



A Path Into the Future

Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

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– Check against delivery –

"Wanderer, there is no path – the path is made by walking." This striking quote by the poet Antonio Machado reminds us that the future is never set in stone. Instead, it is built step by step – through our choices, our determination, and our courage. In the same way, the road of discovery is not fixed in advance, but emerges through our curiosity, our questions, and our research. And today, here in Buenos Aires, we are fellow wanderers on a shared journey, making new paths together through our collaboration.

Ambassador Lamlé,
President Gelpi,
Esteemed Deans,
Dear colleagues
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is truly an honor to speak at the University of Buenos Aires, an institution renowned for its unwavering commitment to academic excellence and training. And it is a very special honor that I can speak to the deans representing all thirteen schools. Let me start by expressing my heartfelt congratulations: Just a week ago, UBA was once again ranked among the top ten universities on the continent. This is due to your excellent work!

UBA represents a vibrant intellectual community – one that generates new ideas and nurtures future leaders in science, the economy, and politics. As a molecular biologist, I had to think of César Milstein, who studied here before developing the hybridoma technique for the production of monoclonal antibodies. This groundbreaking discovery transformed both science and medicine, unlocking vast possibilities for research and treatment. And it earned him the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1984!

The university's research achievements however extend from the life sciences to many different disciplines. And UBA distinguishes itself also through its commitment to accessible education. Furthermore, the university combines excel-



lence in scientific advancement with a profound societal impact – an aspiration shared by leading research institutions worldwide, including our organization, the Max Planck Society.

The Max Planck Society is dedicated to curiosity-driven basic research across the natural sciences, life sciences, and humanities. We are guided by the principle that the people and their ideas matter more than any research program. Our 84 institutes span a very wide range of fields: from astrophysics and neuroscience to law and cultural studies. In this spirit, I see a shared mission with UBA: the pursuit of knowledge in all its diversity, combined with a deep commitment to training and society.

Over the decades, the Max Planck Society has nurtured 31 Nobel laureates, placing us among the top three research institutions worldwide. This success also stems from international cooperation and the exchange of talent. Today, 41% of our 300 directors and 58% of our scientists come from outside Germany. Our 26,000 employees represent 136 different nationalities, making us a truly global research community.

We collaborate with many partners in Latin America, and we are engaged in research infrastructures like the Amazon Tall Tower Observatory in Brazil and telescopes in Chile. Above all, it is the extraordinary talent and motivation of young Latin American scientists that fuels our collaboration. For example, more than 60 scientists from Argentina have conducted research at Max Planck Institutes just over the last year. Through these scientists, knowledge transcends borders – for the benefit of science and society.

Our cooperation with Argentina is special in many ways. Over the last five years, Max Planck scientists and their Argentine partners have published 1,268 shared papers, with UBA ranking among our top three collaborators. Currently, there are 18 joint projects spanning several fields. Argentina has hosted 18 partner and tandem groups, demonstrating our long-standing relationship. And the Biomedicine Research Institute of Buenos Aires, founded in 2007, is the only Max Planck partner institute in the world.

Dear guests,

Unfortunately, our collaborations are increasingly endangered by very significant geopolitical shifts. Over the last two years, Argentina's political and economic landscape has changed dramatically. Inflation has decreased, and the country is searching for its path towards sustainable economic growth that must be balanced with social welfare and with the long-term capacity to address critical challenges in health, the environment, and technology. It is in this context that science and education are absolutely essential.

However, science in Argentina faces major challenges. Public investment in research has declined sharply, shrinking the scientific workforce and especially affecting early-career researchers. The universities – including UBA – and the national research council CONICET have suffered budget cuts, which have sparked an outflow of talent. It is estimated that the science sector was cut by around one third, and several thousand positions were lost.



In addition, academic freedom has come under pressure, although it is protected by the Higher Education Law of 1995. In this situation, it is essential to recall the standards set by the Inter-American system, including the Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, which provide clear benchmarks. In these difficult times, Argentine scientists show remarkable resilience and commitment, which deserves our highest respect.

Let me be clear: Restrictions on academic freedom are not just an issue of academia. No, they have severe, wide-ranging consequences. As the Rector of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México has recently said, they affect the broader social and democratic fabric. Indeed, every government must be aware that research and education are essential for the advancement of society and for the stability of a democratic country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this respect, I am deeply concerned about the recent developments in the United States, where our colleagues face profound challenges to academic freedom and the foundation of scientific inquiry. Since January, the new U.S. administration has restricted billions of dollars in federal funding. Prestigious universities like Harvard are under unprecedented political pressure, undermining the autonomy essential to scholarly pursuit. These interventions create an environment marked by uncertainty, censorship, and intimidation.

We must be aware that the developments in the United States are affecting all of us, because science is a global endeavor. In particular, the policies of the new U.S. administration have questioned the United States' role as the driving force of science and as the prime destination for talent. This shift undermines research training and collaboration as we have known it for decades. This erosion not only limits researchers' ability to pursue new knowledge, but also undermines the foundations of democratic societies. Free science, like free media and independent courts, is a cornerstone of democracy.

Of course, democratically elected governments can prioritize research serving society's needs. But it is equally crucial to grant scientific institutions the freedom to set their own agenda for research and education. Restricting this freedom also restricts creativity and innovation because much of what shapes our future remains unpredictable, beyond the reach of government planning. History teaches us that free science delivers unexpected breakthroughs that can advance society – from antibiotics to lasers to gene editing.

Let me be clear: civil liberties and independent institutions are not luxuries. They are essential pillars of democracy. Science serves society by fostering critical, unbiased, and self-directed engagement with the world. It empowers individuals to think and act independently, to overcome dogma and external control. Thus, scientific freedom forms the foundation of open societies. Politics and society must therefore protect institutional autonomy and ensure that research and education remain free, open, and strong.



Dear colleagues and friends,

How can we, scientists in Argentina and at Max Planck, respond to these developments and global changes? How can academic institutions in Latin America and Europe act strategically when our long-standing partnership with the United States is being challenged, and Asia, in particular China, establishes itself as a powerful partner? Clearly, in a changing world, we are stronger together, united by our dedication to excellence, openness, and cooperation.

At the Max Planck Society, we are committed to strengthening international collaboration. Our institutes serve as welcoming hubs and trusted partners, offering world-class research conditions for scientists from across the globe. And we foster a vibrant exchange of talent through programs that nurture early-career researchers, and that enable them to return home while staying connected to the Max Planck Society.

It is against this background that – with great joy and gratitude – we celebrate today the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. This partnership strengthens our cooperation and testifies to our shared commitment to open science across all fields. Together, we can build bridges that transcend borders and empower future generations to explore freely, to innovate boldly, and to contribute meaningfully to our shared world.

In closing, let me return to Antonio Machado – a poet but also a dedicated educator who understood the importance of nurturing the next generation. Just as Machado devoted part of his life to teaching and inspiring young minds, so too does our mission in science rest on training and empowering future talent. It is the curiosity and enthusiasm of our young researchers that provide vital energy and will take science into new and uncharted territories. In this spirit, we reaffirm our commitment to empowering the next generation of scientists – true wanderers who create their path by walking, thereby advancing society and humanity.