



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Hundred and eighty-third session

183 EX/INF.4
PARIS, 3 December 2009
English & French only

**Statement by Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,**

at the 183rd session of the Executive Board
(Paris, 23 November 2009)

Mr President of the General Conference,
 Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,
 Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

It is a very great pleasure for me to meet you today for the first time as Director-General of UNESCO. Having been a Member of the Executive Board myself, I obviously have a very privileged insider's view of the Board. I am keenly aware of the central role that you play at the heart of the Organization, as Members of one of its two governing bodies. Constructive interaction and collaboration based on trust among the Organization's three primary organs – the General Conference, the Executive Board and the Director-General – are crucial to ensuring the Organization's efficiency and effectiveness and to its potential role in multilateral relations. I see you not only as members of a governing body but also as a respected and reliable source of advice, knowledge and support and as frank and enlightened critics, individually and collectively. As I have UNESCO's interests at heart, I shall rely on each of you to ensure that your decisions are implemented by the Secretariat in the smoothest possible manner. We are equally committed to ensuring that the ideals and vision enshrined in the Constitution and in the Medium-Term Strategy will have a real impact on people's lives and on societies. I shall see to it that our relations are very open and founded on mutual respect and dialogue – values that I hold dear, as you know. My working principle will be that of constant dialogue.

First of all, allow me to congratulate the new Members of the Board, the Chairperson and the members of the Bureau. Together, in the years ahead, we shall chart a new course for UNESCO.

Ladies and gentlemen, on 23 October 2009, in my installation address, I conveyed to you my conviction and my vision for UNESCO. I therefore do not intend to repeat the various points that I made on that occasion. I should simply like to concentrate on a few issues that are of the utmost importance as we begin our journey together today.

With our fields of competence in education, culture, natural science, social and human sciences, communication and information, combined with our two priorities – gender equality and Africa – we are in a unique position in the multilateral arena, in order:

- first, to assist in harnessing globalization more in the service of humanity and sustainable development and in attaining internationally recognized development objectives, in particular the Millennium Development Goals;
- second, to make a difference internationally, and at the national level in particular, through effective high-quality activities in our fields of competence, in which we must play an international leadership role;
- third, to refine our unique role in the multilateral system, as an Organization that promotes and facilitates dialogue among decision-makers, scientists, the academic world, intellectuals, members of civil society, journalists, spiritual leaders and many others; this must have a definite impact on the overriding goal of our Constitution, which is to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men and women;
- fourth, to continue to contribute fully to the reform of the United Nations, in particular at the country level, in order to highlight our capability to meet the Member States' priorities and demands.

Our strength, dear friends, lies in our legitimacy (as there are now 193 Member States and Associate Members, we have nearly attained universality) and in our capacity to respond to the great challenges of our times in an interdisciplinary manner. This makes it possible for us to work in a different way and to make a constructive contribution to the pursuit of a means to overcome the crises that the world faces on so many fronts – economic, social, financial, humanitarian and ethical, in addition to the climate, food and energy crises.

The efficient implementation and high quality of our programmes and the specific projects for which they provide are the keys to our credibility and success. They constitute an indispensable condition for us, all together, to do better in promoting UNESCO and in explaining its role and tangible contribution. An indispensable condition if we are to ensure that UNESCO's presence in world governance and dialogue, and in national development processes and efforts, especially in Africa, is more active and more fully recognized.

Africa and gender equality are the Organization's two integrated priorities, as provided for in the Medium-Term Strategy, most convincingly I must say, for 2008-2013 (document 34 C/4). I shall be unswervingly committed to promoting these priorities and to taking concrete results-based action in furtherance of these two priorities – in our five major programmes.

In regard to Priority Africa, I shall endeavour to achieve interaction and close and constant contact with the African Union and with African leaders and partners in order to ensure that the specific action we take is linked more effectively, in all programme sectors, to their objectives.

Similarly, one of the keynotes of my term of office will be my very firm support for gender equality. This will apply both to our programmes, which must provide more widely for gender integration and women's empowerment, and to our own personnel structure and operations within the Secretariat.

It is also of prime importance for UNESCO to be given a more active role and to redefine its position, while reasserting the leading role that it has played for several decades, in the dialogue among cultures, on which the culture of peace is founded. At its last session, the General Conference reaffirmed the central role of the culture of peace. At the next session in April, we shall begin discussion on the future development of a programme on the subject, for inclusion in document 36 C/5. Similarly, the General Assembly of the United Nations recently adopted a resolution which again stressed the urgent need, at this stage of history, for a culture of peace, and laid emphasis on UNESCO's role in that process. To my mind, these developments are particularly relevant now that we are about to celebrate, in 2010, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, for which UNESCO has been designated lead agency in the United Nations system, and to implement an action plan. This responsibility requires us to demonstrate creative leadership and to encourage and initiate tangible activities and results-based initiatives.

In my address on 23 October 2009, I proposed to establish a high-level panel on peace and dialogue among cultures. It will be composed of eminent persons and will be set the task of joining forces with UNESCO in furthering the debate on culture, tolerance, reconciliation and greater respect for diversity in our societies and throughout the world. Pluralism is the precondition for mutual understanding, and peoples must act in solidarity in our great world.

Our first and foremost challenge is to continue our endeavours to promote **education**, which is the priority of all UNESCO priorities. In this field, many goals await us, both substantively and in terms of UNESCO's role and position. A great deal has been done in education to define a broader agenda for education for all (EFA) and the major education initiatives. This policy thrust has been expanded through the greater emphasis placed recently on education for sustainable development, technical and vocational education, and higher education. Life-long education, as an integral part of education for all, will be the focus of international attention during the CONFINTEA Conference that will be held next month in Belem, Brazil, which I look forward to attending.

The Education Commission of the General Conference has strongly approved the education programme contained in document 35 C/5, which lays emphasis on our action in the neediest countries and on literacy teaching, teachers, qualifications and planning – which are all key pillars for building education for all. As I said in my installation address, I shall call for greater emphasis to be laid on achieving gender equality at all levels of education in regions and countries where unacceptable disparities persist. Take the case of countries in Africa and Asia where more than 50% of the female population is illiterate – how can one speak of inclusive societies and human rights in such conditions?

I believe, however, that the international EFA coalition, with its expanded agenda on education, is still weak and that we must continue to encourage all organizations of the United Nations system involved to contribute much more practically and more directly to a coherent and effective approach at the global and country levels. We must also do much more to motivate all of our bilateral partners, whether they be donor or developing countries. We must encourage donors to keep their promises and increase their official development assistance for education. Countries should not reduce their national education budgets. It will only be through joint efforts, in which each partner participates and contributes to the full, that we are likely to succeed.

I therefore intend to speak to all of our EFA partners in the United Nations system and to our Member States in order to improve this situation and to undertake to adopt common approaches that can give good results, in particular at the country level. I also intend to contact the President of the World Bank and the new Chair of the Fast Track Initiative, Ms Carol Bellamy. I shall also contact the International Monetary Fund, which could become a solid partner, especially in these times of crisis, inasmuch as it decides on the allocation of the additional resources entrusted to it. Furthermore, I intend to make a forceful plea to the OECD Development Assistance Committee to encourage its Member States to support an increase in the share of official development assistance earmarked for education. I shall campaign resolutely for a greater share of official development assistance to be allocated to education and I shall endeavour to convince countries to abide by the commitments that they have made in that regard at G8, G20 and other summit meetings.

The next EFA Global Monitoring Report, which I shall launch jointly with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-moon, in New York on 19 January 2010, will deal with the ways and means of reaching marginalized groups and will lay special emphasis on EFA funding and resources. It will be an opportunity to highlight the urgent need to reach marginalized people and to increase funding for education in the wake of the economic crisis. It is an imminent and much awaited opportunity for me to test the ground, to enter into a new commitment with our partners and with stakeholders, and to lay down specific milestones for the future.

As you know, the theme of my first address as Director-General – delivered at the World Innovation Summit for Education, in Qatar, was education. We need highly visible platforms and international campaigns in order to place education once more at the top of the world agenda. As the agency that coordinates education for all worldwide, we must strive to secure bolder commitments from all of our partners and strengthen our coalition to provide quality education to all children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the **natural sciences**, we have been recognized for a number of solid accomplishments: the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, freshwater management and ecosystems, assistance in the development of science, technology and innovation policies – a new focus area, just to name some of the most important. We must constantly reassess our role and refine our approaches in order to occupy and defend lead positions in these areas within the United Nations system. There is no doubt for me that UNESCO has something special to offer in these areas. We must stay ahead and provide Member States with the quality services and support they rightly expect from us. This is how we should find more synergies with United Nations sister organizations in the area of science.

Our ability to contribute to action by Member States to cope with, mitigate and adapt to climate change and its consequences will determine our future role in many science fields. Through the UNESCO Climate Change Initiative, which I announced in my speech of 23 October 2009, I will put forward an integrated package of action-oriented, value-added climate actions relevant for the global, regional and national levels. This package shall draw on our intersectoral advantages and our recognized skills, guided by UNESCO's already existing Climate Change strategy. Overall, the initiative should strengthen our visibility and our advocacy for action.

Clearly, we will fully operate in the division of labour agreed upon by the United Nations Chief Executives Board, to which UNESCO contributed and which will be presented by the United Nations Secretary-General at the forthcoming Copenhagen Conference. I will participate in the Copenhagen summit in the special event for Executive Heads of the Chief Executives Board led by Mr Ban Ki-moon. There, I will also seize this opportunity to have maximum bilateral contacts with participating leaders from all regions and other fellow United Nations agency heads.

The Climate Change Initiative will comprise our contribution to the global knowledge base and climate science largely residing in the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the role of freshwater, the potential of biosphere reserves, the possibility of a stronger focus on the role and expertise of the World Heritage Centre on natural and cultural sites, dedicated support for Small Island Developing States, assistance in disaster risk reduction and a focus on the social dimensions of climate change. This will be complemented by Education for Sustainable Development, the ethical dimensions of climate change in line with the General Conference's resolution thereon and our in-house climate-neutral initiative. We all must work towards becoming a climate-neutral organization and be aware, ourselves, of the steps that we can take as individuals to reduce our carbon footprint. As you know, all United Nations organizations have subscribed to this United Nations system-wide climate-neutral initiative, which will also be unveiled in Copenhagen.

Another area of great significance will be the International Year of Biodiversity which we celebrate globally in 2010 and which we will launch in January at Headquarters.

In the area of sciences, I also announced in my investiture speech that I intend to form a High-Level Scientific Panel to advise on UNESCO's role in today's major scientific issues and in science policy. Drawing on the advice of top-notch and ennobled scientific coriphea should allow UNESCO to place science at the centre of our efforts and help us to contribute to poverty eradication, sustainable development and, as a priority, respond to the needs of Africa. The panel is not intended to duplicate the work of our international and intergovernmental science programmes. The ultimate aim is to help Member States and governing bodies to strengthen policies, capacities and research orientations in science, technology and innovation.

The **social and human sciences** are, on the one hand, the hub for the ethics of science and technology, in particular bioethics. On the other hand, the rapid change affecting our societies poses the question of how we respond to these new and pressing challenges.

No other organization within the United Nations system can deliver in the complex field of ethics as we can. We must do our utmost to keep our leading position. The forthcoming work for a universal declaration on ethical principles for climate change opens up a new and highly visible avenue for our efforts. As I said, it will be part and parcel of the climate change initiative.

The work of MOST will be crucial to help reinforce research-policy linkages on a number of social science issues and to provide advice to policy-makers in all regions.

In the field of **culture**, UNESCO is second to none in the United Nations system. The recent release of the UNESCO World Report on "Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue" has once again highlighted how much we can contribute to the intellectual discourse among Member States and the world community and policy development. This will be but one area which I will be concentrating on. Following the release of the report during the last General Conference, I believe we must prepare for a much more high-profile international launch of this unique report. The international press and indeed decision-makers at large, the global intellectual community and multilateral organizations, in particular the United Nations system, have barely taken note or been aware of the availability of this report. This will be an immediate task which the Secretariat must tackle.

You have heard me express my conviction that dialogue among cultures is the antidote to intolerance and exclusion. It is a preventive force. Especially in the context of our activities during the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2010 I will seek to establish multiple

partnerships, including with initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations. I intend to discuss with all interested parties how we jointly contribute to our most noble goal, namely the strengthening of peace, the fostering of peaceful relations among countries and peoples and the reinforcement of tolerance and mutual respect as an overarching value.

Other important work in the field of culture relates of course to our main flagship World Heritage, increasingly so to intangible cultural heritage and the diversity of cultural expressions, all so aptly captured in the six culture conventions. We will also continue contributing to the ongoing debate on multilingualism and endangered languages. Culture and development is increasingly recognized as a pivotal field, including the precious work by creative industries to which we should pay more attention in our deliberations. Ultimately, we must work to have culture recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a major development driver.

UNESCO, as I have already said, has a distinct role to play in peace-building and reconciliation, which we must uphold and strengthen. We must continue to build bridges (as UNESCO has done in Mostar), to unite people that have been separated because of ethnic, religious or cultural differences and to do so through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. The goal of promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and a culture of peace should be the light that guides us in all of our endeavours.

Recent developments have introduced a new feature into the debate and reflection about culture, namely the progressive digitalization of culture. This involves a wide range of cultural goods and services – books and libraries, music, heritage sites, intangible cultural heritage and in general the use of the Internet. The time may have come for UNESCO to take the initiative and organize a conference on this increasingly hot topic in order to debate and to exchange ideas and good practices.

The building of **inclusive knowledge societies** is an abiding challenge, necessitating a major contribution by all Programme Sectors addressing as they do various aspects of knowledge: access to knowledge, knowledge generation, knowledge sharing and dissemination. I do believe, like all of you do, in the transformative and strategic power of knowledge and in its major role in advancing development and building peace. I believe that one of the key tasks of UNESCO is to empower people through knowledge, helping them to acquire the skills which are so needed in today's world. We must insist that knowledge societies must be inclusive of all, building on the contribution of and benefiting all citizens and all countries. UNESCO has been a trailblazer in introducing the notion and concept of the knowledge society into the international debate and in particular the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. We must redouble our efforts to link declarations and agreements into concrete, meaningful action. The **Communication and Information Sector** will continue to lead and coordinate UNESCO's response in this regard.

At the same time, I firmly believe that the freedom of expression of the media and journalists, the free flow of information and ideas and independent and pluralistic media are at the core of UNESCO's work. This is complemented by UNESCO's offer to train journalists, promote independent media and provide advice to Governments on media legislation. There is no other multilateral organization engaged in this vitally important activity, and I am committed to continue according it the priority it deserves.

This combined with our commitment to promote universal access to quality digital content, multilingualism in cyberspace and the introduction of ICTs are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and good governance. ICTs cut across all UNESCO's domains and provide unlimited opportunities to bridge the digital and the knowledge divides.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The General Conference has just passed a new programme and budget for the next two years, pegged at US \$653 million. The immediate next task will be to complete the work plans and I intend to validate these work plans so that work can begin to implement the new 35 C/5 with the onset of the year 2010. To be sure, more work is awaiting us in this field, as the General

Conference has requested me to examine further the reduction of funds in Parts I and III and to reallocate such gains to Part II, the Programme Sectors. I will present my proposals to the Executive Board at its April 2010 session.

Ensuring the effective implementation of the decentralization and rotation policy will also be key to providing all staff with first-hand knowledge and experience of the challenges that countries, especially developing countries, are facing. As I have already said, I will strongly encourage staff rotation. I will ensure that our rotation policy is fairly implemented and that adequate incentives and support systems are in place to favour mobility. Rotation is an enrichment for our staff and an asset for the Organization. We should not be spread thin but enhance our expertise at regional level. Our specialized regional bureaux must be staffed by leading experts in their field who can best assist Member States in developing their education, science, culture and communications policies.

But the principle of rotation comes also with an obligation of the Organization to do its utmost to help protect our staff who find themselves in duty stations beset by conflict and tensions. Security in our world has become an overriding objective of its own – be it at Headquarters, where we always need to be vigilant and to enhance our security arrangements or in the more than 50 field offices.

The dangers inherent today in multilateral work must also be tackled through a rigorous application of our new policy for extrabudgetary resources and cost recovery, under which all direct costs must be charged to the funds provided by donors. This applies not only to the staffing needs for implementing such projects, it applies equally and with renewed urgency to the security component of making our presence and contribution at the field level safer.

Results-based management will be continued, refined and strengthened under my leadership. I wish to assure you that there will be no slackening in this regard. All work plans currently under preparation are already developed in line with the results-based management precepts.

We must also be an Organization that practices what it preaches, and I am going to do my very best to reward creative initiatives developed by staff, and to institute a human resources policy that invests in its staff, particularly its younger staff, and enriches their career development.

In line with the commitment that I made to all of you during my pre-election campaign, I shall be a Director-General who will listen to all Member States, whether big or small, whether prosperous or struggling to achieve development. You expect me to continue vigorously to reform the Organization. You wish, we wish, I wish UNESCO to be more present in the field, implementing specific projects that contribute meaningfully to national authorities' priorities. We wish to see less funding for administrative structures and more resources for actual projects. We wish UNESCO to be involved with more determination and with a higher profile in the "Delivering as One" approach currently taken by the main multilateral agencies, funds and programmes. In that connection, we must take account of the experience gained in the last three years in the eight pilot countries, including four in Africa. This will be a real challenge in the next two years as we embark on the drawing up of a large number of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF). We wish to see world public opinion, on all continents, gain a better understanding of what purpose UNESCO serves today, at the beginning of this new millennium. We wish more donors, States and other public authorities, major NGOs and foundations or private-sector stakeholders to be convinced that, through UNESCO, they contribute to making globalization more human, they contribute to speeding up of the pace of development of poor countries, they contribute to the exchange of ideas and scientific data among representatives of the various cultures of the world. In a word, through UNESCO, these new partners must understand that they will contribute to the new humanism that we wish to have in place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To this end, I am looking forward to the recommendations of the independent evaluation of the Organization, and to discuss these recommendations with you. As you know, this evaluation has

been decided by the 35th session of the General Conference, and the procurement process has been launched by the Internal Oversight Service.

As Director-General, I see one of my most important public roles as rendering the Organization more visible and vocal on the international stage. Better visibility of the Organization will be a precondition for more recognition, more resources, more confidence in our work. I will pay particular attention to this field and will strengthen our communications and outreach globally and at national levels – through effective public information policies and approaches, through high-profile partnership and more creative approaches with Goodwill Ambassadors and celebrity advocates.

My top priority is undoubtedly yours: to be an effective, respected Organization with a forceful voice on the global stage and in countries. I have heard the concerns of our Member States. They will be guiding principles in my reforms and initiatives. We will be present where the needs are greatest – in Africa, Small Island Developing States, post-conflict countries but also where large educational disparities prevail; where biodiversity, cultures and languages are endangered; where freedom of expression is curtailed. Today's economic and financial crisis reinforces the relevance and urgency of our message. People are looking towards UNESCO to show alternatives, promote cooperation, share ideas, and advocate for increased investment in education, culture and science as an imperative for the recovery.

In a nutshell, UNESCO's strategic orientation and positioning will be one of my major concerns. At the same time I will be engaged in programme issues, without however yielding to the temptation of micro-management. The day-to-day management of our diverse activities will rest in the hands of a competent senior management team. In this endeavour I will be guided by the objectives of optimizing and streamlining our structures, making them less costly and less bureaucratic, ensuring high-quality delivery and results attainment, effective decentralization and significantly enhanced visibility. I will consult you, the Executive Board, at your April 2010 session, about my proposals and conclusions in this regard.

I thank you for your attention.