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### **Title**

Binational Development and the Quest for Knowledge

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## **Binational Development and the Quest for Knowledge**

The following commentary by Richard Atkinson is from the UC-CONACYT Agreement of Cooperation commemoration event, held at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City on July 25, 1997.

Ladies and gentlemen, and particularly my Mexican colleagues: It is a distinct pleasure to be in Mexico City. This is one of the truly great cities of the world, and I always feel energized when I visit. I am especially pleased to be here on the occasion of the signing of this agreement. Let us not misunderstand its importance. On the other hand, let us also remember that there have been long-standing collaborative efforts between the University of California and various universities here in Mexico. To mention just one example, UC established UC MEXUS in 1980 to build upon the rich history of scholarly cooperation between UC scholars and their Mexican collaborators, an act that recognized Mexico's particular importance to California.

This morning several people introduced themselves to me as graduates of the University of California, and of course we have some very distinguished individuals from Mexico who attended UC. On this occasion it may be appropriate for me to mention at least one. I am thinking of the first president of Mexico after the Revolution, Francisco Madero, who studied at the University of California at Berkeley. I believe he would be very pleased with recent events here in Mexico and also with the plans and agreement that are being ratified today.

The United States and Mexico have much in common. We share a continent, a common border, and the rim of the vast Pacific Ocean. It is true that Mexico has a long and rich cultural history, while ours is a comparatively short one. But the future of our two nations is clearly intertwined.

And that future - the twenty-first century - is going to be dominated by the information revolution. The future will belong to nations that excel in the quest for knowledge - those nations that are willing to invest in education, including higher education, graduate education, and research and development (R&D). There can be no question that if our two nations collaborate in the quest for knowledge, the whole will far exceed the sum of its parts.

It may seem hard to believe, but just twenty-five years ago there was little economic evidence that could relate a nation's investments in research and development to simple economic measures like economic productivity and economic growth. Over the past twenty-five years, however, a remarkable body of literature has evolved on this very issue. This research

focuses on the United States, but I believe the conclusions it suggests can be generalized to all countries. The research is nicely summarized in a recent report by the U.S. President's Council of Economic Advisors. Simply put, that report describes what is now called "new-growth theory," which holds that 50 percent of the growth in the American economy in the last forty years has been due to investments in R&D. This is a stunning conclusion; few would have anticipated that as much as half of American economic growth during the past four decades could be ascribed to investments in R&D. The private sector is a big factor in that investment, but universities, particularly research universities supported by federal contracts and grants, have also played a key role. The research that underpins this theory includes compelling evidence that when the United States government increases its investments in federally supported research activities of universities, the private sector, with a corresponding time lag, increases its efforts as well.

So we come to this agreement with a clear understanding that a nation's commitment to a strong university community that generates excellent research programs is absolutely critical to that nation's development. I want to emphasize that when one looks at the information revolution and its implications, it is also clear that national investments should not be restricted to scholarly work in science and technology. The humanities play a time-honored and ever-increasing role in our lives, and so we must, as this agreement recognizes, ensure scholarly activity across the spectrum of disciplines, from the sciences to the humanities.

Today's agreement will provide UC with the honor of educating Mexico's leading graduate scholars and will enrich our graduate programs. The agreement will also make it possible for more UC faculty and students to work and learn at Mexico's finest research institutions, as well as fostering collaborative research. As these cooperative arrangements unfold, we hope to expand opportunities for scientific and technological development in Mexico, and encourage business exchanges growing out of the professional collaborations and personal friendships this program will engender.

I am especially enthusiastic about today's agreement because I have been a long-term observer of CONACYT. I served as director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the late 1970s, and there were frequent exchanges between individuals from CONACYT and NSF to discuss CONACYT's organization and its future. In 1980, NSF and CONACYT entered into the first agreement in history between the United States and Mexico on science and technology. I signed on behalf of the United States at a ceremony in President López Portillo's office here in Mexico City. President López Portillo was the sponsor of the agreement, and with clarity of hindsight, we can see what a major step that agreement was and how many productive

collaborations have flourished as a result. In the intervening years, I have had many other interactions with CONACYT: individual exchanges related to physics and engineering at the University of California, San Diego, as well as discussions that led to debt exchanges between UC and Mexico. It has been a great pleasure to see CONACYT grow into a tremendously important organization that will do much to guarantee the quality of education and research in Mexico.

Several weeks ago I had the opportunity to have lunch with President Clinton, during which we talked at some length about the plans that are being laid between UC and CONACYT. He was very interested and asked me to convey the nature of these plans to his Science Advisor and his Secretary of Education. So you can be assured that on the U.S. side this event is not being viewed as just a University of California venture, but also as an important venture for the United States.

I am both pleased and honored, therefore, to be here for the signing of this agreement. Today marks a new chapter in a long history of collaboration between the University of California and various universities in Mexico, a very special chapter that represents a great step forward. Political winds may shift and diplomacy may fail, but one of the enduring characteristics of the academic community is that we share a common language and a common cause. Whatever the ebbs and flows of politics between our two nations, I hope - I know - this agreement will stand as a strong foundation on which we can continue to build collaborative efforts.

Finally, this occasion would not be complete without some words of thanks to those in both Mexico and California who have worked so hard to make today's agreement a reality. I want to express deepest appreciation to Carlos Bazdresch, the director of CONACYT, and to his fine group of directors and their staffs. I also want to recognize the indispensable contributions of the Council of Graduate Deans of the University of California, and particularly the dedicated efforts of Clifford Attkisson, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, and Joe Cerny, who led the council in its work on the UC-CONACYT agreement. Dean Jean-Pierre Mileur, dean of the UC Riverside graduate division, deserves our gratitude for his contributions to the development of the agreement in the context of graduate education in the University of California. And we owe a special debt of thanks to Juan-Vicente Palerm, director of UC MEXUS, for the vision, thoughtfulness, and perseverance he has brought to shaping and shepherding this agreement from beginning to end.

This is a great day for the University of California, for CONACYT, and for our two nations. It is now my pleasure to join the director general of CONACYT in signing this historic agreement.