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Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
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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,

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**on the occasion of the World Congress of the Junior Chamber
International (JCI) and meeting with JCI's President in Québec**

Quebec city, Canada, 30 October 2016

Mr Paschal Dike, President of the *Junior Chamber International*,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this invitation.

I am honoured to speak before so many young women and men, from across the world, joining hands for peace.

The *Junior Chamber International* is an official partner of UNESCO, and we signed a new agreement in 2014, to redouble efforts to support the civic engagement of young people, to bolster the foundations for sustainable development and lasting peace.

This has never been so important.

Just this morning, I opened the International Conference on *Internet and the Radicalization of Youth: Preventing, Acting and Living Together*.

This was organised by UNESCO and the Government of Quebec, with the support of the Government of Canada, bringing together young women and men from all countries.

Engaging young people for peace is essential today.

The world is crossing turbulent times.

Globalization and deepening exchanges are opening new opportunities for cooperation and dialogue -- with young women and men leading the way...

At the same time, the world is increasingly fragmented.

We see climate change affecting all countries.

We see enduring poverty and deepening inequalities.

We see conflicts tearing at the fabric of societies, causing humanitarian tragedies.

We have seen devastating terrorist attacks across the world.

Violent extremism is challenging societies everywhere.

Humanity's cultural heritage and diversity are attacked.

Minorities are threatened.

And the world is facing the most important refugee and displacement crisis of our time.

Now, more than ever, freedom is under threat.

... freedom of speech.

... freedom of movement.

... freedom of choice.

In this context, how can we promote inclusion, dialogue and peace? How can we strengthen the foundations for sustainable development and empower all young people?

UNESCO has been working with States since 1945 to answer these questions.

Our Constitution opens with words I never tire in repeating:

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

Today, in a new century, I would add just one line to this statement:

...the defences of peace must be built in the minds of young women and men....

The world has never been young, and it is getting younger every day.

All of you here are the largest generation of young people humanity has ever seen.

You are the most educated, the most connected, the most travelled, the most outspoken young generation the world has known.

You are leading positive change everywhere – but you are also shouldering the burden of transformation.

Today, 1.5 billion people live in fragile or conflict affected countries ... 40 percent of them are young people.

... 28 million young girls and boys are out of school.

... 73 million young people are unemployed.

These figures are sobering, but they must not discourage us, because they are *not* the future – you are the future...

I say ‘you,’ and I mean each of you, individually.

Because you are all different.

You come from different backgrounds, you have had different opportunities.

And you are all here today, members of *Junior Chamber International*, committed to working together to change the world.

This is my key message today.

The future is here in this room.

The future lies in our common resolve to act together, to build stronger foundations for peace.

In August last year, I was honoured to participate in the first *Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security*, in Amman, initiated by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II.

A few months earlier, in April, His Royal Highness had spoken before the United Nations Security Council and said:

“We are in a race to invest in the hearts and minds as well as the capabilities of the youth.”

I agree -- this is a race for the hearts and minds of young women and men, in poor neighbourhoods, in rural areas.

A race for the hearts and minds of young women, forced into marriages, out of school.

A race for the hearts and minds of young men, lured by extremism.

This is a race to reach and teach and include every young woman and man.

Humanity cannot look to a peaceful future when millions of young people are denied their rights.

Sustainable development is unthinkable while young people face exclusion and inequality.

These ideas stand at the heart of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Agreement*.

I believe these should be seen as a single, universal, transformative agenda, for people, prosperity, peace, and the planet.

These agreements were struck between Governments – but to have lasting impact, they must be embedded in societies... they must be owned by women and men... young women and men...

I am aware of the 2015 *Kanazawa Declaration of the Junior Chamber International*, to place the new Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of your work.

I commend these efforts -- including the *Peace is Possible* campaign launched on *International Day of Peace*.

The same goals guide all UNESCO's work, to empower young women and men in decisions that affect their future, to open opportunities for them to lead.

This means nurturing young people, as peacebuilders, as activists, as entrepreneurs, as change-makers.

I see this as the spirit of the 2015 *United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2250*, to engage young people in building peace.

This must start on the benches of schools, through global citizenship education, through education for sustainable development, education for peace.

Every young woman and man must have skills to shape their lives as they dream.

This calls for a new focus on technical and vocational education and training, and stronger policies for comprehensive sexuality education.

This calls for new approaches to lifelong learning, to provide literacy – including cultural literacy, including media literacy – to all young people... especially young women, who face the steepest obstacles of discrimination and marginalisation.

This calls for harnessing the full power of education to prevent violent extremism, to teach mutual understanding and respect across all borders, to advance Holocaust education and genocide education, to promote education for human rights.

We need new forms of solidarity with each other.

We need new relations of harmony with the planet.

We need new ways of seeing, being and acting.

These objectives guide UNESCO's action to lead forward Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, underpinning our work across all the new Goals -- to advance gender equality, to promote culture for sustainable development, to defend freedom of expression, to harness science for the ocean, for the benefit of all.

We must combine skills for young people with new opportunities for their empowerment.

This is why UNESCO is so intent on the development of national youth policies, in Burundi, in Zimbabwe, in Mongolia.

Through the *Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project*, with the support of the European Union, UNESCO is working in 10 countries around the Mediterranean – to support youth civic and media engagement, to build the capacity of youth organisations, to empower young people to advance peace every day, through their own initiatives.

This is why I launched the global #unite4heritage campaign in Baghdad last year, to counter hate propaganda -- to engage with young women and men in protecting humanity's heritage.

This is the importance of UNESCO's *Education Response to the Syria Crisis*, in Jordan, in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria – we simply cannot lose a generation to violence...

We sometimes hear young people referred to as 'beneficiaries,' as the 'targets' of policies – this cannot stand.

I am convinced we must work *with* young people, with you, as the leaders you already are.

Young women and men are shaping the world – we must recognise this and support it.

This is the goal of UNESCO's biennial *Youth Forum* – this underpins our #YouthOfUNESCO storytelling initiative, to highlight how young people are leading everywhere...

...young people like Lauren Singer, who is showing the way to a zero-waste lifestyle, fitting all of her refuse produced over the past four years into one small jar...

...young people like Nousha Kabawat, who works tirelessly in refugee camps teaching conflict resolution to children, equipping them with skills to rebuild a post-conflict Syria.

The world talks about 'youth' as if it were a single group.

It isn't.

You aren't.

Each of you is unique.

And each of you shares the same conviction.

That your voice matters to make peace happen, to build a better future for all.

I share this conviction, and you may rest assured, UNESCO stands with you.

In this spirit, I thank you all for your commitment to the goals we share, and I look forward to deepening our cooperation with the *Junior Chamber International*.