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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 Special event on The Role of Parliaments for
Building Peaceful and Inclusive Societies and Combatting Violent
Extremism**

ECOSOC, New York, 21 July 2016

Thank you very much, M. Gianni Domenico Picco,

Ms Emilia Gatto, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations,

H.E. Ambassador Kiarat Abdrakhmanov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN,

Mr Jehangir Khan, USG and Chairman of the Counter-terrorism Implementation Task Force,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address this Meeting on the role of Parliamentarians in Countering Violent Extremism.

I commend the Permanent Mission of Italy and the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Global Ethics for this initiative.

Having been a Parliamentarian myself, I am deeply aware of the importance of Parliaments, as institutions elected by the people, to represent the people and serve the people.

Parliaments play a critical role to address the challenges of our times, when not everything can be solved at the level of Governments or United Nations Agencies.

We need solutions that are shaped by an informed democratic debate, and are decided upon by general elections.

Parliamentarians have the unique power to bring these solutions – as well as international organizations – closer to the people.

And this is the key to success.

We see crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of extreme ideologies.

We see minorities persecuted, journalists silenced, killed.

We see cultural heritage destroyed and looted.

We see cultural cleansing.

We see a rising humanitarian and refugee crisis.

Violent extremism is a red thread tying this picture together.

There is no single cause for its rise.

But one thing is clear: this battle cannot be won with hard power only.

We need soft power also, we need to win the battle of idea – through education, through democratic debate, through a better understanding of the history of each other's cultures and religions.

This is what Parliamentary debate is about, and this is also the spirit of the latest landmark resolution adopted by the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) in March 2016, on the protection of *“tangible and intangible cultural heritage of humanity”*.

We need new skills, new forms of “cultural literacy”, because in today's diverse societies, passive coexistence is not enough.

We need to build bridges of dialogue between cultures and faiths, and this is the goal of the UN International decade for the rapprochement of cultures (2013-2022), which was launched at the initiative of Kazakhstan, and led by UNESCO.

We have just released a roadmap to raise awareness and strengthen capacities of Member States and educational institutions, and coordinate action with existing initiatives, for instance UNESCO's network of cities against racism.

I see this as the new struggle for hearts and minds – especially young minds and hearts.

This starts on the benches of schools -- and this is my key message -- countering violent extremism starts with peace education, with textbooks and curricula that teach human rights.

This starts with critical thinking, with the teaching of history and religions, to help people respond to the propaganda of hatred.

UNESCO is mapping approaches to human rights education across the world, with a view to sharing best practices.

Framed by the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace, UNESCO is working to make learning more inclusive.

In January 2012, UNESCO joined the United States and Brazil in launching the global *Teaching Respect for All initiative*, to tackle the rise of intolerance and violence.

UNESCO contributes to the *Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force*, and this contribution is underlined in the *Global Counter Terrorism Strategy*.

This builds on UNESCO's longstanding work to develop guidelines for educators in human rights and intercultural dialogue:

- the 2006 *Guidelines on Intercultural Education*
- the 2011 *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims* with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- the 2016 *Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism*

UNESCO published *Why Teach about the Holocaust?* – to support educators in teaching the history of genocides and mass murders, because understanding the past can prevent discrimination today.

In Iraq, UNESCO is working with the Educate a Child Initiative and the Government, to reach 180,000 out-of-school children.

In Afghanistan, UNESCO has reached 600,000 people with literacy skills, 60 percent of whom are women.

In Jordan, with EU backing, UNESCO is supporting education quality and promoting skills for young Syrian refugees.

The role of parliament is critical to strengthen these efforts, to increase budgets, to adopt policies, to strengthen the “world team for peace”.

And I am convinced we can strengthen this team and the number of voices speaking for peace, if we bring back to education the 57 million children out of school today.

It is this spirit that we must distribute, invigorate, and it starts on the parliamentarians’ benches as much as on the benches of schools.

Thank you.