



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

Message from Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Day of Peace

21 September 2010

Every year on 21 September the International Day of Peace is observed around the world. Established as an annual day of non-violence and ceasefire by the UN General Assembly under resolution 36/67, it provides an opportunity for individuals, organizations and nations to commit to or engage in actions to build a culture of peace.

This Day has particular significance for an Organization charged with building the defences of peace in the minds of men and women. It coincides this year with the close of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), with the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) and the International Year of Youth, Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (2010), which are mutually reinforcing.

Peace and security are closely linked to guaranteeing fundamental freedoms. Societies cannot be secure when over one billion people live in extreme poverty; when people lack access to education, health services and nutrition and when women do not enjoy equal rights. This is why the Millennium Development Goals are a basic minimum to ensure human dignity and make our societies more peaceful.

But the nature of peace is also changing in a world marked by rapid integration. New tensions have arisen that all too often find expression in prejudice and fractures between different cultures and beliefs. While cultures or religions are not in themselves the cause of war or conflict, they have often been used as a pretext for inciting confrontation. Ignorance is invariably at the root of intolerance, hatred and - ultimately - conflict and war. In many cases, conflict arises when dialogue

falters or breaks down, just as it can often be mitigated or prevented through dialogue.

Nurturing a culture of peace calls for efforts at all levels to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding. This is the main purpose of the High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures established this year under my leadership. Gathering intellectuals, artists, religious and political figures, it is stimulating debate on how to promote understanding and rethink peace. The International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures has itself generated a wide range of creative projects that demonstrate the power of cultural diversity and dialogue as forces for peace.

A culture of peace must be underpinned by shared values. There is no better place to promote mutual dialogue, respect and understanding than through inclusive education systems. It is my firm belief that education is the key to fostering peaceful, non-violent and equitable societies.

Peace and development cannot be achieved without investing in gender equality. Empowering girls and women is a key to building more just and sustainable societies. We must also ensure that youth are fully engaged as respected partners in peace-building processes and sustainable development efforts.

The culture of peace is one of peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution, education for non-violence, tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue. It is closely linked to the new humanism advocated by UNESCO, which puts human beings at the core of all development processes.

I take this opportunity to call upon governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to scale up their efforts to bridge cultural and religious divides through dialogue, to make education for peace and non-violence a core element in all educational programmes, to transform gender equality from a slogan into an everyday reality for girls and women worldwide, and to harness the energies of the young to make them the constructive agents of peaceful social change.

Irina Bokova