



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 launch of TeachHer Initiative: Empowering Girls to
Pursue STEAM Careers**

UNESCO, 14 June 2016

Dr Jill Biden, Second Lady of the United States,

Ms Mercedes Penas Domingo, First Lady of Costa Rica,

Ms Crystal Nix-Hines, United States Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to
UNESCO,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express deep condolences to the people and Government of the United
States for the tragic loss of life in Orlando as a result of a barbaric terrorist act.

This reminds us that we are living in a vulnerable world and that the mandate of
UNESCO has to be acknowledged as an important responsibility to educate for
human rights.

This reminds us of the need to stand together, more than ever, especially for human
rights and education.

We know the two go together... inextricably... especially for girls and young women.

The world has set a new course for the next 15 years, in the *2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development*.

This is an agenda for poverty eradication and sustainability – an agenda to let no one
behind - fundamentally, this is an agenda for human rights and dignity.

I want to see the face of the new agenda as a 12 year-old girl, in school, not forced into marriage or work.

This girl can be an engineer, an artist and must be front and center of every effort we make....her imagination... her wonder and creativity.

This is the significance of the *TeachHer Initiative*, to empower girls to pursue science, technology, engineering, arts and design and mathematics – STEAM.

This initiative goes to the heart of this vision of sustainability.

This public-private partnership relates to UNESCO's *Better Life, Better Future Initiative*, launched in 2011 by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, taken forward with United States private sector companies, Procter & Gamble, the Packard Foundation.

Drawing on the April decision of the UNESCO Executive Board, this will build on UNESCO's work in promoting science education, in rewarding outstanding women scientists, including with the L'Oréal Foundation, to eliminate all biases discouraging girls from STEAM careers.

TeachHer will start by training teachers, in Latin America – I am deeply grateful to Costa Rica as a host -- and in Ethiopia, the host country for Africa.

This will draw on all UNESCO expertise and networks, including the *UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa*, and UNESCO Field Offices in Ethiopia and in Costa Rica.

I see the face of the new global agenda as that of a girl named Zeynab.

Zeynab is 15-years-old and Ethiopian, and she dreams of being an engineer.

Supported by UNESCO, she just won the top award in a science competition, for inventing a solar mobile charger, an incubator and an instrument to spot rotten eggs.

We must support Zeynab – because Zeynab is the promise of a better world for everyone...

In this spirit, I want to thank once again the United States Government, the Permanent Delegation, especially Ambassador Nix-Hines, for this initiative.

I thank Dr Jill Biden for her lifelong commitment to teaching in an institution whose mandate is related to education and science – this is deeply inspiring. I know you came to the 2009 *World Conference on Higher Education* -- it is wonderful to welcome you back to encourage and inspire us, to celebrate UNESCO and our partnership with the United States, to celebrate girls.

I encourage all countries to join this partnership, to lead the next phase of this initiative.

Thank you.