



Celebration of the 200th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO
04 - 18 October 2016

Message from Alissandra Cummins
Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO
(2011-2013)

I wish to offer the Chair, the Board and the Secretariat my heartiest congratulations on the attainment of the 200th session of the Executive Board. Serving as Chairperson of this august body was both a challenge and a privilege for me during my term in office, but whichever it was, it was always an education in cooperation and leadership.

For me the highlights were the following:

At the 189th session in March 2012, the Board acknowledged and appreciated 40th anniversary of its flagship the World Heritage Convention, with an anniversary theme of “World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Local Communities”. This provided crucial recognition that the goals and actions of the Convention are essential for sustainable development. Together with UNESCO’s initiative on culture and development, were critical to ensuring that this time around during the Rio+20 deliberations culture would inform international reflections on the post-2015 global development agenda, and would not be left out of the articulation of the new Sustainable Development goals.

The 2012 visit of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon to the Executive Board on the occasion of its 190th session where he emphasized his commitment to the five imperatives of sustainable development; preventing and mitigating conflicts, human rights abuses and the impacts of natural disasters; building a safer and more secure world; supporting countries in transition; and working to engage the talents of women and young people – essentially outlining the elements for ensuring the continued relevance of the UN system, and UNESCO’s role within it.

Another highlight at that session was the Statement of Solidarity with Malala Yousufzai following the vicious and outrageous attack on her and her fellow students for asserting their right to education. As the moral conscience and the champion of education for all (EFA) in the international community, UNESCO could not remain silent while such heinous crimes were committed to intimidate and deny women and girls their basic human rights continue to be perpetuated. It was important on that day for the Board to speak with one voice and one heart and it did. This commitment called for the world to actualize the universal values and human rights required to build peace in the minds of human beings.

Finally, the Launch during this session of the Board of the publication Memory of the World: The Treasures that Record our History from 1700 BC to the Present Day was a tremendous recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Memory of the World Programme and its successes

over two decades as a response to UNESCO's Constitution which calls for "the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science".

Of particular importance for me during the 191st Session was the achievement of consensus decisions that were adopted on the Middle East items at this session. It was the clearest demonstration that when Members of Board felt that business as usual for these items was no longer desirable or acceptable that it was entirely possible for all parties to play a role in getting things right. The return to consensus with regard to this most volatile of issues was deeply welcomed and would have enabled progress to move forward in a productive manner. So while one might call it a fragile peace due to the continued turmoil experienced shortly thereafter, it was nevertheless a most cherished and historic moment during the life of the board where all members and all parties put aside the destructive rhetoric of previous sessions came together in unity of vision. It demonstrated what could be achieved if everyone worked towards the same goal.

5 Special Session of the Board – during the first special session of the Board to be convened in 28 years, we welcomed the efforts of both the Director-General's and the member states to stabilize UNESCO's financial situation in the extraordinary situation in which we were placed. We considered that the Secretariat, together with the Member States, carried out highly effective work on the Programme and Budget for the upcoming period, this required that we work on a process unprecedented within UNESCO of ranking programme priorities for the Draft Programme and Budget for 2014-2017 (37 C/5) and while none of us really liked what we had to do, we achieved important results as a result of the mutually agreed process and in the end generally supported fully the basic directions and parameters of the proposed budget.

192 Session - I considered this session to be the one which demonstrated clearly what the Board was capable of achieving when it set its mind to it. The meeting focused on many aspects of change which were of critical importance of the time. I feel that one of the key results of my presidency was that the Board conceptualized and oversaw the transition of the Organization to the new quadrennial programming cycle – a new four-year programming cycle within an eight-year medium-term strategic framework – as reflected in the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021 (37 C/4) and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2014- 2017 (37 C/5). That throughout the process it took cognizance of the recommendations of the independent external evaluation of UNESCO (IEE) and worked on ensuring the organization's continued relevance through the articulation of the role of UNESCO in the post-2015 development agenda.

Hopefully members came to understand and appreciate the need for proactive instead of reactive approaches to monitoring and evaluation in support of such critical transitions.

Frankly it would not have been possible to achieve such results without the effective support of the chairpersons of the F and A and PX Commissions. They together with the secretariat of the Board worked endlessly to ensure that we achieved effective results.