



AUSTRALIAN INTERVENTION

at the
38th session of the General Conference
of UNESCO

**H.E. Mr George Mina
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
of Australia to UNESCO**

Friday, 6 November 2015

Mr President

Director-General

Distinguished Delegates

May I, Mr President, congratulate you on your election to this important post and wish you well for the challenges that lie ahead. You take up this important role in UNESCO's seventieth year.

At its inception, the founders of the UN Charter recognised there was a need for a body such as UNESCO to reinforce the United Nation's broader objectives: international peace and security could not be achieved through political and economic might alone. Australia is proud to have been one of UNESCO's founding members.

Today, we are just as committed to UNESCO – and the UN system more broadly – as we were when it was established. Our Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull, reiterated this commitment only a few weeks ago at our own 70th anniversary celebrations, when 35 iconic sites across Australia were lit blue. Two of these were UNESCO World Heritage sites: the Sydney Opera House and Uluru. He spoke about the vitally important

role the UN continues to play in maintaining international peace and security; protecting the world's most vulnerable people; and bringing together nations to address global challenges. He noted that the United Nations is alone in having the legitimacy and convening power to bring together 193 Member States to cooperate on issues that affect us all.

We all know that the UN and UNESCO's anniversary celebrations come at a time when countries must, more than ever, work together to address global challenges. We face multiple seemingly intractable conflicts, new manifestations of terrorism and the struggle to win over minds to the cause of radicalisation, particularly among our youth.

Indeed since we last gathered here in Paris, only two years ago, we have seen how these conflicts are impacting not only on the lives and livelihoods of millions of innocent people, but destroying precious antiquities and our cultural heritage. This deliberate destruction is an abhorrent crime and an assault on the very essence of humankind. It represents nothing less than an attempted assault on civilisation itself.

We have witnessed an alarming rise in violent extremism, with terrorist activity no longer just the remit of large, identifiable organisations, but promulgated amongst an increasing number of rogue, disaffected individuals, with crude but effective tools to inflict significant damage on innocent lives.

For these reasons, we welcome UNESCO's engagement in resolutions to support the protection of our common cultural heritage. We congratulate the Director General on her particular efforts to condemn destruction of cultural heritage. We also support the High Level Side Event on Preventing Violent Extremism through Education, recognising as we do the importance of grassroots, community engagement to prevent the radicalisation of youth at risk. We support the Director General's focus on engaging youth in this effort.

World Heritage is also under threat from competing pressures associated with development and human-induced climate change. In Australia, we have faced our own challenges in relation to the Great Barrier Reef.

A year ago, the Reef was facing the possibility of being inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The World Heritage

Committee had sent a very strong message to those responsible for management of the Reef. A year later, the Committee was pleased to see that its message had been acknowledged and acted on in a powerful and well-resourced set of policies and actions. Our experience has reinforced the role of the World Heritage regime as a powerful global tool in accompanying national efforts to preserve our common heritage.

With the move to a knowledge intense society, human capital and the power of education are ever more critical. It is time now to unite in support of the Sustainable Development Goal on education. Articulating and agreeing this goal was a major achievement. We have just two days ago adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action. It is now time to contribute practically on the ground.

We need to shape education norms in this era of globalisation. Never before have there been so many students studying outside their own countries – developing skills and qualifications that can and should be transferable. Australia supports a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications to support the growing global mobility of our best minds.

UNESCO is celebrating its 70th anniversary and we would like to congratulate the Organization for achieving this remarkable milestone.

Australia is proud to have associated itself through the seventy year journey as a founding member, as an active contributor through the years and as a strong supporter today of its mission, values and contribution to our common future.