



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 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan

Brussels, 4 October 2016

President of the European Council, H.E. Donald Tusk,

President of Afghanistan, H.E. Ashraf Ghani,

United Nations Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO is honoured to participate in this conference, to pledge once again the Organisation's absolute commitment and support to the people of Afghanistan.

Our position is clear.

The future of Afghanistan depends upon the development of quality education and skills for all Afghan women and men.

It depends on the protection and promotion of heritage as a condition for nation-building, to foster belonging and national identity.

It depends on strengthening the free flow of information, to nurture a vibrant public debate, to enhance good governance.

The history of Afghanistan reminds us 'hard power' is never enough – you need the 'soft power' of education, culture and information also, to recover, to rebuild, to build a more inclusive and resilient society.

This is UNESCO's mandate.

This calls for sustained investment in education, in literacy, in skills, in the protection of cultural heritage as a force for dialogue and social cohesion.

This aspiration lies at the core of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* -- where the 17 new goals can only be achieved by empowering every girl and women.

Since 2008, UNESCO has been leading the largest literacy project in the history of the country, benefitting over 600,000 people, of whom 60 percent are women, with the support of Japan (20 million USD), Sweden (9 million USD) and Finland (3 million USD).

We must dramatically strengthen the capacities of all implementing partners to ensure all can effectively access quality education in remote provinces.

This is a human rights issue.

This is a development issue.

This is a security issue as well.

Violent extremists seek to destroy culture and education, because it delegitimizes them.

This is why they target both.

In response, we must strengthen education, training and skills and I hope this will be a major outcome of this Conference – we must not just invest in robust infrastructures, but also in competent and skilled women and men.

This is vital to build a robust civil society, to build a peaceful and prosperous and resilient Afghanistan.

Thank you.