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**INTERNATIONAL UNION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL
AND ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES INTER-CONGRESS
IN POZNAŃ ON “WORLD SOLIDARITIES”
OPENING CEREMONY ADDRESS**

*Dear Rectors, Dear Deans, Dear Deputy Mayor of Poznan, Dear Fellow
Anthropologists and Ethnologists, Dear Guests and Participants,
Welcome!*

Welcome to the city of Poznan, a historical place where the Polish state was born and where the first seven Polish rulers are buried. The Poznan metro area, with its million inhabitants, has a large student population—well over a hundred thousand. Our University was established a hundred years ago, immediately after Poland regained its independence in 1918. The Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology is proud to have been part of this University since its beginning, and proud of being the oldest anthropological institution in Poland. We have invited anthropologists from all over the world to join us here at the University's and the Department's centennial anniversary party.

This party is to be an intellectual feast of reason. We decided to organize the IUAES Congress in order to seek insights into the ways in which anthropologists study the human solidarities that exist and emerge at the local, regional and global levels of social life. Inevitably, in the age of the Anthropocene, these solidarities have to include other species and entire ecosystems. Population growth combined with industrial expansion are exerting pressures on the environment, leading to deforestation, the devastation of biodiversity, and global warming, which endangers all life on earth. The notions of compassion, commonality and solidarity are particularly important now, as climate change and social injustice force

increasing numbers of people to migrate. In such circumstances, exclusionist ideologies can easily thrive. The rise being seen in xenophobia and intergroup enmity has its historical and cultural roots, but it is largely determined by social relations and environmental factors. Our perception of the collective good has to consider both ever changing inequalities and the ecological catastrophe we as humans are causing. Making the interconnections between these two issues manifest will help to raise consciousness, define the problems humanity faces, and lead to the emergence of new meanings of such concepts as resilience, wellbeing, care and exchange. By shedding light on these issues and by actively engaging them we will be able to fulfill the task of promoting solidarities as opposed to hostilities, and mobilizing social actors in an effort to make our world a better place to live. We sincerely hope that our collective effort during the Congress will demonstrate the intellectual and social power of anthropology to increase global solidarities.

You are in the country where “Solidarity,” an enormous social movement and trade union emerged in 1980. It continued the rebellious tradition of workers who rose up against the totalitarian authorities in 1956 in Poznan, and to whom is dedicated the monument that stands on the square just outside this building. Ordinary people, including what was then called the *intelligentsia*, protested against social injustice and the authoritarian communist regime. Despite the odds and oppression the Solidarity movement faced, it toppled the system—a system based on the creation of external and internal enemies, on the fear of others, on the imposition of ideological unity in line with the slogan “whoever is not with us, is against us,” based on the destruction of minorities, on the creation of a false history and on “fake news” in propaganda, on the denigration of disobedient political and ideological opponents, and on intimidation and blackmail.

Why do I recall these events? Because today, forty years after the “Solidarity Revolution,” thirty years after the “Velvet Revolution” and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, people can feel they are experiencing a sense of *déjà vu*. Different times, different people, different stories and histories, but similar—if not the same—patterns and mechanisms. A rising tide of what in common discourse is described as nationalism and rightist populism is proliferating like a contagious disease across the globe. Religious, ideological, political and national fundamentalists raise fears against multiculturalism, pluralism and diversity; they glorify cultural and racial apartheid. Identitarians do not want immigrants and refugees, and

are ready to use violence or kill Others—in Christchurch in New Zealand, Chemnitz in Germany, Charlottesville in Virginia, Białystok in Poland, and many other places.

As anthropologists, we are not blaming people for this, and we work incessantly to identify the historical, cultural and socio-economic reasons for these phenomena. Our task is to critically understand them along the lines of Clifford Geertz’s observation that “Looking into dragons, not domesticating them or abominating them, not drawing them in vats of theory, is what anthropology has been all about” (1984). Let me, here and now, draw attention to a burning political aspect of these issues and the stakes involved. In our emerging milieu some political elites present themselves as the voice of the people. Once in power, authorities interested in perpetually strengthening their position and in creating favorable circumstances for the continuation of their rule, make use of technologies for exercising power know from the recent communist past and against which the “Solidarity” movement fought. Certain ideas we are witnessing in the world today can be seen as inherent elements of Bolsheviks and fascist systems. Both old-fashioned fascists and neo-fascists must create enemies and exclude certain groups from a community or even deny them their full humanity. Some of these are internal minorities—ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, the latter of which has been the target in Poland of a nasty anti-LGBT campaign waged by cynical politicians and religious ideologues. Others are external groups, like Muslims or Jews, seen by fascists as “culturally distant” or “inferior.” It can work differently in different context, but the Others are always dangerous, ready to invade the salubrious population or blight innocent minds. Fascists are hostile to liberal democracy, and take popular support as legitimization for absolute rule by a highly vocal majority. Fascists are afraid of plural society and a pluralism of ideas, since for them only an integral nation led by an infallible Führer can survive historical turmoil and social decomposition, preserve culture, defend the eternal and pristine faith of our predecessors, and prevent outsiders from hijacking the country. Order implemented by means of control, discipline and punishment is to secure the national unity of an imagined primordial community. Fascists, as Ignazio Silone, an Italian intellectual put it, strive “to strip away the private sphere from the individual and turn it over to the state.” They pride political incorrectness in their erroneous understanding of freedom of speech. Modern-day fascists use novel means of exercising power, using social media and internet trolls, with the help of which they

smear defenders of the system of liberal democracy, based on the principle of the separation of legislative, executive, and judiciary powers. The Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi warned that fascism can emerge anywhere and anytime, and arises “not just through the terror of police intimidation, but by denying and distorting information, by undermining systems of justice, by paralyzing the education system, and by spreading in a myriad subtle ways nostalgia for a world where order reigned.” (1974). One can say, after him, that “every age has its own fascism.”

We have to warn, we have to be on a guard; the community of Polish anthropologists has shown solidarity not only with those who suffered from Poland’s neoliberal transformation, but more recently, also with the victims of hate speech, violence, and discrediting discursive intimidation. We organized an anti-discrimination demonstration—on the square in front of this building; we issued an anti-hate-speech declaration; we convened a nationwide meeting of anthropologists in Poznan in 2016 under the slogan “Anthropology against discrimination”—a historical trace of which can be found in the entrance to our Department. We received support from numerous individuals and organizations, including the World Anthropological Union and the IUAES. But perhaps because of this, the current government used the opportunity to undermine the position of the discipline, which has been critical towards its policies and perceived as leftist, cosmopolitan and pro-immigrant. On the pretext of “consolidating” research areas under a neoliberal micro-management of academia, ethnology and anthropology disappeared from the official list of disciplines, and are now subsumed under the category of “Cultural and Religious Studies,” a “discipline” unknown, to the best of my knowledge, anywhere else in the world. We are afraid that such a disappearance from the public and bureaucratic radar is damaging in a long run. However, “anthropology” continues to be a subject of study, and departments remain within university structures. At this University, a new division will be formed, called the Faculty of Anthropology and Cultural Studies. As you can see, we are still alive, and we are not giving up. By coming here for this Congress, you are showing your solidarity with us. Thank you for this! You are now invited to join the above-mentioned intellectual feast, to show your solidarity with other humans, species, and the world we all care for.

Hereby, I announce 2019 IUAES Congress in Poznan open!

Poznań, 27 August 2019