



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  
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 the visit to the Flemish Parliament**

*“A New Multilateralism to Tackle New Challenges”*

**Brussels, 9 June 2016**

The Honourable Mr Jan Peumans, Speaker of the Flemish Parliament,

The Honourable Mr Rik Daems, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Policy,  
European Affairs, Tourism and Cultural Heritage,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be here, at the Flemish Parliament, to speak before this joint meeting of committees.

This is my first official visit since the terrorist attacks that struck Brussels on 22 March.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to all people of Belgium for the tragic loss of life that followed these barbaric acts and to pledge my absolute determination to stand with you against violent extremism.

This showed the vulnerability all societies share today.

This showed also the resilience at the heart of this society.

It showed the vibrant power of your commitment to values that have never been so important.

Human rights and dignity.

Democracy.

Solidarity in action.

I recall the delegation I received on 30 January, 2015, with Members of the Commission for Foreign Affairs, European Affairs, Tourism and Immovable Heritage, led by Senator Rik Daems.

This came a few weeks after the terrorist attacks that struck Paris on 7-9 January.

2015 and 2016 show this threat knows no borders, with attacks in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Lebanon, in Mali, in Indonesia...

Violent extremism is part of a wider picture that features rising turbulence.

Globalisation is opening vast new opportunities for dialogue and exchange, for shared growth and joint action.

But challenges are high.

Climate change is affecting all societies – and all countries are seeking responses, as embodied in the historic *Paris Climate Change Agreement*.

Poverty remains enduring, just as inequalities are deepening -- this is weakening perceptions of the social contract in many countries.

Conflicts endure across the world, tearing societies apart, forcing millions of people on the road, seeking the shores of Europe -- this also puts European core values at a test.

In 2015, worldwide displacement was the highest level ever recorded, reaching a staggering 60 million.

In Syria, in Iraq, we see rising attacks against cultural diversity and humanity's cultural heritage, in an unprecedented campaign of cultural cleansing.

This sees the systematic violations of human rights, the persecution of people on cultural and religious grounds.

This sees cultural landmarks bulldozed in Palmyra, in Mosul, in Aleppo...

This sees archaeological sites looted on industrial scale, fuelling illicit trafficking, financing terrorism.

Fundamentally, I would say, we are seeing a new global struggle for the hearts and minds... especially *young* hearts and minds...at a time when young citizens are turning weapons against their own in Europe and elsewhere...

I believe these challenges raise hard questions.

Questions about multilateralism today.

Questions about how best to tackle new threats.

We must face these challenges together -- we have done so in the past, and I am convinced we can do so again, by joining around shared values, by crafting new forms of action.

I see this as the importance of UNESCO's mandate, crafted 71 years ago after a devastating war, to build peace through cooperation in education, culture, the sciences, communication and information.

Our Constitution opens with words I never tire in repeating:

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

Today, more than ever, I believe we need this 'soft power' to tackle new challenges, to build new partnerships, to strengthen a new multilateralism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Take the challenge of violent extremism.

We must halt financing, stop foreign terrorists and push back violence.

But *countering* violent extremism is not enough -- we must *prevent* it.

Violent extremists are not born... they are made and fuelled.

Disarming this process starts on the benches of schools, through education, through media literacy, through new opportunities for youth engagement.

This was my message to the *Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism* last September, invited by the United States President Barack Obama.

This is UNESCO's contribution to the Secretary-General's new *Plan of Action to Prevent Extremism*.

Last November, UNESCO held the first *High-Level Conference on Education to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism*, when we brought ministers of education together from across the world.

We just launched a *Teacher's Guide on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation*.

This provides practical advice to teachers in primary and secondary levels, on how to discuss violent extremism and radicalisation, how to create a classroom climate conducive to respectful dialogue and critical thinking.

We are now drafting a Technical Guide for education policy-makers in ministries, to integrate education to prevent violent extremism across education systems, in curricula, teacher training.

All this is part of UNESCO's leadership in advancing global citizenship education, part of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education – to promote peace and human rights education, education for Holocaust remembrance and genocide prevention, with countries across the world.

The key is inclusion -- because exclusion breeds hatred and violence.

This goal guides UNESCO's *Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project*, supported by the European Union, in 10 countries across the Mediterranean, to nurture the civic engagement of young women and men.

This is the importance of UNESCO's *Education Response to the Syria Crisis*, in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

We support host community education systems – and we are focusing on secondary, technical and vocational and higher education, because this is where youth are falling out of the system, where they are most vulnerable to violence and radicalisation.

This is why UNESCO launched, with its partners, the new *Education Cannot Wait Fund*, at the *World Humanitarian Summit*, to fill the USD 2.3 billion funding gap for education in conflicts.

We must also nurture the Internet for peace.

Last June, UNESCO held the first *International Conference on Youth and the Internet – Fighting Radicalisation and Extremism* -- we will hold a second conference next October in Canada.

We are working here to bolster media and information literacy skills for young people, to deepen critical thinking, to give them tools to make the most of the Internet for peace.

This goal underpins the #unite4heritage campaign I launched in Baghdad last year, to counter hate propaganda, to engage young women and men in protecting humanity's heritage.

Violent extremists attack culture... to weaken the fabric of 'living together'... to destroy symbols of dialogue.

This is why UNESCO worked with local communities in Mali, to rebuild the mausoleums of Timbuktu, destroyed by violent extremists in 2012.

This is why we are working to safeguard the cultural heritage of Syria – earlier this month, I was honoured to open the Expert meeting on the safeguarding of Syria’s heritage, with Professor Maria Böhmer, Minister of State to the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, with more than 230 Syrian and international experts from all sides joining forces to develop a common damage assessment and define priorities in emergency safeguarding measures for the sites affected by the conflict.

We are building a board coalition to fight the illicit trafficking of cultural goods from the region, from Iraq and from Syria -- we are training and building capacity -- we support States, and the European Union, in strengthening legislation, notably to take forward the ground-breaking Security Council Resolution 2199.

In all this, I wish to single out the support of the Government of Flanders to UNESCO.

The partnership between UNESCO and Flanders is simply outstanding.

This very morning, UNESCO organised a *High-Level Meeting and Technical Conference on Cultural Diversity under Attack: Protecting Heritage for Peace* -- an initiative supported by Flanders.

The Government of Flanders has supported UNESCO in its efforts to safeguard Syria’s cultural heritage.

It underpinned the damage and needs assessment in Nepal after the devastating earthquakes last year – I was in Nepal last month and saw for myself the power of this work.

The Government of Flanders is backing UNESCO’s support to safeguarding cultural, natural and intangible heritage, particularly in Southern Africa, by building capacity, advancing reform and creating development opportunities -- because culture means creativity and innovation, it means tourism, jobs and revenues, especially for women.

Science is a key pillar in our cooperation – with a focus on water management and on the management of Biosphere reserves.

Flemish funds and expertise have helped UNESCO to create drought monitoring stations, to monitor melting glaciers and to establish water security plans -- all essential at a time when year after year the climate is breaking records.

The Government of Flanders is a longstanding supporter of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

Flanders is backing the Project Office for the *International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange* in Ostend -- collecting and analysing marine-related data, sharing this knowledge by training people worldwide.

Flanders is also seconding 4 staff to key positions in UNESCO.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Flanders for its leadership.

I believe our partnership is about resilience.

Our partnership is about bolstering societies in transformation, facing uncertainty, giving them tools and capacities to help themselves...

I see this as key to taking forward the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Change Agreement*.

I am convinced the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement are a single agenda, for human rights and dignity, for sustainability and inclusion, for the planet and peace.

These agreements were reached, because they were led in a process owned by all States, because they were conducted on the principle of inclusion, allowing all voices to be heard, from civil society to the private sector...

Inclusion, openness and ownership.

These are the hallmarks of the new multilateralism.

Taking this forward calls for leadership and will – and I wish to underline the importance of parliaments in this process.

I have been a parliamentarian myself, and I know the vital role of parliaments -- in relation to Governments and societies, in relation to other parliaments – in raising awareness, in mobilizing action, in legislating catalyst change, in monitoring and ensuring accountability.

This is essential today, to bolster the multilateralism we need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to tackle new challenges and lead forward an ambitious new agenda.

This calls for all voices to be heard.

This calls for all strengths to be mobilised.

I thank you again for your sharing your voice and your strength at a time when this has never been so important.