

UNESCO ADVANCING PEACE

The central objective of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), created 65 years ago, is “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations” (Article I of the Constitutive Act of UNESCO). The same Constitution states that lasting peace must “be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind” in order to counterpart the fact that “war is made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect...”

We live in a world of particular urgency, exception and emergency. These emergencies are frequently political, economic, sometimes environmental and sometimes a mix of all. They can take the form of intra or inter-states conflicts which may turn into wars, transnational disease vectors, global terrorism, tsunamis, floods and droughts as well as the joint effect of all these forces in producing traumatic human population movements and relocations of women and men. Moving in and migrating seems to have become an ordinary nature of contemporary life, creating fluid cultural mappings worldwide and the need to reconcile cultural diversity and social cohesion within more and more diversified societies. This process is accelerated by the revolution of information and communication technologies being of particular attraction to youth, creating accelerated multiple shifts and rapid changes, thus offering unimagined possibilities of access and participation in global conversations.

In a time where existing social, political and cultural tensions persist, new dilemmas and challenges for humanity’s harmonious coexistence are emerging. Conflicts, violence, bigotry, intolerance, ignorance and exclusion persist, in old forms and new.

UNESCO and its Member States are striving to creatively adapt political frameworks in order to address these global challenges which are jeopardizing humankind’s cohesion. Thus, UNESCO is increasingly focusing on the close links between cultural diversity, dialogue, development, security and peace. These five interdependent notions underlie those of universality and unity, cosmopolitanism and global citizenship as well as the need for a new humanism and ethics. In this new cultural and political landscape where cultural diversity is present inside every society, UNESCO aspires to create safe spaces where people from different cultures can learn, understand and trust each other.

In this way, UNESCO serves as the tribune of the world’s consciousness where, in the noble words of UNESCO’s Constitution, “the defences of peace in the minds of men” and women can be built, through international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture and communication and information. These fields have become today the new influential territories where “soft power” is developed and demonstrated.

Tasking a multilateral organization like UNESCO with such a diverse remit was nothing but foresightful, as we realize today that the soft elements of power are equally important as military might, if not more, for the maintenance and sustenance of peace. People must have and be given the capability to express themselves, their identity and their culture – the local inspiration they draw from their local conditions – and to give flesh to their aspirations,

which, in our interconnected world, reaches out to the global. This is a key foundation of global and societal peace.

Over the years, UNESCO has advocated new orientations in humanity's interactions. In this regard, the terms of "tolerance" (1995), "culture of peace" (2000), "dialogue among civilizations" (2001), "intercultural and interreligious dialogue" (2007) and more recently "rapprochement of cultures" (2010) described new conceptual, political and programmatic approaches. The notion of "culture of peace" for which the "International Year for the Culture of Peace" (2000) and an "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), for both of which UNESCO had been designated as lead agency of the UN system, remains a uniquely mobilizing global concept as it encompasses the values and attitudes that form the cornerstone of peace: respect for diversity, tolerance, dialogue, human rights, gender equality, and democratic participation. Throughout the years, UNESCO mobilized a wide variety of actors, at all levels, in all regions. Bridges were built that await reinforcement in the years ahead.

UNESCO has been all these years at the forefront of demonstrating quietly, but effectively how peace can be built such as through formal and non-formal education, scientific capacities and cooperation in the natural as well as the social and human sciences, cultural heritage and cultural diversity, the promotion of intercultural dialogue and understanding as well as the empowerment of independent media and freedom of expression. UNESCO gives particular attention to contemporary social transformations and innovative ways of building peace, including women and youth's role in peace-building, in inclusive decision-making processes and in advancing democracy and fighting discrimination.

In this way, UNESCO has contributed to the emergence of a new paradigm for peace in the age of globalization. Combined with its commitment to Africa and gender equality as global priorities, UNESCO is setting an example how Member States can strive for a new humanism and usher in a more human, less violent, inclusive and sustainable development committed to the core values of human rights, solidarity and tolerance, thereby building and strengthening peace within and around societies. After 65 years of dedicated activities, UNESCO deserves the global recognition, encouragement and reinforcement of its work which the Nobel Peace Prize would bestow upon it.

Let us recall some of the more tangible accomplishments and initiatives:

- In 2010, the Director-General decided to establish a High Panel on Peace and Intercultural Dialogue to embark on a debate and reflection on the means of fostering mutual understanding, reconciliation and peace, accompanying and informing the Organization's work.
- Following the creation of the "culture of peace" programme in the 1990s, UNESCO has now revitalized its approach to building a safer world through a set of concrete actions, focusing on "everyday peace" opportunities, peace education at all educational levels;
- UNESCO has advocated for a much stronger focus on and support for education in conflict areas and emergencies – exceedingly well documented in the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (EFA-GMR).
- UNESCO's global leadership role for the pursuit of the six Education for All goals and the two education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) puts it in the forefront of building a better world for all.

- The launch of a global initiative for women and girls education in 2010 – underlines that there can be no development – and no peace – without full gender equality.
- A strong focus on education for sustainable development, including climate change education, seeks to impart the values of sustainable development into curricula and educational processes and change unsustainable behavioral patterns, especially of young people.
- The development of educational programmes to stop violence in schools. Using the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network as an outreach possibility, the organization has developed a model interactive educational programme for adaptation and implementation at local/community level involving schools (including students and teachers), parents, the media and professional bodies (such as police, municipalities) to stop violence.
- UNESCO has promoted the place of science in the process of dialogue as a universal language. It has, for instance, developed activities underlying the importance of the history of science in raising awareness on the role of science for the rapprochement of cultures and its significance in helping to understand the close interconnection of science with the growth of civilization and the flourishing of cultures. The history of science and scientific thought is an instrument of scientific humanism which is celebrated each year during the World Science Day for Peace and Development (10 November).
- The development of effective frameworks, infrastructure and knowledge networks for the sustainable management of water resources helps build a culture of water sustainability, expanding access to fresh water and sanitation for millions of people. UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP) is the only intergovernmental programme of the UN system devoted to water research, water resources management, education and capacity-building. UNESCO also leads the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), which produces every three years the World Water Report benchmarking developments across the world. These activities promote water as a source and tool of cooperation counteracting causes of conflict.
- The preservation and sustainable management of the oceans on which both the livelihood of many peoples rest and which influence climate; the quest for the blue oceans will, especially at the Rio+20 conference, be a main driver for the accomplishment of sustainable development across the globe.
- UNESCO has drawn attention to the critically important role of the natural sciences and the social and human sciences in two landmark reports, the World Science Report and the World Social Science Report, which are benchmarking the contribution of the two science sectors to policy dialogue, development and peace and the role of the various stakeholders.
- UNESCO is unique as an international organization in focusing on the ethical issues of development per se and in particular of science and technology, especially bioethics, which will be determining factors for the well-being and prosperity of people and societies as well as future innovation.
- UNESCO has engaged to raise awareness about violence and investment in youth civic engagement as a means of building participative societies, development of critical thinking, eradication of violence against women, strengthening of democratic culture and fundamental freedoms, and combating of all forms of discrimination and xenophobia. Special focus has been placed on students to encourage them to become involved in violence prevention campaigns.

- In the context of post-conflict support, UNESCO has identified “hubs of peace building”, putting emphasis on the role of women, both as actors and decision-makers and of youth, in collaboration with local and regional associations in building an “everyday peace”, deploying programmes to accompany peaceful integration processes at local and regional levels.
- The promotion and safeguarding of cultural diversity and its components tangible and intangible cultural heritage as bridges and vectors for mutual understanding and respect among peoples of different cultures and countries. – For example, UNESCO has promoted regional cooperation in the previously war-afflicted region of South East Europe through seven annual Summits of the Region's Heads of State, which have given rise to concrete measures for regional cooperation. They constitute an exemplary record of vision, political will and commitment to act, whether in the field of values education; enhancing scientific exchange; fostering respect for religious and cultural pluralism, or the overarching importance of communication for building a region free of ethnic, religious or cultural divisions. These summits – and the related annual meetings of the region's Ministers of Culture - testify to the power of culture and cultural heritage to bring together stakeholders. The rebuilding of the highly symbolic Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an eloquent illustration of this proposition, underlining how cultural heritage can serve as a symbol and tool of reconciliation.
- In promoting dialogue for reconciliation and intercultural understanding, UNESCO is committed to increase awareness and deepen knowledge about the causes and consequences of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in order to work towards a future free from racism, discrimination, and intolerance. UNESCO has also created a dedicated programme on holocaust education.
- UNESCO is at the forefront to strengthen capacities and institutions to highlight the crucial importance of the freedom of expression and the role of the media in peacebuilding. UNESCO promotes the use of the media for intercultural dialogue and media literacy programmes, training of journalists, including on conflict-sensitive reporting and election coverage, production of images, and the dissemination of a diversity of cultural content particularly for young people. It supports sharing of information on projects promoting dialogue and tolerance, reconciliation and peace, particularly among youth through the UNESCO Power of Peace Network.

All these activities attest to the daily work of UNESCO in the service of building peace.