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Mission statement

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UNESCO in a Globalised World: New Humanism for the 21st Century

The year 2009 is marked by important global challenges that have affected humanity as never before. While globalization has had a positive effect on millions of people by helping them rise out of poverty, this global crisis of unusual proportion – economic, financial, social, environmental, as well as moral and ethical, endangers the fulfilment of the most important agenda of present-day multilateralism – the Millennium Development Goals, and affects the most vulnerable countries, especially in Africa. This crisis sets an imperative to act without delay.

During the past nine months, I have visited 45 countries, I have talked to heads of state, heads of government, ministers, intellectuals, scientists and artists. I have visited dozens of National Commissions, as well as the UNESCO Offices in Abuja, Bangkok, Islamabad, Kingston, New Delhi and Santiago de Chile.

My conviction that the greatest challenge in the world today is the global governance of the 21st century, has been reconfirmed. In overcoming the crisis, we should not go back to yesterday's status quo. The greatest challenge is to lead the world into a new era of peace and humanism, to create more inclusive, just, and equitable societies through sustainable economic and social development, based on science, innovation and new technologies that will serve mankind and will preserve the environment.

We need to enhance multilateralism and reinvigorate the United Nations in order to make development efforts, aimed at the most vulnerable and most severely affected by the crisis, more coherent and efficient. I am more confident than ever before that notwithstanding UNESCO's universal mandate, Africa's development needs, especially in education, and those of the Small Island Developing States as the most crisis-stricken countries in the world, should continue to be a strong priority.

Turning the challenge into an opportunity

The major challenge is to turn the crisis into an opportunity and create a more democratic and humane world where the values of human dignity and human rights, of equal access to education and culture, will underpin all economic and political considerations.

UNESCO should take part in the global governance debate because its competences are at the core of globalization. The Organization which embraces

193 Member States and six Associate Members is nowadays more democratic, universal and open to cooperation with civil society.

The constitutional mandate of UNESCO is still relevant in the 21st century where building knowledge-based societies is an imperative, where culture is crucial to any meaningful debate on development, where science and innovation mark the new era of humanity's future in all social and environmental fields, such as climate change and water, where we need to understand better the deep transformations of our societies, and finally, where dialogue, tolerance and respect for diversity is a humanistic value in itself that should be cherished.

UNESCO has a unique tool for mobilizing public opinion and the intellectual and academic communities in the pursuit of its values and priorities – the National Commissions. With their hundreds, if not thousands of dedicated men and women all over the world, the National Commissions should be strengthened and supported in every possible manner, as they are the true guardians of the spirit and values of the Organization.

Education – the road ahead

UNESCO should reaffirm the centrality of education for development. As United Nations lead agency, UNESCO should advocate a more coherent coordination of good governance, quality education, financing education and reducing disparities based on gender or income. We should aspire to inclusive quality education – primary, secondary and higher.

Strong commitment to EFA is indispensable to achieve the most important objective – universal primary education, with a strong accent on quality. Jomtien, Dakar and Oslo provide a global vision and concrete measures for attaining these goals.

I shall call on governments to allocate adequate domestic resources to education and on development partners to deliver on commitments and ensure the timely flow of adequate resources through various bilateral and multilateral aid channels in accordance with the Doha Declaration.

In countries making progress towards EFA, UNESCO should target those still excluded from education, with a special emphasis on women and girls. All possible venues for South-South cooperation in the area of education, including the exchange of good practices, should be explored and I shall encourage any such effort.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) can contribute to alleviating poverty and to promoting economic growth.

I am convinced that Education for Sustainable Development based on the interdependence of environment, economy, society and cultural diversity, is the key to a better and more just world of the 21st century.

Science and technology serving humanity

My belief is that science must be one of the priorities. UNESCO should become the leader and mobilizer of governments, specialized agencies and the scientific community in the field of science, innovation and new technologies, including green technologies, under the slogan “Science and technology serving humanity”.

Climatic change, biodiversity, mitigation of natural disasters, water resources management, energy and pandemics, are the new key challenges in science which should be given priority in UNESCO’s programmes, while incorporating the ethical dimension. I welcome the recommendations made in 2006 by the Overall Review Committee on Major Programmes II and III and shall follow them. UNESCO should complement national policies to better integrate science, research and science education.

In order to enhance the visibility of science as a priority, I shall propose the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Committee of eminent personalities such as Nobel Prize Laureates and winners of UNESCO Prizes.

Culture: tolerance, mutual understanding and development

UNESCO is intimately linked with culture and cultural heritage where its mandate is unique and most visible. The preservation of heritage – tangible and intangible and the promotion of cultural diversity, are the most powerful tools of UNESCO for giving globalization a more humanistic and democratic face. I regret that culture is not included in the MDGs and I intend to relaunch the debate on culture and development because culture should accompany every development effort.

Culture and education are best placed to promote peace especially in post-conflict situations, as well as tolerance, respect for human rights and the dignity of the other. UNESCO should reach out more proactively towards initiatives such as Alliance of Civilizations that pursue the same noble objectives.

Communication and Information

Freedom of expression, independent and pluralistic media, free flow of ideas, universal access to information and knowledge through new technologies, are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and good governance.

UNESCO must continue promoting flagship projects such as Memory of the World and the World Digital Library which provide free Internet access to cultural resources of libraries and archives all over the world.

UNESCO should become more involved in the ethical, legal and socio-cultural implications of the Information Society, emphasizing the opportunities which the information and communication technologies provide for every individual.

Finally, I would encourage stronger collaboration between the CI and the BPI in order to enhance the visibility of the Organization.

UNESCO and “One UN”

One of the most important challenges for UNESCO lies in its integration into the “Delivering as One” initiative. I welcome the efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to reorganize and streamline the development activities of the UN agencies, funds and programs. I am convinced that UNESCO should continue to be part of these efforts while decentralizing its operational activities.

UNESCO does not have an alternative but to integrate. I also believe that a deeper and more substantial debate on this subject is needed within UNESCO. I shall initiate such a debate with a view to elaborating a clear strategic vision that would help to promote our objectives as convincingly as possible.

This is one of the many examples that highlight the imperative need of an optimal synergy between the Director-General and the Member States.

Budget, Management and Administration

In my future activity I shall be guided by the following principles:

- Transparency, accountability and result-based approach
- Improved intersectoral coordination and interdisciplinary approach
- Better management of human resources, staff mobility and rotation, encouragement of the spirit of initiative
- Promotion of women to senior posts
- More equitable geographical distribution of Secretariat staff, experts and consultants

Some of the tools for implementing these objectives will be:

- Optimization of UNESCO’s senior management
- Reinforcement of UNESCO’s presence in the field
- Full implementation of the recommendations of the External Auditor
- Strengthening the Internal Oversight Service
- Use of local staff resources especially in countries where UNESCO is not present.

UNESCO’s budget is clearly modest compared with our ambitions. But we have to be realistic – in times of crisis, UNESCO should make a better and more efficient use of the available resources, reduce administrative costs, modernize its structures and become a more reactive and performing organization. Programme implementation should clearly be given priority over administrative activity.

I commend the decision of the OECD Development Aid Committee to raise the UNESCO ODA coefficient from 25% to 44% thus reflecting UNESCO’s significant development aid contribution. I still think it should be increased to 75% and I will work for it.

UNESCO must focus on a reduced number of priorities for which its competence is universally acknowledged, making it an uncontested lead agency. This implies consultation of all parties concerned – a complex and arduous task that requires courage, resolve and patience.

The financing of programmes through extra-budgetary resources is another challenge for the Organization. We are witnessing an increase in extra-budgetary funds and a declining regular budget. A balance must be struck between these two components.

UNESCO's cost recovery policy should alleviate pressure on the regular budget. Without such a policy, the regular budget is becoming increasingly ineffective. This is a challenge which UNESCO should face while harmonizing practices within the UN system.

My credo for UNESCO: new humanism

In my future activities I shall not cede on the respect and dignity of each country – big or small, developed or developing, on the respect and dignity of every human being.

I am more than committed to work in close collaboration with the Member States, the NGOs and the intellectual community with the aim of making UNESCO's action more coherent and efficient, more visible and compliant with the imperatives of the redefined priorities. We must all create a new synergy between the Director-General and the Member States on the basis of strong political will to reform the Organization.

For many years, I have been involved in the efforts to reach gender equality. I have participated in the three major international conferences within the UN Decade for Women held in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). I consider gender equality to be one of the most important goals, both political and humanistic, of our times. I am strongly motivated to make UNESCO invest more efforts in attaining this objective.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which changed the entire world and set free the minds of millions of men and women.

I strongly hope that this spirit will guide our efforts here, at UNESCO, towards the creation of more just and prosperous societies based on knowledge, tolerance and equal opportunities for all through education, science, culture and access to information.

My understanding of a NEW HUMANISM for the 21st century will guide all my activity.

Irina Bokova

Director-General of UNESCO