



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 Film Projection “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”**

**UNESCO, 28 March 2012**

Excellency Mr David Killion, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the United States to UNESCO,

Excellency Mr Dudley Mackinley Thomas, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Liberia to UNESCO,

Ms Abigail Disney, Executive Producer of the series on *Women, War and Peace*,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to UNESCO for this showing of *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*.

I am pleased that so many have come, despite the plethora of activities underway across the House today.

This is a very special event, and it is an honour to introduce this event in the context of UNESCO's celebrations of the 2012 *International Women's Day*.

This film addresses a subject that goes to the heart of UNESCO's mission to build peace in the minds of men and women.

It goes to the heart of our global priorities – Gender Equality and Africa.

We know the impact of conflict on girls and women.

Across the world, women continue to endure unprecedented levels of violence, including sexual violence, as a result of conflict.

The impact is deep and long-lasting on individuals, on communities, on societies as a whole.

Fourteen years of civil conflict in Liberia had brutal consequences, as his Excellency the Ambassador knows well.

One devastating fact illustrates the point – during the conflict, an estimated 60-70 percent of women were sexually assaulted.

The story that is less told is that of the power of women for peace in such circumstances.

We must do more to tell this story – because, across the world, women are working at the forefront of efforts to build peace.

Time and again, women have come to peace negotiations united across party, class and ethnic differences.

This has been the case in many parts of the world.

This determination stems from everyday concerns -- to protect children, to find food, clean water and shelter, to protect themselves from violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence.

Ideologies may differ, but these women are united in their demand for freedom from violence, for equality and the full enjoyment of their human rights.

This is the story told by this film.

A story of courage in the face of violent strife.

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* tells the story of the power of peace.

This is the meaning of the white T-shirts won by the women of Liberia.

A statement in May 2003 by the *Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace* demanded “*all belligerent parties to disarm*” and work towards sustainable peace.

They backed this appeal with demonstrations, with prayers and silent protests outside the Presidential Palace.

Three months later, Charles Taylor was forced out of power and into exile, due to growing dissent within the country, coupled with international demands for him to be held accountable for human rights violations.

This success inspired Liberia to embark on a new path of peace.

It inspired the joint award of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman.

I wish to underline my deep respect and friendship for the President of Liberia, for her courage and leadership.

We must do more to acknowledge the work of women in conflicts across the world.

We must make far more of their power in peace negotiations, in peace-making and reconstruction.

UNESCO is working to raise awareness with women of their rights and their capacity to advocate for their respect.

We support the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and underpin efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

We have established research centres on women – most recently, the *Regional Centre for Women, Gender and Peacebuilding for the Great Lakes Region*, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

The establishment of the Centre has been accompanied by the creation of a *Regional Forum of Ministers of Women's Affairs and Gender*.

We are working also with a number of countries in Africa to strengthen teaching for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Delegations of the United States of America and the Republic of Liberia for this initiative.

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* shows what we can do when we join together.

This provides powerful inspiration to us all.

Thank you.