

Deputy Secretary Antony Blinken
United States National Statement
Friday, November 6, 2015
Paris, France

Mister President of the General Conference, Madam Director-General, distinguished delegates, it is an honor to represent the United States at the 38th session of the General Conference during UNESCO's 70th anniversary.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to affirm our candidacy for reelection to UNESCO's Executive Board and to reiterate our nation's belief in the undeniably important role that UNESCO plays in upholding our collective peace and security.

Seventy years ago, out of the rubble of war and the pain of unfathomable national loss, our predecessors made one of the wisest decisions in human history.

With the gift of foresight and the courage of hope, they resisted the impulse to concentrate power in the hands of the victors and, instead, built an international system of institutions, norms, and rules dedicated to the peace, stability, and prosperity of every nation.

They stood up a force of blue helmets to protect civilians. They created organizations to safeguard public health, defend human rights, and respond to humanitarian crises. And they founded UNESCO to preserve the common spirit of our humanity while cherishing its diversity of traditions, cultures, and faiths.

Taken together, these institutions have given life to a global order that provides still to this day the best and sometimes only means to prevent conflict, energize progress, and allow countries to resolve their differences diplomatically and peacefully.

As an integral pillar of this order, UNESCO stands on the frontlines of our toughest challenges equipped with some of the most powerful weapons in our arsenal: the lasting impact of a quality education, the skepticism of a free press, the expertise of our cultural preservationists, and the latest tools to sustainably manage our precious resources.

Across all of these critical issues, the United States is a deeply engaged leader and partner with UNESCO. We were very pleased to join many of you earlier this afternoon to elevate the role of education in preventing and countering violent extremism—a role that received ringing endorsement by more than 85 co-sponsors during the session of the Executive Board.

I was also proud to highlight a new UNESCO and U.S.-led education initiative to equip students with the skills to embrace inclusion and resist violent extremism, and I encourage all UNESCO member states to join us in this effort.

Wherever our values are under greatest threat, we see UNESCO's work making a difference—from preserving cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq to protecting the safety of journalists and the free flow of information to fighting for a quality education for all children.

We are honored to be a partner in these initiatives. At the 197th Executive Board last month, we were proud co-sponsors of several important resolutions, including...

...highlighting UNESCO's work to combat climate change in advance of the Paris Climate Conference...

...advancing freedom of expression, supporting equal access to education, and protecting cultural heritage in Ukraine...

...and recommending the admission of Kosovo as a member of the Organization.

The Constitution of UNESCO is clear on this issue: there is an undeniable path for Kosovo membership in the Organization, a path which is not diverted or blocked by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. What's more, 111 UNESCO member states have recognized Kosovo as a state, and Kosovo already enjoys membership in several UN specialized agencies, including the World Bank and IMF. Our co-sponsorship of the resolution conveys our strong belief that Kosovo should be welcomed by this General Conference as a full member.

A founding member of UNESCO, we remain committed to its ideals and aspirations. As a candidate for the Executive Board, the United States renews that promise, reiterates our determination to restore full funding for the organization, and pledges our continued, determined leadership.

This is not just the policy of our nation. It is also a personal commitment—one that was passed down to me by my stepfather Samuel Pizar, who was a UNESCO Honorary Ambassador and Special Envoy for Holocaust Education.

This morning, in fact, I had the opportunity to retrace my steps as a young boy when I returned to my alma mater, Ecole Jeannine Manuel, a UNESCO associated school.

As I walked into my old classrooms, I reflected on the education I had been so blessed to receive. Alongside lessons in math and science, literature and language, my classmates and I were taught, in the words of our founder Jeannine Manuel, “de penser comme l’autre” —to see through the eyes of another.

In doing so, we learned to respect our differences while recognizing all that we have in common—including our gifts of reason and wisdom, our expressions of art and culture, our universal values of civility, freedom, and dignity.

The goals we have set for ourselves—from fighting climate change to achieving universal access to education to fighting violent extremism—are only possible if we work together to utilize these shared gifts, so that our collective efforts to make the world a little bit healthier, a little bit wealthier, a little bit wiser are empowered by the talents of our citizens. This is the *raison d'être* not only of UNESCO—but of all those who have high hopes and big dreams for the future.

On behalf of Secretary Kerry, it is my honor and privilege to reaffirm our position as a proud candidate for the Executive Board. I also extend my sincere appreciation to this institution, its leadership, and its mission of peace.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.