



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

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of opening of the exhibition “People, Book, Land, *the 3,500 year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land*”

Delivered by Mr Francesco Bandarin, Assistant Director-General for Culture

Knesset, 29 November 2015

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honoured to read the following statement on behalf of Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General:

The Right Honourable Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Speaker of the Knesset,

Honourable Members of the Knesset,

This exhibition has a special importance in these turbulent times.

These are times when violent extremism, fuelled by hatred and sectarianism, kills individuals and destroys heritage of all cultures.

These are times, when 70 years after the Second World War, antisemitism is on the rise, fuelled by prejudice and ignorance.

Against ignorance and hatred, against racism and anti-Semitism, we must also respond with stronger knowledge and education.

Understanding history is the starting point for peace.

This is 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*.

This Exhibition is an invitation to explore the profound, unassailable connection between the Jewish people and the Holy Land.

It is an answer to all those who seek to distort history, to deny facts in order to fuel hatred and prejudice.

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

The Exhibition was opened at the United Nations Headquarters last March and at the United States Congress last week.

It will be taken next to the Vatican, in Rome.

It is a special honour to open the Exhibition today at the Knesset, in the city of Jerusalem which is a point of historical, cultural and spiritual convergence for billions of people, embodying a heritage held in common that we must protect together.

This spirit underpins UNESCO's action to protect the heritage of all cultures, including Jewish culture – from the millennial sites of Masada and Beer sheba, to the modern architecture of Tel Aviv – all inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

This spirit inspires our cooperation with Israël, from the UNESCO/MASHAV fellowships to our cooperation with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel Centre and the Weizmann Institute of Science – with youth NGOs like YaLa, and Israeli artists like Dani Karavan, Ruti Sela and Mayaan Amir, who received a UNESCO Peace Award, and scientists like Ada Yonath, UNESCO/L'Oréal Laureate for Women in Science and Nobel Prize Winner.

This same spirit guides UNESCO's action for Holocaust education – this programme is unique in the UN System – and in cooperation with many partners, such as Yad Vashem here in Jerusalem.

This helps us to combat and denounce anti-Semitism today, in whatever guise it may take.

It is UNESCO's duty is to offer another path than that of divided memories, to calm spirits and to shine light on the dialogue of cultures, showing how Muslims, Jews and Christians have long lived together in Jerusalem and elsewhere – to work against the escalation of incitements.

This is why, as the Director General of UNESCO, I appealed and worked with the Executive Board to reach consensus and to refrain from any decision that would further inflame tensions, and I am grateful to the Speaker of the Knesset, and to the President of the World Jewish Congress, for their support.

As we commemorate the 20 anniversary of the killing of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, I organized with the Permanent Delegation of Israel to UNESCO a special ceremony, at UNESCO Headquarters, to pay tribute to his message:

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

We must join forces to fight ignorance, through stronger knowledge of culture and history.

This is how we can build real peace in the minds of men and women.

This is the mission of UNESCO, founded 70 years ago.

And this is why this exhibition is so important.