



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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 opening of the exhibition “People, Book, Land”

United States Congress, Washington D.C., 18 November 2015

The Honourable Ed Royce, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee,

The Honourable Eliot Engel, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee,

Rabbi Marvin Hier, Founder and Dean of the *Simon Wiesenthal Centre*,

Honourable Members of Congress,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just come from Paris.

I have come from a city that suffered a devastating terrorist attack.

129 killed in cold blood.

Over 350 wounded.

The city is stunned.

The country is in a state of emergency.

The world is shocked.

This criminal, barbaric act of violence affects us all.

It attacks that which we hold most dear.

Freedom.

Human rights and dignity.

Our sense of belonging to a single humanity.

Violent extremism is a global challenge, and we must respond at every level.

This year, in Syria and Iraq, we have seen women and men, entire communities, killed, enslaved, and persecuted on the basis of religious and ethnicity.

We have seen humanity's cultural heritage attacked, looted, to finance terrorism.

These are all faces of the same threat.

Fuelled by hatred, intolerance, false interpretations of faith, violent extremism seeks to kill, to divide societies, to tear humanity from the history it shares, to destroy the culture that brings us together.

We can never accept this.

We must stand together, with France, with all women and men.

This violence reminds us of the vulnerability of all societies today.

It reminds us also of the steel of our resilience.

I see this as the spirit of this Exhibition on *People, Book, Land: The 3,500 year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land*, organised with UNESCO and the *Simon Wiesenthal Centre*.

We launched this together, at UNESCO, in June 2014.

The Exhibition was opened at the United Nations Headquarters last March.

The Exhibition will open next week at the Knesset, in Israel, with Speaker Yuli-Yoel Edelstein.

The Exhibition will be taken to the Vatican in December.

It is a special honour to open the Exhibition today at the United States Congress.

I thank Congressman Ed Royce and Rabbi Marvin Hier for this initiative.

For UNESCO, understanding history, respecting culture and heritage is the starting point for peace.

This is why this Exhibition is so important.

This is an invitation to explore the profound, unassailable connection between the Jewish people and the Holy Land, the land of the three monotheistic religions.

This relationship spans 3,500 years, and it has shaped the history of all humanity.

It reminds us that Jewish culture has given to the world some of its most universal figures.

It shows the pioneering role of Jewish culture in contributing to the advancement of all humanity, through exchange and mutual enrichment with peoples of all faiths.

We need to know this history.

The world needs to know this history.

Because knowing this history is important for peace today.

Because knowing this history is important to counter hatred and anti-Semitism.

This history cannot be denied.

This is the core mandate of UNESCO.

To promote respect and mutual understanding, to fight all forms of racism, anti-Semitism and denial.

This has never been so important.

This is how we must respond to violent extremism, to hatred and intolerance.

UNESCO was born in London seventy years ago, and we are based in Paris.

But the Organisation bears the imprint of this country.

UNESCO is shaped by the history and values of the United States.

The American diplomat, Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish penned the lines that open our Constitution:

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.

The United States inspired the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

The attacks in Paris remind me of the words of the late Russell Train, former Head of the *Environmental Protection Agency*, founder of the *World Wildlife Fund*:

As the fabric of human society is under attack by forces that deny the existence of a shared heritage, that strike at the heart of our sense of community, I am convinced that World Heritage holds out a positive vision of human society and human future.

It is not just World Heritage.

UNESCO holds out the same “*positive vision of human society*” in the fight against violent extremism – I was honoured by the invitation from President Obama to speak at the *Leaders’ Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism* last September in New York.

This is why I am convinced UNESCO has never mattered so much for the United States – or the United States for UNESCO.

I believe UNESCO's work to advance education to fight violent extremism is shared by the American people.

I believe our action to counter racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism is shared by the American people.

I believe our action to empower girls and women is shared by the American people.

I believe our action to defend freedom of expression is shared by the American people.

I believe our action for scientific cooperation, ocean sustainability, is shared by the American people.

Despite the withholding of funding, since 2011, we have led new initiatives and deepened our partnership.

This is embodied in our work to prevent and counter violent extremism, to prevent youth radicalisation on the internet...

...in our efforts for Holocaust education and genocide prevention, with the University of Pennsylvania, George Washington, the University of Southern California...

...in our standing together for freedom of expression, during *World Press Freedom Day* here in Washington in 2011...

...in our cooperation with major private sector companies, from Procter & Gamble, Microsoft, Intel to Cisco...

...in our promotion of *International Jazz Day*, with our Goodwill Ambassador, Herbie Hancock, to celebrate human rights and cultural diversity.

I thank the Government of the United States for its leadership.

This has never been more important, to build a 21st century that is more peaceful.

At UNESCO Headquarters, there is a *Square of Tolerance*, created by the Israeli artist, Dani Karavan, inaugurated in 1996 by Shimon Peres and Leah Rabin.

This was where I held the commemoration ceremony on 4 November, in homage to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Yitzhak Rabin once said:

A diplomatic peace is not yet the real peace. It is an essential step in the peace process leading towards a real peace.

This echoes with the mission of UNESCO.

The idea that real peace must be built in the minds of every woman and every man.

This is what UNESCO stands for.

This is what we fight for.

To build real, lasting peace, we need to understand and respect the shared history, culture and heritage of all humanity.

Thank you.