

H.E. Carmel Shama Hacoheh
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Israel to UNESCO
Intervention in Plenary of the 38th UNESCO General Conference
4 November 2015

Mr. President, Madam Director-General, Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since 1949, just one year after the establishment of the State of Israel, we became a full member of UNESCO. The proximity in time was made not only for practical or political purposes, it was more than that.

Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 is based on the same values UNESCO aims to promote.

And I am quoting: **“it will be based on freedom, justice and peace...it will ensure complete equality and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex, it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture, it will safeguard the holy places of all religions....”**

These words, Mr. President, are quoted from the Declaration of Independence of Israel. They are as relevant today as they were 67 years ago, and they reflect the fact that in Israel and here in UNESCO, we share for more than six decades the same dream of a better world.

Israel is a strong believer in education, since our major resource is the human being.

We are not rich in oil, nor in nature's gifts that are spread around and crisscross our region. Our source of strength is our people, our children and their education.

In the last two years, Israel continues to work with UNESCO on many areas such as education with a high emphasis on promoting teachers in Africa, information and technology, where Israel has a leading role in IFAP, science, culture and many more aspects.

Israel is also working together with UNESCO on Holocaust education, and values enormously UNESCO's work on that subject.

The global challenges we are facing today are making UNESCO more relevant than ever.

Education, climate change, radicalization, racism, anti-Semitism, to name a few, are all interconnected in our global village, To address those challenges we need cooperation. We need to work together. We need a strong UNESCO, not an Organization that is weakened by political disputes.

Sadly, Israel witnessed in the last four years a dangerous trend of politicization of UNESCO's bodies, especially the governing bodies, which continue to single out Israel with anti-Israeli and anti-reality proposals and resolutions.

We all share the responsibility to our national interest but at the same time, by joining this Organization, we share the responsibility to make UNESCO strong and efficient. When you become a Member State in this Organization, you are expected to behave like one. You are expected to be responsible and follow the spirit and values of the Organization and not to take advantage of your membership to advance only your narrow interests and especially not by using offensive language and incitement instead of truthful respect and tolerance.

UNESCO values are about coexistence. Even if we don't agree, it is not about bullying or humiliating another Member State.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 20 years ago, exactly on 4 November 1995, Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was assassinated by a Jewish extremist. Rabin was a messenger of peace. Even though he was killed, his dream for peace is still valid in the hearts of all Israelis.

We pray for peace to preserve both our own and our neighbors' lives, and we work for a better world to improve the quality of life for everyone.

UNESCO is the best tool to ensure that the life we all cherish will be worth living, that our history will be worthy remembering and that our future will be worth creating.

Let us use UNESCO as a bridge over gaps instead of using it to dig new ones or to widen the existing ones.

I thank you.