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Organización  
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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 Plenary Session  
“Education for Intercultural Citizenship”  
AoC Third Global Forum**

**BRAZIL, 29 May 2010**

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you most warmly to UNESCO's plenary session on the topic of 'Education for Intercultural Citizenship'.

I am delighted that such eminent personalities are here to enrich our discussion. With us today are:

Senator Cristovam Ricardo Cavacanti Buarque. Building on your shining academic and political career, not least as a Minister of Education, I am sure you will provide us with key ideas on how to bring this agenda forward;

Mr Abdilaziz Othman Altweiji, Director-General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). Your professional experience, authoritative publications and longstanding engagement with the many issues linked to the rapport between cultures makes both you and your organization important partners of UNESCO;

His Royal Highness Raja Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince of Perak, Malaysia. Your Royal Highness has a distinguished academic and intellectual background in economic and political development, matched by active involvement in civil society organizations.

I also welcome Professor Lynn Davies. As someone who has undertaken major research and teaching on educational management, particularly concerning

democracy, human rights, citizenship and gender, in different parts of the world, you will also have important insight to share with us on this topic.

A warm welcome also to Dr J. Michael Adams, President of Fairleigh Dickinson University, and to Mr Diogo Vasconcelos, of Cisco International's Internet Business Solutions Group and Chairman of 'Dialogue Café', an initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations, Cisco, and the Anna Lindh and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundations.

Thank you all for being with us this morning.

Our discussions here today are particularly timely in this, the United Nations' International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, for which UNESCO is the lead agency.

The goals of this International Year and, beyond it, are to promote greater mutual understanding and a culture of peace, a topic in which UNESCO has been closely involved for many decades. These are also the truly ambitious goals of the Alliance of Civilizations.

In Paris last February, I had the pleasure of meeting the High Representative of the Alliance, President Jorge Sampaio. We both agreed on the need for a more focused and complementary collaboration between UNESCO and the Alliance of Civilizations. The terms and contents for this collaboration – for the next two years, and, I hope, beyond – have been set out in a Memorandum of Understanding, which Mr Sampaio and I co-signed earlier today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is most fitting that we are gathered here in Brazil, a country that places great store both in education, and in mutual understanding between cultures as a path to peace.

Two years ago, UNESCO awarded the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize to Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. In his acceptance speech, the President said the following:

“There cannot be real peace until the roots of conflict have been destroyed, so long as there is hunger, inequality, unemployment, but also so long as there is ethnic, religious cultural and ideological intolerance.”

Exploring the most effective way to transform intolerance into tolerance, in our ever more multi-cultural societies, is the question that brings us together today.

As a pioneer in the field of education for inter-cultural understanding, UNESCO convened, in the mid-1990s, an international commission on what education should look like in the twenty-first century. This commission heralded “Learning to live together” as one of the key challenges of the new century. In view of the events that have unfolded since then, history appears to be proving us right.

In a world marked by economic globalization and migration – both within and between countries – decision-makers are faced with the need to formulate policies that reflect, and respect, the cultural diversity of groups and individuals. At the same time, they must foster harmonious coexistence, notably by promoting shared values and a sense of unity. Yesterday, I spoke about UNESCO’s Guidelines on Intercultural Education, an important example of how we are trying to assist this process.

The world has become richer for the diversity of cultures that have entered into contact with one another. This diversity nevertheless presents complex challenges.

The world of our parents, and indeed the one in which we ourselves grew up, were very different places from the world in which our children are growing up. We must empower young people by ensuring that they have the tools and skills needed to make a success of being the first truly inter-cultural citizens of our planet.

In this new landscape, culture becomes central to political debates on citizenship, and the role of education becomes ever more important, for its capacity to empower individuals from all kinds of backgrounds, as well as for its ability to foster greater understanding of others.

Education is the crucial common denominator.

There are many questions raised by the issue of inter-cultural citizenship and education. Perhaps the most relevant for today's discussion is how to translate these concepts into practical actions. What are the requirements for inter-cultural citizenship and how can the education system deliver them? How do new media and social networking affect young people's sense of identity, and the way they perceive people of other cultures? How can we help teachers keep up with this changing environment – and how can we train them to effectively transmit the values that lead to greater mutual respect and understanding between cultures? How can we ensure that this education reaches those who are the most marginalized in society, including minority groups? This was one of the questions addressed by the most recent edition of the Global Monitoring Report, which was this year dedicated to reaching the marginalized..

We must be careful not to confine our discussions to the difficulties associated with inter-cultural citizenship. This would be to miss the point. I am convinced that, as our societies and our world evolves, future generations have before them an extraordinary opportunity to develop their minds and their creativity, and to broaden their social horizons in ways that we can barely imagine.

We urgently need to develop a shared understanding of inter-cultural citizenship, which might be defined as the ability and capacity of people to participate actively and responsibly in the life of their own community, the life of their country and of the whole world.

This can only happen if there is recognition and respect for cultures of all kinds.

There is clearly a significant amount of potential freedom – freedom of expression, of loyalty and attachment, and of creativity – built into the notion of inter-cultural citizenship.

It also has a wealth of implications for our rights as citizens, living in a world where national boundaries define who we are and where we belong.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With these remarks, I now leave the floor to our eminent panellists to share their thoughts with us. I am sure you have a lot to say on this compelling subject.

Thank you.