



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

**Message from Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the International Youth Day**

**and**

**launch of the 2010 “UN international Year of Youth: Dialogue and  
Mutual Understanding”**

**12 August 2010**

Today marks the launch of the UN International Year of Youth centred on the theme of dialogue and mutual understanding. It has been 25 years – more than one generation – since the UN dedicated a special year to youth. A force of 1.2 billion between ages 15 and 24, young people have the energy and motivation to propose innovative solutions to today's global challenges and the aspiration and tools to build bridges of dialogue across cultures.

This Year aims to raise awareness about young people's contribution to society, to help them address the challenges they face and encourage them to participate in development initiatives, from community to global level.

We have to open more spaces and opportunities to nurture civic engagement and enable youth to participate in shaping their future. Five years away from the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it is more important than ever to encourage young people to dedicate themselves to achieving a more just and sustainable world.

Our goal is to harness the potential of youth as partners for development and peace. The UNESCO Youth Forum, held since 1999, is now an integral part of all sessions of the UNESCO General Conference, the Organization's highest decision-making body. The Forum gives young people from all Member States the opportunity to learn about UNESCO's programmes and be more actively engaged in tangible action in their respective countries. The 2011 UNESCO Youth Forum will provide space for all UN agencies and other partners to report on their activities carried out during International Youth Year and chart a future course of action.

Public investment in youth provides lasting dividends for all society. The global economic and financial crisis has made the world more insecure for young people, especially for those from vulnerable or marginalized groups. Youth policies that promote equity and directly engage with young people must be strengthened. Development assistance policies should be better geared to address youth's needs and concerns.

UNESCO is committed to empowering youth and ensuring that their voices are heard. We are currently co-chairing the United Nations Interagency Network on Youth Development, which was formally set up in February 2010 at UNESCO Headquarters. The establishment of this network marks an important step towards better coordinating our knowledge, reflections and actions on youth, in order to improve the impact of our work. The Organization will reinforce support to Member-States in developing effective policies and programmes affecting youth, running from access to quality educational opportunities, the empowerment of young women and partnerships for HIV and AIDS prevention to the promotion of cultural diversity, measures to address youth violence, and sports for development and peace.

By recognizing the manifold contributions that youth can make in promoting mutual understanding, the International Year of Youth embraces UNESCO's vision of "building peace in the minds of people" and aligns with the objective of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which UNESCO is leading.

Young people must be given opportunities to participate as respected partners in decision-making and action at all levels. It is in everyone's interest to empower youth with the skills they need to build more sustainable future. I call upon governments and the international community to act hand in hand with youth, and encourage young people from across the world to seize the opportunity this Year offers to network, share ideas and launch initiatives that promote peace, mutual understanding and development for all.

Irina Bokova