



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

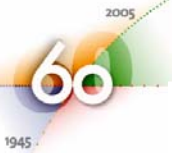
Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

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



## Dialogue among cultures, civilizations and peoples

Current events throughout the world demonstrate the need for the international community to work towards peace. UNESCO aims to achieve this goal by supporting and promoting dialogue among cultures, civilizations and peoples.

The quest for a dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples is deeply entrenched in UNESCO's constitution and its various programmes and resolutions. The promotion of dialogue in order to "build peace in the minds of men" is at the core of UNESCO's mission.

In our increasingly divisive societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Therefore the fostering of dialogue among cultures and peoples can only occur on the basis of the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity. In this context, UNESCO advocates for inclusive and participatory policies as a guarantee of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace.

For several years, and especially since the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations (2001), the issues raised by the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples have been addressed through important initiatives, declarations and in many conferences and meetings organized by UNESCO and numerous stakeholders in a wide range of countries and regions. These events have also given rise to programmes and publications fulfilling UNESCO's advocacy role.

Efforts are also being pursued through activities for the recognition and preservation of the diversity of the world's cultural heritage as well as its manifold cultural expressions which allow for a better knowledge among cultures and peoples.

### Contemporary challenges

Globalization and the emergence of new challenges, threats to humankind, ignorance and widening gaps in mutual understanding have made the need for dialogue among peoples more necessary than ever. We witness at present a sense of shared vulnerability and at the same time a palpable new willingness to counter intolerance and fanaticism and to build instead on opportunities that globalization has created for intercultural exchange and understanding.

In October 2001, UNESCO's General Conference affirmed the fundamental challenge constituted by dialogue; a challenge based on the unity of humankind and commonly shared values, the recognition of cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilization and each culture. The General Conference set out a new framework for action, which has been progressively refined by the Executive Board, most recently at its 175<sup>th</sup> session.

New impetus has been gained from the *United Nations World Summit* in September



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UNESCO has responded to the need for further dialogue among civilizations by intensifying and focusing its strategy on concrete actions and results in the following areas:

- The articulation of a set of commonly shared values;
- Initiatives at the regional and sub-regional levels;
- The development of action-oriented thematic proposals drawing on all domains of UNESCO;
- Multi-stakeholder involvement beyond governmental representation and deliberate engagement of youth, women and existing UNESCO networks;
- Renewed exploration of the contribution of religions to dialogue related activities;
- Research on the role of dialogue in advancing women's rights.

The Rabat Commitment, adopted in June 2005, constituted a major break-through in this regard, setting out concrete and practical steps in various domains of UNESCO, which the Organizations participating in the Rabat Conference – ISESCO, ALECSO, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, The Danish Centre for Culture and Development, the Anna Lindt Foundation - have pledged to pursue.

2005, when the world's leaders committed themselves to taking action for the promotion of a dialogue among civilizations and a culture of peace at the local, national, regional and international levels and assigned UNESCO a lead role in this endeavour.

Following the “cartoon crisis” in 2006, a new challenge has arisen with respect to the complementarity of the principles of freedom of expression and the respect for cultural and religious symbols. UNESCO's Member States called for concrete approaches and practical action, drawing on all the domains of expertise of the Organization – education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

### Roads of dialogue

The concept of “roads” or “routes” has been at the heart of many of the Organizations's intercultural dialogue projects. Roads are itineraries by which individual travellers or communities have conveyed their ideas and customs across continents and oceans. From the Silk Route to the Slave Route to the Iron Roads in Africa, history has shown us that routes are venues for the exchange of cultural experience, ideas, values and goods through art, trade and migrations.

The advent of technologies has accelerated the rate of globalization. One result of this phenomenon is that men and women of different cultures are exchanging ideas and opinions, gaining a better understanding of

one another, their ways of life and ways of thinking. On the flip side, globalization can also have negative effects leading to a feeling of exclusion rather than openness and leading to the rejection and/or violence because of fear of the other, his values and culture. Intercultural dialogue can help promote social cohesion and promote sustainable development.

### Interreligious dialogue

UNESCO's programme on Interreligious Dialogue aims to promote dialogue among different religions and spiritual traditions in a world where intra- and inter-religious conflicts are becoming ever more present. These conflicts often result from ignorance or a misunderstanding of different cultures or traditions. The programme is considered an essential dimension of intercultural dialogue. It focuses on interactions and reciprocal influences between religions, spiritual and humanist traditions and the necessity of promoting reciprocal knowledge in order to respect cultural and religious diversity. The Programme has also generated a network of UNESCO Chairs for interreligious dialogue and intercultural understanding.

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