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Mexican President Echeverría and Science

During his recent state visit to the United States, the President of Mexico, Luis Echeverría, graciously met with a delegation from the AAAS at Blair House in Washington, D.C. One purpose of the meeting was to brief him on progress for the inter-American meeting "Science and Man in the Americas," which is being planned jointly by the AAAS and the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología of Mexico (CONACYT). The meeting is scheduled for 17 June to 7 July 1973 (*Science*, 5 November 1971, page 549, and *AAAS Bulletin*, May–June 1972). Another purpose was to invite him to serve as honorary chairman of the meeting, an invitation he was pleased to accept.

What also emerged from the meeting was the portrait of a head of state remarkably aware of the role of science and technology in the life of a nation. Echeverría is alert to the potential of science and technology in helping solve his country's problems and is eager to engage scientists in his councils. It was he, in fact, who created the Consejo in order to foster scientific and technological development in Mexico. His views are well worth quoting here, as reflected in the following excerpts from a recent interview.*

"I believe that the contribution of scientists, both pure and applied, and of technologists is absolutely essential to any country, whatever its level of economic development . . . in Mexico no political decision is taken without the direct or indirect involvement of scientists."

Echeverría understands the differences between political decision-making and scientific advice. "Of course, there will always be a gap between what the scientists and technical men recommend and what the government can do . . . there will always be constraints—for example, budget restrictions and political exigencies—that determine the government's choice between two or more alternatives. I am not suggesting that the political leader is good or bad, no more than I suggest that the scientist can't see beyond his own thesis and proposals; what I mean is that in running a nation many limitations, of time and of place, of financial means, must be taken into account."

Among the major problems now coming under scientific scrutiny in Mexico are pollution of the environment, population and economic growth, and arid zones. "Forty percent of the country is semi-desert land," says Echeverría. "The problems of these dry regions in Mexico, as in the rest of the world, can only be dealt with on a scientific basis."

Not surprisingly, all of these are major topics for consideration at the inter-American meeting next year. Other key areas to be explored then are nutrition, earthquake engineering, nonnuclear energy, the sea and its resources, and science, development, and human values.

Human values concern Echeverría too. "Frequently," he says, "[the inhabitant of urban areas] feels isolated in the midst of a crowd. . . . He loses contact with the mountains, the trees, the sea. . . . I am not being romantic: man, for biological and spiritual reasons, needs his contacts with nature. These are problems associated with the industrial life in all countries, regardless of their political or economic nature."

President Echeverría feels that the opportunities and the problems connected with the wise use of science and technology are of transcending importance to his country. He is delighted to be host to a gathering that will bring together leading scientists from his country, from other parts of Latin America, and from the United States to discuss many of the most interesting of these great challenges.—GLENN T. SEABORG, *President, American Association for the Advancement of Science*

* L. Echeverría, interviewed by B. Friedman, *Impact Sci. Soc.* **22** (No. 1–2), 43 (January–June 1972).