



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

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вопросам образования,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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Address by Mr Stanley Mutumba Simataa

**President of the 38th session of the General Conference,
on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the
38th session of the General Conference**

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

3 November 2015

Mr President of the 37th session of the General Conference,
Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madame Director-General of UNESCO,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates to UNESCO,
Members of the media,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured and humbled by the confidence and trust bestowed unto me to serve this great Organization as President of the 38th session of the General Conference.

Your unanimous endorsement of my nomination is a testament to the principle of the equality of States espoused in the UNESCO founding Constitution. It is indeed an honour for Namibia as a young nation, to be accorded the opportunity to preside over the supreme governing body of our Organization.

I thank my government for having endorsed my candidature – this in spite of demanding national responsibilities I am vested with. I also thank my family represented here by my wife, Maggie, for providing the much-needed support that rebooted my often-depleted energy levels.

Equally, I would like to express my gratitude, in particular, to the Africa Group for their unreserved support for my candidature. My predecessor H.E. Mr. Hao Ping, Vice Minister of Education of the People's Republic of China, is also thanked for his sterling contributions during his tenure. In the same vein, the Chairperson of the Executive Board, H.E. Mohamed Sameh Amr, is thanked for his able stewardship of the operations of the Board during very testing times.

And yes, let me thank someone I once said had the greatest respect and admiration; that is you, Madam Director-General. Your unparalleled endurance in leading our Organization during what will likely go down in the annals of its history as one of the most challenging times is highly appreciated.

Madam Director-General, where many would have hurriedly exited, you consciously chose to stay the course. Your unrelenting efforts, together with the sacrifices of the unsung heroes of our Organization, the Secretariat, under the measured guidance of the Executive Board, succeeded in ventilating our Organization.

As Trevor Noah, one of the famous South African comedians, notes “every obstacle, every pain, every heartbreak, every fear, every single negative thing in your life, is the fuel you must use to get you to a positive place”. Thank you, Madam Director-General, and members of the Secretariat for having kept faith in our UNESCO.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The year 2015 is significant in the history of humanity. We are celebrating the 70th anniversaries of both the United Nations and UNESCO. Both organizations were established to ensure the maintenance of peace and security in the world. The United Nations General Assembly, recently adopted ambitious and forward-looking Sustainable Development Goals to, amongst others, end hunger and poverty and provide equitable quality education.

In the case of UNESCO, the founding members of our Organization had a lasting vision in mind, when they founded our Organization 70 years ago. They remind us today, just as they did 70 years ago, and as stated in the UNESCO Constitution, “that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments, would not be peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.” The historic narrative of a humane world order, characterized by lasting peace, has never been as relevant and

profound than it is today when the world and humankind continue to experience unending conflicts and natural disasters.

Coming from a country which had emerged from a lengthy armed conflict filled with hatred and mistrust, I am inclined to reason that humankind needs to invest more in sustained efforts to construct true and lasting peace. We need first to understand who the others are and why they do things the way they do. There is no single correct way of addressing issues. As human beings, it is natural that we look at issues through lenses framed by our norms, values and cultures.

Similarly, as individual countries, we appreciate world events based on our backgrounds and experiences. This, your Excellencies, makes our coexistence complex. And coexist we must, for we have no choice. To appreciate each other's ways, we need firstly, a strong and unprejudiced will to listen to each other with open minds. Secondly, we need to pose for a while and put ourselves in others' shoes. Let us allow ourselves a few minutes to forget about our own conditions and visualize ourselves in the situation of fellow human beings experiencing daily challenges. This may change our view and make us understand why countries have different positions. This may bring us to the realization that there is no single right way. Despite opposing views, both views may be right! Only when we try harder to understand and appreciate each other's ways, will we be able to tolerate each other and be truly supportive.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let us redouble our efforts to ensure that UNESCO achieves its sacred mission of building peace. However, peace and peace alone, is not a sufficient condition to address prevailing global challenges. As the current President of the Republic of Namibia noted when addressing the Executive Board of UNESCO in 2010 – and this is what he continues to remind Namibians – that “People do not eat peace, democracy, stability, and nor do they sleep in good constitutions”. Peace, democracy and stability are but prerequisites that enable us to go a step further, to achieve equitable sustainable human development. However, it is true that development, which is sustainable, is premised on enduring peace, security and equitable prosperity of nations and their citizenry.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In time of despair, UNESCO is called upon to bring foresight and hope to the peoples of the world through education, including education for peace, tolerance, democracy and human rights, through the sciences notably with the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge to improve responses to unprecedented environmental changes now occurring, through culture by building bridges amongst different cultures, safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage and creativity, and through communication and information through the free flow of information and ideas. There is no doubt that UNESCO remains the beacon of hope in a world littered with deep-seated intolerance and despair.

The celebrations of UNESCO's and the United Nations' 70th anniversaries provide us with opportune spaces for reflections on where we have come from and where we want to go. UNESCO must therefore draw on an ancient Buddhist wisdom, which teaches us that “if you want to know your past, look into your present conditions. If you want to know your future, look into your present actions.” Can we as nations build a better world for the future generations characterized by mutual respect, tolerance and coexistence? These are some of the questions to ponder as we celebrate the 70th anniversaries.

As Nelson Mandela teaches us in his book *Long Walk to Freedom* “to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning. I have walked that long road to freedom. I have made missteps along the way. I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of

the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance that I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk to freedom is not yet ended.”

The wisdom of Nelson Mandela should inspire our Organization to take stock and embark upon the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals with renewed vigour and determination. UNESCO Member States must reflect deeply on the prevailing conditions of our Organization. We must appreciate the opportunities presented by the SDGs where our Organization has leadership and delivery obligations in quite a number of the 17 Goals. We must continue to build on measures initiated so far to break the “financial El Niño” hovering over our Organization. We must spare no effort in providing adequate resources to make UNESCO’s field network more functional, for it is at the epicentre of our Organization’s operations.

We must pursue initiatives undertaken to tweak, however, with due care, the existing governance architecture of our Organization, to ensure that we are better placed to lead the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. We dare not lose this opportunity, for if we do, the relevance of our mandate will be severely compromised. This calls for a recalibration of our actions.

In the case of Africa, there is an established blueprint: “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want”. Let us draw lessons from our experiences in implementing the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals and promise the future generation that we will bequeath to them a world in better shape than we inherited.

In conclusion, allow me, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, a last quote from the Namibian President. As you are aware, the independence of our country 25 years ago stands out as one of the most successful stories in the history of the United Nations. For this reason, President Hage Geingob at our 25th Independence Day celebration and on the occasion of his swearing in as the 3rd President of the Republic of Namibia in March this year, reminded Namibians that “Namibia is a child of international solidarity, a friend to all and enemy to none”.

This is the spirit in which I pledge to preside over the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference. I will rely on your support and cooperation in exercising my duties and responsibilities.

Merci beaucoup, muchas gracias, xièxie, shukran jazilaan, spasibo.