



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the ceremony to designate Mr Ali Mahdi Nouri as a  
UNESCO Artist for Peace**

**UNESCO, 30 October 2012**

· Excellency Mr. Khalid Mohamed Farah, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of  
Sudan to UNESCO,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to UNESCO on this occasion to designate Mr.  
Ali Mahdi Nouri as a *UNESCO Artist for Peace*.

I know there are quite a few guests today from Sudan, including from your family,  
and I thank you all for coming.

This is a ceremony to strengthen the UNESCO family and to deepen our work for  
solidarity.

I believe one of greatest challenges we face today is to work against forces that  
divide and to strengthen the values we hold in common.

No society can afford to retreat into fear. We cannot allow cultures of exclusion to  
arise, especially in situations of tension or conflict.

Our constant goal must to be to build cultures of dialogue, cultures of inclusion,  
cultures of mutual understanding.

This is the importance of art, and especially theatre.

Art is a way to see the world -- it is also a way to *be* the world.

By expressing reality, art refashions it and creates it anew, opening new spaces for understanding and dialogue.

Victor Hugo once wrote that “*it is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live.*”

Art is the bridge between the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal,’ the link between ‘existence’ and ‘living.’

For these reasons, art is a most powerful force for peace and renewal.

It is what remains when everything else has been lost, the foundations for reconciliation and rebuilding.

Art lies at the heart of UNESCO’s mission, and this is why I am so pleased to designate Mr. Ali Mahdi Nouri as a *UNESCO Artist for Peace*.

Mr. Nouri has dedicated his life to directing art, theatre and music for dialogue and peace.

This is the mission of the Bugaa Theatre Group that Mr. Nouri founded in Khartoum, Sudan, in 2000.

Twelve years on, the Bugaa Theatre has gained global recognition for its work to advance theatre for development and peacebuilding.

This has been taken forward through the *Theatre in Conflict Zones* project, based in Khartoum and then developed in Darfur and Hajr Sultan.

The Bugaa Theatre has brought art to young audiences in some of the most difficult situations. It has reached out and included them, providing them with new ways of thinking and acting.

This is an inspiring example of the transformational power of the arts, to heal wounds and create new spaces for dialogue that are essential for reconciliation and renewal.

Mr. Nouri, you have staged plays performed by child soldiers and war orphans.

You have helped them express themselves and share, despite all differences.

You once said,

*“This is the real meaning of using art to build peace and to develop our community.”*

Your work encourages boys and girls to transcend war and divisions. It empowers them to break the logic of conflict and to lay the ground for a better future.

I believe this is the ultimate expression of art for peace.

You carried the same passion when you were a member of the Sudanese Delegation in 1990 when the Sudanese Government signed the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* at the United Nations Headquarters, and also to your work for *SOS Children’s Village Sudan*.

This is not the first time that UNESCO recognizes your commitment.

In 2010, upon the recommendation of the International Jury, I was honoured to award you the *UNESCO-Sharjah Price for Arab Culture*.

This highlighted your commitment to using the Arabic language and culture, especially songs and tales, as points of resilience, from which young actors can craft new ways to express themselves and connect with others

Mr. Ali Mahdi Nouri,

As a *UNESCO Artist for Peace*, you will take forward our common aim to make the most of art for cultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

When we met, you told me a story about an old woman, who started to dance as part one of your performances and who was so touched by this that she gave you the gift of a family stone.

I see this as the power of art. For UNESCO, culture is for everyone, and this is the message you carry tirelessly in all your travels and work. This is a formidable example of how people turn to art in the most difficult of circumstances for strength, to find themselves and to connect with others.

These are foundations for healthy societies and lasting peace, and this work must start with children, especially those living in difficult situations, in conflict zones or following their end.

Art is an essential platform for their education and the renewal of their communities.

On this basis, I am deeply honoured to welcome you today to the UNESCO family as a *UNESCO Artist for Peace*.

Thank you.