

Check against delivery

UK General Conference Speech

Excellencies, Mr President of the Executive Board,  
Fellow Ambassadors, Dear Colleagues,

Congratulations Mr President on your election to the important post and thank you for the leadership you have already shown UNESCO, but more importantly thank you for the work which I know you will do over the next two years.

Happy Birthday UNESCO. At 70 years old, many are ready to retire, but just lately, I see you UNESCO, have a new sense of purpose, hopefully now a new lease of life. I see that for the first time since the financial crisis began, a new programme will formally come into existence at this General Conference, the new Geoparks programme. The U.K. was proud to support the development of this programme, and if adopted, we look forwards to welcoming the first ever UNESCO global Geoparks conference in the UK next year.

We are also looking forwards to UNESCO's role in the SDGs. In getting here we saw again what it meant to have UNESCO intellectual leadership, please keep it up.

We know too that UNESCO will be needed and will respond to new challenges, never envisaged 70 years ago.

Art, artefacts and monuments are how civilisations tell their stories. We celebrate and recognise this in many UNESCO programmes such as World Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Memory of the World. And whilst those programmes bring obligations along with the right to recognition, they are designed for a world with an international system of states, and rules, borders and justice.

But today's challenges often come from people who recognize no rules, norms, borders, authorities or justice. Their simple purpose is destruction and the prevention of social cohesion and reconciliation.

This is why the UK government last week hosted a cultural protection summit. We are working to establish a Cultural Protection Fund, and the government has also committed to ratify The Hague Convention. As a first step we launched a £3m Iraqi Emergency Heritage Management Project to be implemented by the British Museum. We will continue work on developing our fund and will work with others including UNESCO as we do.

Of course preventing violent extremism is a key challenge for us all today, and it encompasses many different strands of our work. Education also has a key role for we know hatred is taught not born.

But terrorists and extremism isn't our only challenge. Just this week the launch of the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and media development,

highlighted the vital role a free media plays in a functioning democracy, and just how often that was under threat. Our CI sector plays a vital role in embedding the values which underpin a constitutional commitment to the free flow of ideas.

Mr President, we could all speak for hours about the importance of UNESCO programmes, highlighting each different one, and its need. But I also want to talk about the challenge of how UNESCO adapts to the future and how it positions itself to deliver a clear and critical role within the wider UN system to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDGs have several characteristics which are vital to understand in order to implement the best programme. Leave no one behind is key. This means that we will need to know where the marginalised, the excluded and the left behind are, how to reach them, how to give them the opportunities we all need. And this requires a data revolution, and adaptive policies. And when I talk about leaving no one behind, it will be particularly important that we make SIDS a priority, in actions, policies and resources.

And whilst the MDGs were largely vertical and somewhat 'siloed', this new agenda has the potential to be much more integrated and horizontal. How will we make integrated solutions the norm rather than the exception?

Where the MDGs reflected and drove a largely North-South agenda, the post-2015 development agenda is universal. In their work to make the UN system Fit for Purpose, the leadership of the United Nations have highlighted several key challenges. A key one for UNESCO is to become more transparent and accountable. This includes specifically accountability to beneficiaries. In this area we still have much to do. We did not undertake the required beneficiary feedback survey to inform the development of the current C5. We do not evaluate routinely conferences or meetings. UNESCO staff are not able to benefit from client feedback as part of their appraisal. This is a pity because we have many staff who are highly appreciated by those they work with and this should be recognized. We must get better at this.

Mr President, this biennium also brought challenges from within the institution. Over \$5m was spent on a staff separation scheme which could otherwise have been spent on our financially squeezed programmes. Elsewhere we need to see consistent, coherent, transparent responses to the recommendations of the numerous Audits. This needs to see us properly adhering to our rules on tendering and contracting, paying more attention to the field offices, improving HR management and most importantly of all improving transparency and tackling conflicts of interest. UNESCO's reputation for accountability and

transparency will rely on getting these things right in future.

Mr President, I cannot close without putting on record formal thanks to someone who has been the heart and soul of the U.K. Delegation for more years than I am allowed to mention, someone who embodies institutional memory, dedication and service to their country. I am talking of course about Hilary Izon in the UK delegation. This is her 20th and final General Conference, coming after her 100th Executive Board. Hilary, thank you for everything you have done for your country, for your delegation. And for me. I salute service and would have been lost without you. I wish you every happiness in your coming retirement.

