



## **Speech by Iñigo Moreno de Arteaga, Marquess de Laserna**

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The award of the Gold Medal for Merit in Hunting and Conservation fills me with gratitude, mixed with a certain astonishment. Why me? And in seeking an explanation, it occurs to me that perhaps it is because I have made the vision of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation my own.

Years ago, in my book *Dignidad de la caza (The Dignity of Hunting)*, which was honoured by the CIC with its Literary Prize in 2011, I sought to answer a question as fundamental as it is complex: what is hunting? At the time, I expressed that it is an activity that responds to the instinct of predation, inherent in human beings. Yet, like all instincts, in man it must be governed by reason. Just as the instinct for survival and nourishment has been ennobled through gastronomy, and that of reproduction sublimated through love, so too has the instinct of predation been elevated through the practice of hunting.

That it is an instinct explains the satisfaction experienced by human beings in the act of hunting, even among those far removed from nature. Many professionals engaged in intellectual pursuits find in hunting a particular pleasure, precisely because it awakens a physical dimension that they had long neglected.

Man is a predator, as evidenced by the position of his eyes, both on the same plane, allowing for depth perception, the measurement of distance, and the precision of attack. This is characteristic of predatory animals, in contrast to prey species whose eyes are positioned laterally to provide near 360-degree vision, enabling flight as their principal defence.

Man is a predator by his physical nature, yet his spiritual dimension leads him to fulfil that instinct through reason. In doing so, he reaches fulfilment by respecting his quarry and transforming his action into a challenge to Nature — with a capital “N”. A challenge governed by an ethic that can be summarised in three principles: the wildness of the prey, the uncertainty of the outcome, and the effort demanded by a worthy adversary. Without these conditions, it is no longer hunting; it ceases to be a human activity shaped by intelligence and will.

Wildness is essential because hunting is a contest between reason and instinct, and instinct finds its fullest expression only in an intact natural environment. It is the very core of hunting. Any artificial intervention in wildlife must therefore be limited so as

not to distort that wildness. It also provides the justification for death in hunting, for the wild animal is so untamed that it can only be taken through its death — it prefers death to the loss of its freedom.

The uncertainty of the outcome is equally fundamental, for there can be no true contest if the result is predetermined. Thus, when abundance is great, the hunter individualises a single animal among many, elevating it as the sole object of pursuit. In the same way, the commercial insistence on guaranteeing success is a fundamental error, for unpredictability is intrinsic to hunting.

Effort is also indispensable for a predator. Ease leads to decline, and a predator that ceases to exert itself will ultimately lose its superiority. Difficulty is the expression of the challenge between human intelligence and the superior physical capacities of the prey. For this reason, the hunter must sometimes impose limitations upon himself when technological advances upset that original balance in his favour, thereby diminishing the challenge.

For this reason, I consider certain practices unacceptable in hunting. Where prey are neither free nor truly wild, or where technology renders them defenceless — such as thermal imaging or shooting at extreme distances — the essential conditions of hunting are no longer present. In such cases, the animal is unaware of the danger and therefore cannot flee.

Respect for the quarry is the natural consequence of this ethical framework. By renouncing his superiority, the hunter voluntarily limits his own possibilities and pays homage to the animal. This is the morality — and indeed the elegance — inherent in hunting.

Death in hunting, which so unsettles our urban societies, is not something alien to nature; it is one of its stages. Yet modern society, concentrated in vast urban environments, has undergone a profound transformation. Surrounded by concrete and asphalt, it has forgotten — and no longer understands — nature and its laws. At the same time, technological progress and comfort have encouraged a certain hedonism: only what is agreeable is accepted, while all constraint is rejected.

The moral framework that once guided society has been reduced to a minimum, and responsibility for death is now conveniently placed upon hunters alone.

Yet in nature, life and death are inseparable. Perhaps the clearest example is that of the praying mantis, where the female must consume the male after mating in order to sustain the life of the new being. We have forgotten that life and death are but two moments of the same existence.

I conclude by thanking our President, Luis de la Peña Fernández-Nespral, for this undeserved Gold Medal, and by expressing my gratitude to all successive leaderships of the CIC for preserving the spirit of its founders, ensuring that the CIC remains a community where friendship and a shared passion for hunting prevail.