

IRINA BOKOVA, Director-General of UNESCO

Mission statement

2013

A UNESCO for a New World

An Agenda for Human Dignity

Since 1945, UNESCO has been working across the world to promote a positive vision of peace, founded on equality, dignity and respect, taken forward through tolerance and solidarity between and within societies. In 2015, the Organization celebrates 70 years of action at a time when our message has never been more relevant.

Every day reminds us that we are living in a new age of limits -- in terms of resources, in terms of the boundaries of the planet. In this world of change, I believe we must make far more of the single most powerful and renewable energy that we have -- that of human ingenuity.

Supporting human ingenuity must start with each woman and man, with their human rights and dignity.

It means giving them the tools and freedom to shape the world to their aspirations. It means respecting all forms of diversity as sources of belonging and strength. It means shared responsibility towards the well-being of everyone, wherever they live, whatever their circumstances. It means building everyday peace, through actions at the local level for the good for the world as a whole.

This is an agenda for global solidarity, for strengthening humanity as a single community, for protecting the world as one.

UNESCO is essential for this agenda.

Today, cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information has never been so urgent -- to strengthen justice, equality and respect.

In 2009, I spoke of the need for UNESCO to become more coherent, efficient and visible in order to address the imperatives of new, emerging world.

Today, change is accelerating.

I believe all societies need UNESCO today, for our humanist message, for everything we are doing to promote human dignity. The call for UNESCO has never been so strong than at this time when all societies are undergoing transformation, when opportunities are vast but pressures are rising.

UNESCO must answer the call to help shape a new world for justice and equality, for dignity and respect. This is a call for deeper cooperation between North and South, East and West. It is a call for empowering girls and women, and for supporting Africa's renaissance. It is a call for a humanity united around its diversity on the basis of dignity, equality and mutual respect.

The Future We Want

The next years are critical, when we must strive to reach internationally-agreed development goals by 2015 and set a new global development agenda.

UNESCO must continue to play a leading part. This is essential for the reform of the Organisation and its future. It is vital for building the future we want for all.

Meeting these challenges requires experience and determination. It calls for unity between all Member States and the Organization. It demands strategic vision and courage.

I am determined to build a sharper, more effective, more performing Organization, to lay the foundations for lasting peace and sustainable development on the basis of human rights, dignity and justice.

I intend to strengthen UNESCO's leadership in promoting human development on the basis of equal dignity and to release the full power of ingenuity in every woman and man.

I will take this agenda forward through our leadership of the global Education for All campaign and our stewardship of the Global Education First Initiative. This will guide our campaign to promote culture for sustainable development and to protect cultural heritage and diversity for tolerance and dialogue. We must harness the sciences for sustainability for the benefit of all societies. We must ensure every woman and man can speak out and be heard, can help create and share knowledge.

Three Priorities Moving Forward

First, human dignity today is inextricably linked to human development and to poverty alleviation.

There is no sense in human development if it is not sustainable, if it harms the planet, if it does not include all. This must be the focus of the new global sustainable agenda to follow 2015.

This is where UNESCO's mission takes on its full significance. Sustainability means quality education, which transforms lives, allowing people to adapt to change and reinvent themselves.

Sustainability draws also from culture, our strongest social cement, promoting inclusion and allowing societies to draw energy from the past to build a more sustainable future. Culture is a source of resilience and a bridge for reconciliation in the wake of conflict. It is also a wellspring of creativity and innovation, an essential source of revenues and jobs.

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

It means strengthening robust and resilient societies, able to handle a rapidly evolving environment and the pressures of global warming, social transformation and natural hazards.

In this context, we must support most especially the least developed countries and the Small Island developing States. We will continue to provide emergency assistance before, during and after conflicts and disasters, helping the most fragile to make a rapid recovery.

My second strategic priority is equality.

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

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.

UNESCO's role consists in ensuring through education and access to culture and information that women are empowered to make their own choices, and that their role in society is acknowledged.

Today, two thirds of illiterate adults in the world are women. Thirty one million girls have no access to basic education. Thirty-four million girls and female teenagers do not go to school.

Gender parity means literacy. It means access to science. It means genuine possibilities for girls to become the person they want to be, to strengthen the fabric of communities and societies as a whole.

All of UNESCO's action is human rights-based and driven, in line with the Secretary-General's Rights Upfront Initiative, to enhance work to protect human rights across the world.

My third priority is learning to live together.

Ultimately, humanism is about solidarity and the conviction that we belong to a single human family.

Today, this solidarity must be shaped by new forms of global citizenship in an era of diversity. Globalization, urbanization and cultural diversity are creating 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 perceptions that every person holds 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 diversity can be a wellspring for creativity and innovation if we learn to reconcile the diversity that makes us richer with the human rights that bring us together.

UNESCO plays a unique role here, in proposing curricula and skills that enable citizens to live with different cultures and languages. We work to develop the tools to turn diversity into a force for dialogue and understanding, and to face the challenges all societies share, in climate change, in water management and biodiversity.

Science knows no borders. We must create new spaces, new attitudes and skills to tackle new global challenges, in ways that cross disciplinary boundaries and that link science with policy more tightly. This is the goal of the new Scientific Advisory Board that UNESCO created and is steering forward for the UN Secretary-General.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity is a milestone for a globalized world, a reference for multicultural societies.

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 a priority of the Global Education First Initiative launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and steered forward by UNESCO.

Learning to live together means that all must have a voice and the ability to speak out. Freedom of expression online and offline has never been so important for good governance, for social inclusion, for strengthening societies and the rule of law.

This is why UNESCO is working to advance media development across the world, to widen access to information, to foster media literacy, to integrate new ICTs into education – all of this is vital for building the inclusive, knowledge societies we need for the 21st century. In this context, UNESCO's leading work – inside and outside the UN system -- to promote freedom of expression is essential, through support to the safety of journalists and the elimination of impunity and by standing up every time a journalist is killed and calling for swift justice.