

Before the tree of Gernika.

Gernika is one of the Basque people's sacred symbols. It was in Gernika where the people's representatives would meet to pass their own laws. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Iparraguirre composed the patriotic song entitled "Gernikako Arbola", which is possibly the song which has been most sung by the Basques of America. "Gernika" is also the title of Picasso's painting which has travelled around the world as a testimony to Franco's ordering of the German Air Force's massacre of the civilian population.

The tree of Gernika symbolises the Basque people's aspirations for PEACE and DEMOCRACY and is also a symbol of their wish to create ties with the rest of the world. This wish appears quite clearly in the song: "Eman da zabal zazu munduan frutua".

And it is before this Basque oak that symbolises our wish for peace, democracy and the international solidarity of peoples, that I would like to use my words to pay homage to the thousands of Basques in the United States and especially to all the Basques of Baxenafarroa, Laburdi and Zuberoa, Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Nafarroa for all the work you have put in to developing this country and for spreading the values of Basque culture. Thanks to your efforts, despite everything, the Basque people have a good image internationally.

And I don't want to finish without warmly greeting Félix Bilbao survivor of the Gernika bombing, who are here with us today. Dear friends, I should like to pay tribute, through you, to all those people who for so many years have worked for the future of the Basque people – both those who live in the Basque Country and those who live in the United States or in other corners of the world.

Eman da zabal zazu munduan frutua. Your work in America comforts us and encourages us to carry on working for a better world. Eskerrik asko.

(2)

Greetings to: The President of the Basque Centre, The President of NABO, Representatives of Basque Centres, The Mayor of South San Francisco.

This is the fourth occasion in the last 5 years that I am with you (Boston, NY, Chicago in 2003, Boise Jaialdi in 2005, Washington in 2006, California in 2008). In this country, the United States of America, which has warmly welcomed many thousands of Basques. Yes, thousands of Basques who decided to live and work tirelessly for a better future for themselves and their families. And together with your effort, to build a better country.

I really do feel at home, with true friends. Every one of us will have his/her own way of thinking and feeling. But that is precisely what forms the cornerstone of our friendship. Eskerrik asko for your friendship and for this welcome.

The history of our relations and the relationship between the Basques and the United States isn't something that has emerged today. Many Basques came to this land in the distant past at a time when California and the south-west of the United States depended on the Spanish Empire. Three of them – Borica, Arrillaga and Sola- even became Governors of California.

During the period when California depended on Mexico, two of its Governors were also Basque: Echeandia and Micheltoarena.- And today we have John Garamendi, the Deputy Governor, who is also of Basque origin.

The discovery of gold brought a great deal of emigration, including Basques. In later years, especially after 1850, many Basques worked as shepherds and they gradually set up home in the south of California, Nevada, Arizona, Oregon, Idaho, New York, Washington, Florida and many other parts of the States.

But they weren't just concerned about striking gold and earning money. Here I should like to highlight two very specific things: firstly the defence of the Basque language : at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century two newspapers were published in Basque in Los Angeles "Escualdun gazeta (1886) and "Californiako Eskual Herria" (1893-97).

As the great Basque poet Bitoriano Gandiaga says: Ikurriña ikurrin, Euskera ikurriñago/ Kolerak baino euskerak/Herritzen Gaitu gehiago.

Those Basques set up home in America before our great symbol, the IKURRIÑA, our Basque flag, had been created. But the fact that they published a newspaper in Basque is proof of their awareness of how important language and culture is for a country. EUSKERAK HERRITZEN GAITU GEHIAGO. What a fantastic thought! Basque makes us more of a people (nation).

The second important thing that I would like to highlight is the creation of a network of Basque clubs, the Euskal Etxeak, associated to a Federation (NABO – The North American Basque Organisation).

And now let me speak to you about the future.

On many occasions you ask us "What does the Basque Government want from the Basque Centres?". Well, as Lehendakari I would mention three challenges.

The first is that your institutions become a social reference point in your communities; that the people in your community have a kind of healthy envy of your co-existence and social projection. The more you grow both within your clubs and in your projection out to the world, the greater will become your recognition and social presence.

And in this way, the Basque Country will obtain greater recognition in the international environments where Basque communities are to be found.

For the second challenge, together with a show of solidarity between the Basque people, which is something that needs to be continually strengthened, I would concentrate on the young people of today, concentrate on their education, their preparation so that in as short a time as possible they can become the leaders of the Euskal Etxeak and the institutions in their communities. There is no future without youth.

And finally for the third challenge, I would ask the youngsters to build a new world, both in the Euskal Etxeak and in their community.

In July last year, the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of Basque Communities was held. 50% of the participants were youngsters. And the motto of the Conference was ZUBI GINTZAN, building bridges.

You are the bridge between your parent's generation – gurasoak- and your children's -seme-alabak-, you are lodged between the past generation and the next. But bear in mind that a bridge means meeting, union, mutual relations and projection. Under no circumstances does it involve, separation, disagreement, break-up.

From this perspective, it would be interesting if in the 2011 Conference you could present the objectives that were set during the previous Conference on recovering the historical memory of Basque presence throughout the world and especially in America. It is important to know where we come from: it is important to quench our thirst at the fountain of knowledge of our origins, our past history and the why and the wherefore of our Euskal Etxeak.

But if it is important to recover historical memory, the challenge of your projection and the projection of your Euskal Etxeak into the future is by no means less important. Don't be afraid of change, of the new realities that will crop up in your path. You will never be able to resolve the problems of new situations with past strategies. But even though this is true, never forget that the life of institutions depends upon whether we get it right when setting up a community. We should build a society where everyone feels at home and where everyone, both young and old, perceives the Euskal Etxeak as their own institution.

In the Basque Government we firmly believe in the philosophy implied in the motto ZUBI GINTZAN-building bridges: the work carried out by you and your ancestors has given the Basque people and their representatives a positive international image. And so I want to take this opportunity to thank you from the heart, to say to you quite clearly: eskerrik asko bihotz-bihotzez.

## Ideas for words for the Basque Community

(3)

Greetings to: The President of the Basque Centre, the President of the NABO, representatives of Basque Centres.

At yesterday's reception that was held right here I said how much at home I feel with you: I feel amongst true friends here at the San Francisco BCC (Basque Cultural Center).

But allow me firstly to say how pleased I am to see Father Martxel Tillous here and also how pleased I am for his recovery. It is fantastic that he is here with us, saying mass and sharing this occasion with all of us.

Besarkada bero, bero bat Aita Martxel

I should also like to thank all those people who have used their effort and dedication to make this San Francisco BCC a reality and to be able to celebrate its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You may well know that my busy schedule didn't allow me time to come and take part in your silver anniversary celebrations, but this year I am happy to have been able to keep my word and visit you here in California.

The United States has been a land that has welcomed you, just as it has welcomed many other Basques (such as Lehendakari Aguirre and part of his government in exile) who came here in search of a better life, or simply to find a land of freedom at difficult times for the Basque Country.

And today we are here because a whole generation of Basques in the United States have struggled to maintain their roots, their cultural identity and to defend our common values. Many of them are sitting in this frontón court. Others, unfortunately are no longer with us.

For all of them, for all of you thank you on behalf of the Basque People. I should like to emphasize the tremendous job you have done. As an old Basque saying says; Katea ez da eten; the chain goes on.

Let's look to the future now.

We could carry on referring to and analysing our past history. It is very important to get to know our roots and to know where we come from. But that is insufficient to guarantee our future. And now what is important is precisely the future.

We need to have ideals, to set ourselves objectives. We need to dream and aspire to make our utopias reality. You cannot realise anything that isn't first dreamt. We need to keep our roots but adapt them all the time.

Today the Basque Country is a modern country:

Our per capita income, according to the latest official data for 2006, amounts to 30,500 euros, 36% above the European average according to European statistics, representing approximately 44,000 dollars at the current exchange rate.

Our average life expectancy stands at 80.9, placing us in third place at a world level after Japan and Iceland.

We also enjoy high levels of education and training. 80% of young Basque men and women of between 20 and 24 years of age have a high school or university education.

Thanks to these high income, education and life expectancy levels, the Basque community occupies one of the top places in the Human Development Index at a world level, bettered only by Iceland and Norway, according to the latest United Nations report on Human Development.

Our country, like California, is also committed to a greener world. We have put into motion a special programme against climate change and an extraordinary action plan to comply with the Kyoto targets in 2012, and we have reduced our energy consumption/GDP rate to the lowest levels in Europe.

But, especially, our country is committed to "People" Our aim is not only to grow, but to construct a just society. One of the distinctive features of the Basque people is their spirit of solidarity. On the one hand the Basque Country was the first stateless nation to sign the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations. On the other hand 70% of our budget is allocated to social expenditure, mainly health, education and social protection. As a consequence of these policies, the poverty risk rate in the Basque Country, in other words, the percentage of people with incomes below 60% of the average, stands at 9.5%, the second lowest in Europe after Sweden.

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There are not very many of us and our country is small. But in reality neither people nor countries are measured exclusively by their physical size. Today the virtues necessary to guarantee a successful future are intelligence

and solidarity. If we Basques can develop these two things, our future is guaranteed. We live in a competitive world: we should not fear it. We should only fear incompetence.

But we need to achieve 2 objectives, 2 dreams: Democracy and Peace.

These are the two main challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, not just for Basques, but for all humanity. For this, we need to work to overcome famine, poverty, ignorance and any other lacking that exists in the pursuance of basic human rights.

Nobody was born to be a slave. Quite the opposite- we were born to be free and what is more we should try to be happy. We must achieve personal and social happiness. At the same time we must work to create structures that guarantee democratic co-existence.

But to do this, we have to be aware that democracy is an objective: we need to be aware that we do not come from democracy but that we are heading towards democracy. However we will never be able to establish a democratic system unless two requirements are met:

The right of all people to express their opinion, organise themselves as a group and even as a PEOPLE and that their opinion be respected.

Peace, just like democracy doesn't just appear from nowhere, it has to be made: we all make peace together. But we will never achieve it without developing democracy and without a peaceful personal and group attitude.

And I would like to refer to a poem by the basque poet Bitoriano Gandiaga: Bakea ez da legea/Bakea legezko da, ordea.

Peace can never be imposed, neither by weapons nor by laws. Peace is a natural right that we are entitled to.

The Basque People too, need peace, peace and political agreements between the Basque Country and the Spanish State to coexist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With everyone's effort, both here and there, we will achieve peace and political normalization.

That is what I am committed to.

Thank you very much.

Bihotz, bihotzez, eskerrik asko eta besarkada bero bat.