



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 visit by the President of Eire. H.E. Michael Higgins**

**UNESCO, 19 February 2013**

His Excellency Mr. Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland,

Excellency Mr. Michael Forbes, Ambassador of Ireland to UNESCO,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, it is an honour to welcome you on this first visit by a President of Ireland to UNESCO, at a time when Ireland is presiding the Council of the European Union.

Ireland is one of UNESCO's greatest champions.

It is a champion in its work to guide Education for All, in its engagement to advance human rights education, in its commitment to promote cultural heritage.

But it goes deeper than this.

Your country embodies values that are at the heart of UNESCO.

The values of equality and respect.

Those of human dignity.

Ireland may have a small population, but Irish women and men have left their mark across the world.

UNESCO is hosting today not one but *two* exhibitions, on James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.

These two Irish writers are really *world* writers, and the Irish pantheon includes many, many more -- this is why Dublin is *City of Literature* in our *Creative Cities Network*

Ireland is a cultural powerhouse, whose appeal flows, I believe, from the vibrancy of the stories told by its people.

These are stories of hope and resilience. Tales of endurance, of community, of imagination.

These are stories I think we all know and we all cherish.

Monsieur le Président,

Vous êtes un homme d'action – avocat pour les droits de l'homme, défenseur de l'accès à l'éducation pour tous.

Vous avez été membre des deux chambres du parlement, maire de Galway à deux reprises.

Sur ce long chemin, vous n'avez jamais perdu de vue votre vocation de penseur, d'écrivain.

Car vous êtes aussi un homme d'esprit, un universitaire, un poète.

La culture réside au cœur de votre vie professionnelle et personnelle, et vous avez été le premier ministre de l'Irlande pour les arts, la culture et le Gaeltacht.

Dans votre discours d'inauguration, vous avez dit – et je repasse en anglais pour vous citer:

*Now it is time to turn to an older wisdom that, while respecting material comfort and security as a basic right of all, recognises that many of the most valuable things in life cannot be measured.*

You spoke of culture as a force for dignity and as a wellspring of creativity.

Mindful of past glories, your vision of culture celebrates the future.

*“Ireland,”* you said, *“is a work in progress, a country still to be fully imagined and invented.”*

And so must peace also, be imagined and invented, by all of us together.

UNESCO is driven by the same conviction, that solidarity is founded on human dignity and it is sustained by safeguarding our common heritage and the wealth of our diversity.

At this time of profound change, we must remain true to our shared humanist values, of tolerance and dialogue.

In this new age of constraint, culture is the ultimate renewable energy, whose power we must nurture for all to benefit — especially the young.

In a poem entitled *Memory*, you wrote:

*The stuff of hope beckons.*

*Out of the darkness*

*we step,*

*and blink into the new light.*

Culture is, indeed, the *“stuff of hope”* – and it is all of ours to share.

Mr. President, today, this morning, UNESCO is *your* House.

I am very pleased now to give you the floor.