

Translation

**Address by**  
**Prof. Maria Böhmer,**  
**Member of the German Bundestag**  
**and**  
**Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office,**  
**on the occasion of the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference**  
**on 5 November 2015**  
**in Paris**

**Mr President,**

[Hon Mr Stanley Mutumba Simataa]

**Director-General,**

[Irina Bokova]

**Ministers,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

On 16 November 2015 it will be 70 years since the UNESCO Constitution was signed. At that time UNESCO was still a manageable community, along the lines of a small house with 37 residents. Now the UNESCO family has 195 members who gather under one roof. The family has expanded, and will continue to grow. The house has been extended. UNESCO's responsibilities have also increased.

This development says a great deal about UNESCO's appeal. The organisation has evolved into a place which brings together almost the entire family of states to help promote peaceful co-existence through culture, education and science.

The past 70 years have seen remarkable achievements, ranging from the restoration of schools, libraries and museums in the wake of the Second World War, through literacy campaigns and the protection of biological diversity – for instance through the Man and the Biosphere Programme – to the protection of cultural diversity, embodied in the exceptionally successful Convention for the Protection of the World Heritage Convention.

The 39<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn sent a clear message. The unanimous inscription of the controversial Japanese nomination of the Meiji sites not only marked a success for diplomacy. Above all it was a success for the basic idea of the World Heritage Convention to find joint solutions even to contentious issues. This demonstrates the power UNESCO has.

The unanimously adopted Bonn Declaration on World Heritage condemns the destruction of cultural heritage in no uncertain terms: as a war crime that needs to be subject to criminal prosecution. Anyone who robs people of their cultural identity and history also robs them of their future.

We must always ensure that people have a future. We want to continue to help make sure that this is the case. The German Bundestag has proposed that more funding for the Cultural Preservation Programme of the Federal Foreign Office be made available in order to be able to provide more emergency aid, to enable us to be even quicker to provide assistance when cultural property is under threat from terrorist acts or when it is destroyed by natural disasters, as recently occurred in Nepal.

However, the Bonn Declaration also reveals the vast dimension of the challenges currently facing us:

- 60 million displaced people worldwide;
- destroyed monuments, plundered cultural heritage sites;
- 60 million boys and girls without access to basic education;
- and in some regions fewer than 60 percent of girls attending school.

If half of the population is excluded from basic human rights – and that includes access to education – no society will achieve long-term peace.

One month ago the international community succeeded in setting a milestone with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNESCO plays a central role in achieving these ambitious post-millennium goals when it comes to:

- facilitating high-quality education,
- safeguarding biological and cultural diversity,
- achieving inclusion and gender equality.

This is UNESCO's core area of activity. This is what UNESCO needs to concentrate on.

We need a UNESCO with the ability to act. But it will only be able to act if the member states are willing to cooperate and provide the necessary financial support.

We have to continue our reform efforts. UNESCO can cite many positive achievements in this area, whether they be the reforms within the World Heritage Committee or the reform of UNESCO's financing instruments, even though we undoubtedly still have plenty of work to do.

Germany is prepared to continue its active engagement in future.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us build the UNESCO house of the future together. Let us make this house stormproof so that it can continue to offer protection and peace for humanity for the next 70 years.

Thank you very much!