



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Investiture Ceremony for her Second Term as  
Director-General**

**UNESCO, 18 November 2013**

Mr President of the General Conference,  
Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

I measure the importance of this moment, and I thank you for your trust.

Let me thank the three extraordinary personalities who have come to share their  
experience and vision with UNESCO on this occasion.

I am deeply honoured to assume the position of UNESCO Director-General for a  
second term.

This hall has heard the voices of so many great women and men – Pablo  
Neruda, Leopold Senghor, Eleanor Roosevelt, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and so  
many others who changed the world.

I measure the power of their aspirations, and I make them mine.

I measure the ambitions of our Constitution, and I pledge to do everything to help  
countries meet them.

I stand before you, more inspired than ever by the vision we share.

The vision of a world of human rights and dignity.

The vision of humanity as a single community.

The vision of a stronger multilateral order, a stronger United Nations.

I pledge to never relent in taking this forward.

UNESCO was created in 1945 – 68 years ago last Saturday -- but its idea is as old as humanity itself.

This is the idea of humanism, expressed by the spirit of Ubuntu, “*human kindness*” in Bantu, by Confucius, by the 19th century Indian humanist, Swami Vivekananda, and so many others.

It is the conviction every woman and man can become everything they aspire to – what Michel de Montaigne, the French Renaissance thinker, called “*la hauteur extrême de l’humaine nature*”.

It is the belief in a single humanity, embodied by each of us.

The late Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe once wrote:

*“You must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole.”*

Each of us is different, but we are not alone, we stand together, and each of us embodies the whole of humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what UNESCO stands for, and never has our message been so urgent.

Globalization is accelerating and so is the impact of climate change and natural disasters.

There has been tremendous growth, but inequalities are increasing.

Technologies are changing the way we communicate, learn and behave – societies are more connected than ever, but also more vulnerable.

Information has never been so available, but the knowledge gap is still widening.

The world is younger than ever and profound change is transforming regions – human rights aspirations are high but so are thwarted expectations.

The opportunities for peace are strong, but conflict has moved within countries and culture is on the front line.

Throughout the world, we see tremendous progress: millions are being lifted out of poverty thanks to the great humanist agenda of the Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015.

But the challenges remain substantial – exclusion, poverty and conflict – and new ones are emerging.

We are relied upon to rethink peace and reinvent development.

These goals require education, science, culture, communication and information to be at the top of the political agenda.

Historic changes are under way and UNESCO is taking the lead in shaping a better future for all.

I have seen it throughout the world.

I have seen it in the words inscribed on the wall of the Ayesha-e-Durrani girls' school in Kabul: *"My pen is my sword."*

I heard it from Rokhaya Sow, a teenager in Pikine, Senegal, who told me that UNESCO helped her to stay in school.

I saw it in Angola, where 3,000 women and young men waving white handkerchiefs for peace met to launch the UNESCO-African Union campaign to promote a culture of peace in Africa *"Make Peace Happen"*.

I heard it in the speech of the President of Peru, H.E. Mr Ollanta Humala, in the United Nations General Assembly in September:

*"We must find another way ... this is not only about growing to include, but also about including to keep growing."*

Ladies and gentlemen, I heard it from the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, who spoke to us last February:

*"True peace requires a form of consciousness that not only eschews all forms of violence but which also envisages the rich fruits of peaceful life together"*.

These voices are strong and so they must be.

Last year, in Timbuktu, during attacks against the mausoleums, one extremist declared:

*"There is no world heritage – it doesn't exist."*

These words must strengthen us in our convictions.

With President François Hollande, I travelled to Timbuktu and I saw the burnt manuscripts, violated testaments of a millennial Islamic culture, and I am more determined than ever to act.

UNESCO is here to amplify the voices of unity against those of division.

UNESCO is here to remind us that lasting peace and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin, that there can be no peace without poverty eradication, no poverty eradication without peace.

This is the same agenda.

An agenda for human dignity.

An agenda for inclusive development, to empower every woman and man.

We have entered a new age of limits.

We are reaching the limits of our planet.

We are reaching the limits of development as it has been understood.

In this new era, we must make the most of the greatest renewable energy we have.

This is human ingenuity.

Human creativity is our great strength, a bottomless wellspring, whose power we must unleash.

This is UNESCO's humanist mission, and it has guided me in everything I have done.

In 2009, I pledged to strengthen UNESCO's leadership at the heart of the United Nations, to bolster the multilateral order.

We are moving on all fronts, and our leadership has never been more in demand.

In 2009, I pledged to strengthen the centrality of education for development.

Together, we have accelerated Education for All, and our action is bearing fruit – on access for boys and especially girls, on literacy, on the quality of teaching and learning.

In 2009, I pledged a renewed focus on the sciences.

Together, we took UNESCO's message to Rio+20, we deepened our work for sustainable water management, for protecting biodiversity, for ocean sciences and monitoring.

We are supporting developing countries to harness the power of science, technology and innovation, through capacity-building, through national frameworks.

In 2009, I pledged to create a *High Panel on Science for Development*, to tighten the link between research and policy, and I did so, giving this a global reach with the creation of the *Scientific Advisory Board* for the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, hosted by UNESCO.

In 2009, I pledged to re-launch the debate on culture and development.

We are taking our message of culture as an enabler and driver of sustainable development across the world, and we are gaining momentum.

In 2009, I pledged to solidify UNESCO's normative framework in culture.

I have launched a vibrant debate on the integrity and credibility of the World Heritage Convention, and the World Heritage List is increasingly balanced and diverse.

To safeguard the heritage and identity of societies in a globalizing world, I have strengthened the 1970 Convention against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects, to halt this plague, to deepen cooperation and to raise awareness.

Together, we have acted to protect cultural heritage under attack – in Libya, in Syria, in Mali, in Egypt – because this millennial heritage carries universal value, because its loss is a loss to each of us.

In 2009, I pledged to promote communication and information and freedom of expression, as human rights essential for inclusive, knowledge societies, for sustainable development.

Together, we are developing media and training journalists, we are leading the United Nations in enhancing their safety and tackling impunity.

In 2009, I pledged to strengthen Global Priorities Africa and Gender Equality.

Together, we have deepened UNESCO's work for girls and women's education in countries most in need.

Together, we have sharpened UNESCO's action to sustain Africa's renaissance.

Africa is rising – I have seen this for myself, in the dynamism of young women and men, in the determination of Governments to craft balanced development, and UNESCO is supporting this historic movement.

In 2009, I pledged to strengthen UNESCO's capacity to react to emergencies, and we have done so, in Haiti, in Pakistan, in the horn of Africa.

In 2009, I pledged to reform UNESCO, to sharpen our focus, to deepen our impact, to raise our profile.

Together, we have stood down a financial crisis, we are leading a root-and-branch reform, our delivery is improving and we are gaining in visibility.

And here I wish to express special thanks to all UNESCO staff, for their professionalism and commitment.

In all this, we have been guided by a single determination:

To reposition UNESCO.

To meet the ambitions of our mandate.

To craft a better future for all.

This has been my commitment and my responsibility, and it remains so.

There remains much to do – but UNESCO is moving forward, our eyes are set firmly on the goals we share.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have done much, but much remains to be done.

In this hyperconnected, interdependent world, we must act together, for the multilateral arena is the only place where we can hope to find peaceful and lasting solutions to our problems.

In this changing world, we must also remain faithful to the core principles of humanism:

Human dignity, which the Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola saw in the individual's ability to define him- or herself and achieve full potential.

The principles of equality and equity.

Solidarity.

We must keep these principles alive in the twenty-first century and adapt them to the challenges of our time.

That is my vision for a new humanism.

Firstly, in today's world, human dignity is inextricably linked to human development and poverty alleviation.

And, as we now understand, there is no sense in human development unless it is sustainable.

It defeats the object if it damages the planet.

It defeats the object if it does not benefit all.

This is the focus of the new post-2015 agenda: an agenda for sustainability.

And this is where UNESCO's mission takes on its full significance.

Our Constitution is itself a covenant for sustainability, seeking to lay the foundations for lasting peace and prosperity.

Sustainability means quality education, which transforms lives and is the main catalyst for human development, allowing people to adapt to change and reinvent themselves.

It is the sturdiest foundation of society.

Sustainability is also found in culture, our strongest social cement, promoting inclusion and giving us confidence, allowing us to draw energy from our history to build a lasting future for ourselves.

Culture is the source of resilience described by the writer Dany Laferrière, when faced with the ruins of Haiti after the earthquake: "the country will recover through culture".

Culture drives reconciliation in the wake of conflict, especially living culture carried forward by people.

Sustainability means building the capacities of societies through science, research and the sharing of knowledge, enabling innovation, invention, better anticipation of risks and preparation for the hazards of an uncertain world.

It means building more robust and resilient societies, which are able to handle our rapidly evolving environment and the pressures of global warming, social transformations and natural hazards.

And in this context, we must help the most fragile, the most vulnerable, the least developed countries, the small island developing States and marginalized communities, for our fates are linked.

We must provide emergency assistance during conflicts and disasters, helping the most fragile to make a rapid recovery.

This is the new frontier of human dignity and my first strand of action.

Sustainable development is inseparable from equality, and equality in the twenty-first century is above all equality between men and women.

This is the second strand of my work.

Equality between men and women is a matter of justice and human rights.

It is also the best way of investing in the future, a powerful catalyst for human development and the fight against poverty.

Our particular role consists precisely in ensuring that, through education and access to culture and information, women are empowered to make their own choices, and that their role in society is acknowledged in full.

Today, two thirds of illiterate adults in the world are women.

In the age of the Internet and the knowledge society, 31 million girls even now have no access to basic education.

Thirty-four million girls and female teenagers do not go to school.

They are forced to leave school because they have become victims of violence, because they have to work, because they were married off at the age of 10 or 12, because they are considered responsible for fetching water.

This is where the bloodless civil war of our time is being waged.

Gender parity is literacy.

Gender parity is access to science.

Gender parity is not only a right on paper, it is the genuine possibility for girls to become the person they want to be, the possibility of fulfilling themselves, and through such women the whole of society becomes stronger and more developed.

This is the original essence of UNESCO's mission, precisely because we come up with instruments to ensure independence and development, and it is in that very direction that we must focus the full force of our action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ultimately, humanism is solidarity, the conviction that we belong to one human family.

Today, this solidarity must take the form of a new global citizenship in an era of diversity.

Globalization, urbanization and cultural diversity form multicultural societies with multiple identities.

This diversity is forcing us to rethink development, dialogue, tolerance, social cohesion and even peace.

The borders of peace are shifting within societies, in the perception that every person has of their own culture and those of others.

Making peace with others implies being at peace with ourselves, with multiple affiliations and with painful memories that demand our respect.

This wealth is also a mine of creativity and fresh ideas if we learn, at the same time, to reconcile the diversity that makes us richer with the human rights that bring us together.

And UNESCO plays a unique role in proposing curricula and skills that enable citizens to live with different cultures and languages, and to build cultural synergies.

Our role is to provide the tools to turn this diversity into a force for dialogue and understanding, and to face the shared challenges that are beyond our individual scope.

Because we must live and work together: climate change and natural risks know no borders.

Water management and biodiversity know no borders.

Science knows no borders.

We must create spaces, attitudes and skills to rise to these challenges in the diversity of our cultures, our beliefs and origins.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity is the dictionary of this globalized world, a citizenship textbook for multicultural societies.

And more than ever, we are measuring the importance of President Houphouët-Boigny's words: "*peace is not a word; it is a behaviour.*" It is a skill.

Education must be about learning the intercultural values and skills that are essential for the twenty-first century, initiating young people into world citizenship, and this is the third priority of the Global Education First Initiative launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and piloted by UNESCO.

I recall with emotion the dream of Doris Lessing, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, who passed away yesterday, and who fought her entire life against a "fragmenting culture", where young people who have had years of education know only one speciality or another and are ignorant of the realities of the world, incapable of thinking globally.

And I quote her:

*"We have a treasure-house. It is all there, this wealth of literature, to be discovered again and again by whoever is lucky enough to come upon it ..."*

*Let us suppose our world is ravaged by war. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise.*

*But the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us.*

*It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed.*

*It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.*

UNESCO is that quintessential universal platform, the laboratory of ideas, the one and only network for sustaining this heritage, removing the barriers between disciplines, learning to act with others and constantly revitalizing ourselves.

I am thinking of the world heritage sites.

I am thinking of the biosphere reserves.

We must be more ambitious, promoting the networking of sites, creating cross-border areas for the heritage shared by two or more countries, providing support for common textbooks, and sharing the memory and living culture of peoples on a continental scale, irrespective of frontiers.

The new technologies make this an even more urgent course of action.

UNESCO, ladies and gentlemen, is the house of peace and we can bring the instruments of peace up to date.

Enhancing the sustainability of a fragile world.

Ensuring equality between women and men.

Building citizenship in an age of diversity.

That, in my view, is what defines the new humanism, which is the key to peace today, and UNESCO's contribution.

The founders of this Organization enunciated a vision that represented an act of faith in human capacities, a defence of humanism in the aftermath of a war that amounted to its negation.

It took courage to talk of intellectual solidarity in a world laid to waste, left physically and morally in ruins.

Given the emergencies of our day and age, we must respond with the same courage, the same sense of daring.

The oath that I have just taken, uttered by all my predecessors, is a pledge for humanism.

It is the pledge of the millions of men and women fighting day in day out for justice, tolerance and the rule of law.

It is the pledge of millions of children on the way to school, and the promise of their parents who want a better future for them.

A future of peace and prosperity.

At this moment in time, I am fully aware of the trust that you have placed in me, and I undertake to honour that vision of what is best in human beings, which is the honour of UNESCO.

I thank you.