is why new Basque offices have been opened recently in a number of countries. ZUBIGINTZAN, let's BUILD BRIDGES between this small country of yours and ours, and the countries where you live. ZUBIGINTZAN, let's BUILD BRIDGES between this Basque society and its public institutions and the new generations of young people who are proud to be members of the Euskal Etxeak founded by your parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents.

In memory of this history, in tribute to those past generations and to your efforts in building a strong future, we wanted to take advantage of this very important event and this internationally renown setting, the Guggenheim Museum, to pay homage to all of the Basque centers which in 2007 are celebrating their 25th, 50th or 100th anniversaries: the Euskal Etxeak in Gooding, Madrid, Mexico, Paris and San Francisco. Zorionak guztioi, eta berezik izuoi lauoi: ZORIONAK.

We share a truly worthwhile history of relations and mutual cooperation. Our past history indeed fills us with honor and pride. But the challenge before us today is to continue working in the same direction.

I'd like to wrap up by wishing you great success in your work here at the 4th World Congress. Once again, ESKERRIK ASKO eta ZORIONAK guztioi.

Iñaki Aguirre Arizmendi
General Secretary for Foreign Action