

Keynote presentation
by Etienne Clement, Director, UNESCO Office for the Pacific States

at the event “UNESCO 70 years- Building peace through dialogue

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Honourable Hekia Parata, Minister of Education of New Zealand,

Professor Ian McKinnon, Chair, New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO,

Honourable Members of Parliament

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, let me first express our gratitude to have been invited at the Parliament of New Zealand, to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) founded by 37 countries, including New Zealand, in 1945, in the context of the end of the Second World War.

In 70 years UNESCO has done a long way in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information from its Headquarters in Paris, its 52 Field and liaison Offices and its some 190 National Commissions, through its five functions. I would like today to emphasize the importance of its contribution to a culture of peace, human dignity and the respect and promotion of our cultural diversity and to reiterate its relevance in the 21st Century.

Having been with UNESCO for more than 30 years, allow me to naturally reflect on my experience, in Africa, at Headquarters, in Cambodia, in Thailand and now in the Pacific, where it faces specific challenges.

History

UNESCO was founded in 1945 to develop the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” as a means of building lasting peace. Its pioneering work has helped change the way people everywhere understand each other and the planet we live on.

The mission of the new Organization was to build, as the North American poet and head of the US delegation, Archibald MacLeish, suggested, "The defenses of peace in the minds of men". UNESCO should work for this visionary dream to come true by way of education, culture, sciences and communication. The mandate was manifold but the goal was one: peace.

In its early years, UNESCO helped rebuild schools, libraries, and museums destroyed during World War II, and served as an intellectual forum for exchanging ideas and scientific knowledge, especially during the “cold war”.

As newly independent countries joined between the 1950s and 1970s, it turned its attention to access to education for all girls and boys and tackling illiteracy.

UNESCO led the movement to protect the environment and sounded the alert over the planet’s shrinking biodiversity. Through its “Man and the Biosphere Program”, established in 1971, it sought to reconcile both the use and conservation of natural resources.

The Nubian Temples campaign of the 1960s to save Egypt’s most famous monuments from the rising waters of the Aswan High Dam transformed approaches to cultural heritage protection and inspired the creation of the World Heritage program, dedicated to safeguarding sites of outstanding universal value. This laid the basis for widening UNESCO action to safeguard several dimensions of heritage – immovable-moveable, tangible- intangible, terrestrial-underwater as well as documentary – and to promote respect for cultural diversity on the basis of human rights.

Through the development of community radio and multimedia centres, training for journalists, helping governments design media laws or, encouraging them to develop broadband services for all, UNESCO has championed freedom of expression, the rights of citizens to information, and helped lay the foundations of tomorrow’s Knowledge Societies.

Nowadays’ challenges

UNESCO is firm in the conviction that in this age of immense social change and increasing limits, we must invest in resources that are

renewable: education, cultural diversity, scientific research - and the boundless energy of human ingenuity - that will enable and drive the development essential for a just and sustainable future.

And indeed nowadays' challenges remain numerous and UNESCO therefore even more relevant. Millions of girls and boys still have no access to learning. Illiteracy prevents hundreds of millions of women and men from fully participating in their societies. Youth unemployment is a global challenge. Education remains a top priority on the new global development agenda being shaped by the international community. UNESCO makes the case for a new goal for equitable and quality lifelong learning and is mobilizing governments and a wide range of other partners for this.

Climate change, shrinking biodiversity and increasing demands on natural resources call for more science, and more scientists, to increase our capacity to observe and comprehend the planet. UNESCO's programs on the ocean, fresh water resources, the sharing of scientific knowledge, and in the social sciences have an important contribution to make.

Culture, a force for dialogue, social cohesion, economic growth and creativity, remains at the heart of UNESCO's mission. UNESCO is determined that it should be a priority in the post-2015 agenda, which should be human rights-based, with a focus on governance and the rule of law.

This is why freedom of expression is also so important and why UNESCO will continue to advocate for harnessing information and communication technologies, building knowledge societies and bridging divides.

To achieve its mission, in its 2014-2021 Medium Term strategy UNESCO has defined its five functions as follows:

- (a) Serving as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice
- (b) Developing and reinforcing the global agenda in its fields of competence;
- (c) Setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation;
- (d) Strengthening international and regional cooperation in its fields of competence, and fostering alliances, intellectual cooperation, knowledge-sharing and operational partnerships;
- (e) Providing advice for policy development and implementation, and developing institutional and human capacities.

Education

UNESCO's early work on fundamental education had a powerful impact. I had the privilege, in my early days at UNESCO, to be associated with the work of rebuilding education systems in Africa. It was impressive for me, as a young European to work with a team of enthusiastic African colleagues in the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (Dakar, Senegal). We were deeply involved in education reforms in most African countries, updating curriculums, strengthening the role of teachers, or adapting school facilities to modern life. Nevertheless, in 1990, the World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien, Thailand, found it necessary to launch a global movement to provide basic education for all children, youths and adults. As a next step, the 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, led Member States to commit to achieving basic education for all by 2015.

The United Nations Secretary-General launched the five-year Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) in September 2012 to accelerate progress towards the Education for All goals and the education-related Millennium Development Goals. UNESCO is the Secretariat for this initiative. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics there are, in 2014, still more than 900 million illiterate adults and youth in the world. Although important results have been achieved a lot remains to be done. Our Office for the Pacific States in Apia, Samoa, is contributing actively to that movement. We are focusing on teachers, improving their knowledge and teaching skills to better respond to learning needs of all children and adolescents. This has led to transformation of teaching practices, curriculum and pedagogical methodology in all Pacific Small Islands developing States.

Beside this fundamental work, as an Agency promoting innovation, we are also exploring new approaches in education. This is the case of the UNESCO program of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which promotes life skills and the learners' participation in the community as well as in environmental protection. Moreover last year, our Office has been mandated by Ministers of education in the Pacific to support them in developing Comprehensive Sexuality Education as well as a program for the prevention of non-communicable diseases, together with other UN agencies. We need funding for these two programs, which we hope will result in a reduction of early pregnancy among adolescent girls in secondary schools for the first one and in reducing the current prevalence of child obesity for the second.

The Natural Sciences

Examples of early major UNESCO work in the field of natural sciences are the Arid Zone programming 1948–1966, the preparation and organization of the International Hydrological Decade in 1965, and the creation of the European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN) in 1954. In 1968, UNESCO organized the first intergovernmental conference aimed at reconciling the environment and development. The main outcome was the creation of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program.

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, took, in October 2013, the initiative to establish a Scientific Advisory Board. This new board provides advice on science, technology and innovation for sustainable development to the UN organizations. UNESCO hosts the Secretariat of the Board.

In the Pacific, we are engaged in scientific programs contributing to Disaster Risk Reduction. Thanks to the support of Malaysia, we are supporting scientific research by Pacific researchers at the University of South Pacific in order to mitigate the effects of natural disasters on two sectors of the economy: tourism and agriculture. We are also contributing to the Tsunami early warning system in the Pacific, through the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission based in Suva, Fiji and in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA.

Social and Human Sciences

From the outset UNESCO saw the promotion of international understanding as an essential precondition for preventing the crimes and tragedies of genocide, racism and war from being repeated. Moving through time, among other influential and groundbreaking initiatives, the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 1997 and approved by the UN General Assembly in 1998), extended this reflection on the concept of human dignity to the field of biotechnology and genetics.

In the Pacific, our program on Social and Human Sciences is very much oriented towards the empowerment of young people. This week, at the Commonwealth Youth Games in Samoa, UNESCO, through its program "Voices of Athletes" (VOA) is training 1,000 young athletes on 'life skills' covering various areas such as prevention against HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), protection of the Environment, Healthy lifestyles and Doping-free culture. Next month, UNESCO Office for the Pacific States and the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO will collaborate in a training on Disaster Risk Reduction,

involving young people from the Pacific, especially from Vanuatu, after Cyclone PAM and from Christchurch.

Culture

UNESCO's early activities in the field of culture included the Universal Copyright Convention from 1952 and the History of Mankind project. The History project was a concrete follow-up to the statement in UNESCO's Constitution that "ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause" for war. The histories aimed at fighting stereotypes and prejudices and fostering mutual understanding.

The Organization's work in the field of cultural heritage became famous with the Nubia Campaign, launched in 1960. The purpose of the campaign was to move the Great Temple of Abu Simbel to keep it from being swamped by the Nile after construction of the Aswan Dam. During the 20-year campaign, 22 monuments and architectural complexes were relocated. This was the first and largest in a series of campaigns including many others, such as Borobudur in Indonesia.

This work led to the adoption, in 1972, of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The World Heritage Committee was established in 1976 and the first sites inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1978. Since then important legal instruments on cultural heritage and diversity have been adopted by UNESCO Member States in 2003 (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and 2005 (Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

UNESCO has also pioneered the idea of culture as an essential component of development. UNESCO has proposed and prepared the integration of culture in the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In the Pacific, UNESCO supports various initiatives in the area of culture. For instance it empowers the Pacific Heritage Hub (PHH), based at University of South Pacific. It promotes tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a driver for development, leading to the nomination of several UNESCO World Heritage sites which are generating sustainable incomes for the local population, while preserving their cultural heritage and identity. We are also promoting PIMA, the Pacific Islands Museum Association and ICOMOS Pasefika, as our support to civil society movement for the protection of cultural heritage.

I have had the privilege to be associated with the standard-setting work of UNESCO in the area of cultural heritage: first with the promotion and implementation of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict, then with the 1970 Convention against illicit traffic in cultural objects. I have also been the Secretary of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Promotion of the Return of Cultural Property to its Country of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation. Further on, I was associated in the drafting of two UNESCO Conventions: the 1999 Protocols to The Hague 1954 Convention and the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. This allows me to testify the importance of these international legal instruments which are legally-binding their States Parties but also reflect the international commitment for international collaboration on cultural heritage. I wish to underline that New Zealand is the only Pacific country to have ratified the 1999 Protocol to the Hague 1954 Convention, confirming its commitment to International Humanitarian Law and to the protection of the cultural heritage of humanity. I sincerely hope that together we can convince other countries in the Pacific to join it soon. I also had the opportunity to hear a lot of the New Zealand involvement in negotiations for the return of cultural property, during my visit of yesterday to Te Papa. Although I am now the Director of UNESCO for the Pacific, I remain occasionally involved in training activities on these legal instruments. Last week I was in Cambodia where I contributed to the training of military in the protection of Angkor monuments and last month in Vanuatu at a UNESCO workshop on the 1970 Convention on illicit traffic in cultural objects.

Communication and information

In the field of communication, the free flow of information has been a priority for UNESCO from its beginnings. UNESCO started organizing training and education for journalists in the 1950s and continues to do so. UNESCO organized the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunis).

WSIS resulted in the creation of the multi-stakeholder Internet Governance Forum in 2006 through which UNESCO promotes the idea that the mechanisms of Internet governance must be based on the principles of openness, privacy and diversity, encompassing universal access, interoperability, freedom of expression and measures to resist any attempt to censor content.

The Memory of the World program was created in 1992 with the purpose of safeguarding endangered documentary heritage and ensuring preservation of and long-term access to the digital memory of the world.

In the Pacific countries, documentary heritage still remains but not always under the best conditions for its conservation. In Samoa, the archives from the German occupation period have been recognized by the Memory of the World program. We hope that researchers will soon start to study them as they definitely have a lot to teach us on the life in the Pacific in the early 20th Century. We are also in search of funding for a program to safeguard and digitalize them. As to press freedom, our Office is engaged in training of journalists on ethics and gender issues with the aim of avoiding the replication of gender stereotypes in the local press. We collaborate with the New Zealand High Commission in the production of a dictionary English-Samoan on terminology related to gender. We have also trained journalists in utilizing a language which does not stigmatize minority groups of the society such as LGBTI (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex).

Conclusion

In order to achieve the goals set out in its Constitution and to exercise its 5 functions, UNESCO has utilized a wide range of modalities of action: conventions, meetings at various levels, publications, events, etc.

But the most powerful of its tools are its networks covering governmental and non-governmental circles in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. To foster these networks, UNESCO has created National Commissions and clubs in the Member States as a way of involving directly Governmental bodies in UNESCO's work and linking directly with civil society and non-governmental initiatives. UNESCO also created itself numerous NGOs, as soon as the early years of its existence and these were involved in developing the programs as well as in implementing them. And it continues. Another initiative, the Associated Schools program, has been one of several powerful networks bringing together children, teachers and citizens from different countries and cultures. UNESCO has succeeded in creating networks for scientists, professionals, activists and youth from all over the world, even during the Cold War and the decolonization process, even nowadays in the parts of the world where conflicts prevail.

It is therefore through the combined action of its Governing bodies (the General Conference and the Executive Board), of its Director-general, of its Secretariat and of these networks that UNESCO has been influential

in shaping legislations and public policies in its fields of competence among its Member States. In today's world, we can see its impact in national legislations and policies covering areas such as freedom of expression, cultural and natural heritage, biodiversity, respect for cultural diversity, lifelong learning, intangible heritage or bioethics, to name only a few.

I believe that it is also the dynamic of the UNESCO various networks, what we sometimes call the UNESCO "wider family", that guarantees that innovative approaches will always stimulate the Organization. For instance, the network of young people is very important at UNESCO. Young people are involved at almost all levels of the UNESCO's life, from the Youth Forum held during the UNESCO General Conference to more grassroots projects such as "Voices of the Athletes" or "Looking beyond disasters". I am convinced that the concerns and interests of nowadays young generation will be reflected in the future UNESCO's priorities, as it was the case in the past when innovative approaches in environment or cultural diversity or bioethics were recognized and introduced in UNESCO's programs through the active youth networks led by their parents or grandparents.

In conclusion, whatever forms the UNESCO programs will be taking in the future, I firmly believe that they will continue to be inspired by the ethical principles, ideals, values and goals which lie in the UNESCO Constitution. Because these principles reflect the universal aspiration of human being for peace. Therefore the famous sentence of the Preamble of the Constitution: "*since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed*" remain relevant in the current days of days of this early 21st century and will continue to generate new initiatives in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.