

Addresse delivered by H.E. Mr Martin Næs, Secretary-General at the UNESCO 37. General Conference

Mr President of the General Conference
Mrs Chair of the Executive Board
Madam Director-General
Excellences,
Colleagues and Friends

Congratulations, Mr Hao, on your election as president of the General Conference and congratulations Madam Bokova on your nomination by the Executive Board of UNESCO for a second four-year term as Director General. Your first term as Director General was also our first as associate member of UNESCO, a term characterized by a difficult economic situation and consequently an urgent need for a reformed agenda. We look forward to working with you and UNESCO in the years to come.

It is a great pleasure for me to attend this 37th General Conference and on behalf of the Faroese Minister of Education, Research and Culture, Mr Bjørn Kalsø, to speak at this prominent session. I would also like to congratulate Anguilla with the associated membership of UNESCO. Although situated in different parts of world, island communities face some of the same challenges in terms of sustainable development and climate changes. I believe it is the strength of UNESCO to comprise the different entities of member states and associate members and that the voices of each one of us can be raised and heard in this forum.

In one of his novels named *The Lost Musicians*, the late Faroese poet Mr William Heinesen describes the Northern European island community of the Faroe Islands in this way: Far out in a radiant ocean glinting like quicksilver there lies a solitary little lead-colored land. The tiny rocky shore is to the vast ocean just about the same as a grain of sand to the floor of a dance hall. But seen beneath a magnifying glass, this grain of sand is nevertheless a whole world with mountains and valleys, sounds and fjords and houses with small people.

UNESCO can be seen as the magnifying glass of education, science, culture, communication and information, magnifying the significance and distinctiveness of the smallest of places and every single human being of the world.

The Faroe Islands are situated in the North Atlantic Ocean between Norway, Iceland and Scotland. 48.000 people and 70.000 sheep live on 18 islands. The economy of the Faroe Islands is mainly based on fishery and with a growing importance of tourism. We speak Faroese, a language with Norse roots that has developed since the Viking settlement 1200 years ago and has survived partly through the living oral tradition of ballads that were only written in the beginning of the 19th century, when Faroese as a written language was constructed. Today the Faroese language is the official and thriving language of the islands.

The inhabitants of island communities basically have two options: to stay or to leave. More than 50 % of the young generations of the Faroe Islands seek the opportunities of the centers of the globalized world and our challenge is to provide opportunities for them to return to the islands so that they can contribute to the economic, social or cultural development of the society. Education and the building of knowledge are fundamental to the development of any society and quality and dissemination of education is at the core of our policy.

Located at the border of the Arctic region, the Faroe Islands are placed on the western arm of the emerging Northern Sea Route connecting formerly very distant parts of the world. The irreversible receding of the Arctic ice and the emerging new sea route provides both challenges and opportunities to our island society. Economic opportunities and environmental threats brought about by the changing conditions in the Arctic region will be parts of our daily lives and decision making process in the years to come. These are conditions that will require competence and the building of knowledge in a wide range of subjects. Together with our neighbours the Faroe Islands are playing an active role in competence building and research on these important issues, and to the Faroe Islands the Global Action Programme in Education for Sustainable Development is particularly relevant also in the post-2015 agenda.

Education is a key to development and culture is a driver of change, but it is in the cross-sectional work that the full value of the UNESCO mandate unfolds. The grain of sand on the floor of the dance hall can remain insignificant if we do not bother to look through the magnifying glass, but our presence here reaffirms the importance of UNESCO's vision through education, science, culture, communication and information to build peace in the minds of men and women. This gives hope for the lives of future generations.

Thank you Mr President.