

“For Our Children”

Today’s turbulent world is marked by increasingly rapid and momentous changes. These changes need to be addressed by the international community or else they risk to undermine shared values and to weaken solidarity and social cohesion. Thus providing fertile breeding ground for conflicts, reviving old historical grudges and deepening religious and ethnic divisions. Additionally, tectonic shifts in technology, resource availability, population growth and climate change, pose threats to our planet’s stability and sustainability. The Agenda 2030 lays out an excellent roadmap for a multilateral response to address these challenges.

The UN-system, despite its imperfections, remains the most appropriate setting for a common assessment and approach to promote stability and sustainable development for peace and security. The UN-system is the bulwark of Human Rights. As emphasized by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, they are embedded in all UN-entities, each having to play its own complementary role.

Since its foundation, UNESCO’s noble aim has been to contribute to peace, dignity, equality and mutual respect, and to protect fundamental freedoms, notably freedom of expression, free flow of ideas and access to knowledge. To remain credible and fulfil its objectives, UNESCO, with its Member States’ goodwill, must **reduce the over-politicization** of its work that has at times made it a tinderbox impeding the achievement of its goals.

We must downplay differences, learn to make diversity our strength and unite around our common interests. It’s not too much to ask if we want a peaceful future for our children. These were life lessons that my generation - the ‘war generation’ - learned the hardest of all ways, as my country, Lebanon, painfully and slowly extricated itself from the insanity of seventeen years of violence, hatred and destruction.

Engaging in debates on the most sensitive and divisive subjects should not prevent us from focusing on what unites us.

What could unite us? What aspirations, values and ambitions do we all share? What is our **strongest common denominator**, regardless of our culture, our colour, our gender or our religion? The answer is **Our Children**.

We all desire a bright future for our daughters and sons.
We want them to fulfil their potential.
We want them to secure decent and fulfilling jobs.
We want them to become responsible free citizens.
We want them to live in a culturally diverse and inclusive society.
We want them to live in peace on a sustainable planet.

These goals touch UNESCO's core mandate. We therefore need to create and sustain a **Safe Haven for constructive dialogue and cooperation** within UNESCO to allow **Education, Sciences, Culture, Communication and Information** - now more than ever - **to Unite Us**.

Today, mankind is navigating in uncharted waters, transitioning from the industrial era to the era of connectivity. Fears arising from this disruption to our current way-of-life must be balanced against the exciting opportunities that new technologies present. This balance rests on ensuring that a more technological world results in a more humane world.

We need to adopt a positive stance towards technological advancement and harness it in a responsible way to serve human progress and improve living standards in inclusive societies. In this era of connectivity, UNESCO should stay alert to the ethical implications of technological change and aim for digital equality. UNESCO needs to provide a **Safe Haven for Dialogue on the Ethics of the 'Era of Connectivity'**.

How do we prepare **Our Children** for jobs that don't exist today? What foundational, transitional and life skills are needed in 2030?

The truth is nobody really knows. Technological advances are driving a constant evolution and transformation of the workplace and of professions. New jobs that require **new skills** are being created. Knowledge and mobility are becoming an inescapable entry point for any job no matter how modest. Therefore significant emphasis must be placed on being able to learn, develop and adapt as new roles and tasks arise.

It is difficult to precisely predict the long-term impacts of this technological disruption. However, trends provide us with insight into the skills needed for tomorrow. Education policies and curricula must be informed by these trends. UNESCO must be the **'Knowledge Hub'**, leveraging all its networks,

analysing trends and translating information into knowledge Member States can tap into and use.

In the era of connectivity, the role of education and teachers has to change from “transferring knowledge to children” to “facilitating education and unearthing talents from each child”. “If children cannot learn the way we teach, we must teach the way they learn”.

Moreover, all of us need to invest in **quality education at all levels**, especially for girls, and particularly girls in science. Education must promote creativity, problem solving, resilience and entrepreneurship. The profile and image of Technical and Vocational Education need to be upgraded and tightly dovetailed with the private sector in anticipation of tomorrow’s jobs. The exponential growth in e-learning possibilities and access to online open educational resources require a continuous establishment and update of norms for certifications and diploma recognition. Moreover, the need to embrace a culture of Lifelong Learning is an absolute priority due to the speed at which the world is changing.

Our Children deserve a life blessed with peace and security. When violence becomes pervasive, whether in the form of extremism, radicalization, gang culture or illegal trafficking, the ability of our youth to learn, to work and to contribute positively to society becomes seriously hampered. UNESCO has therefore to respond to all forms of violence holistically, by clearing homes, schools and societies from hostility and turning them into places for learning and dialogue.

These challenges cannot be addressed by applying traditional approaches that are no longer successful. **Innovative approaches** explored at UNESCO’s Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace (MGIEP) show promising results. The institute engages with youth directly and make them part of the solution. Based on cognitive learning, behavioural transformation and socio-emotional skills development, MGIEP uses new technology as a tool to transform education to build peaceful sustainable societies, which allows children to interpret and understand the world through ‘critical inquiry’, to strengthen their moral courage to act and to build **empathy and compassion**.

Africa is the continent where the impact of new technologies has brought about the most spectacular leap forward. Unfortunately, many challenges

remain. Africa's staggering population growth, twice the global average, has serious implications on critical issues such as youth unemployment, illiteracy, gender inequality, connectivity and climate change, urgently requiring a decisive integrated response by UNESCO.

We have to act together if we want to leave to **Our Children** a healthy planet to live on. Climate change is "the defining challenge of our time" and UNESCO must intensify its efforts to contribute to this global effort to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change. Education, sciences, culture, communication and information should aim to influence our common mind-set.

UNESCO's current focus on those communities and countries that are the most vulnerable and the most negatively impacted by climate change must be translated into purposeful action.

Mankind cannot prosper without decisive action to mitigate climate change and manage biodiversity, freshwater resources and oceans. Indeed, the very existence of populations living in low-lying coastal regions and small islands developing states is threatened by sea-level rises.

UNESCO's cultural Conventions safeguard, transmit, promote and protect culture and heritage. They are visible flagships, generating new forms of revenue, but they need to remain **effective and credible**.

The recent destruction of unique cultural heritage highlights the importance of protecting and preserving culture in conflict zones. Preservation goes beyond the material protection of mere historical artefacts. It touches our identities and our common history.

Culture is not a static set of inherited traits, values and patterns of behaviour. It is an evolving process. What was considered 'modern' in the past, is 'tradition' today. And what is modern today, is tomorrow's tradition. What matters is maintaining the dialogue. UNESCO should provide a **safe haven for cultural dialogue**, focusing on what unites us, ensuring all voices are heard, in particular those of minorities and women.

With regard to women, Alfred de Vigny said: "After studying the condition of women in all times and in all countries, I came to the conclusion that instead of saying good morning to them, one should ask for their forgiveness". Unfortunately, this nineteenth century quote remains valid today. Doesn't this call for a more **daring approach to gender equality**?

While UNESCO's mandate and functions remain relevant, its ability to tackle the challenges faced requires ever-greater resilience, anticipation and resourcefulness. UNESCO has to modernise its processes and optimise the use of modern technology, to transform it into a real **e-Agency**.

UNESCO has to become **agile** in its approach to management and administration - more innovative - with a fresh mind-set. The Organization should adopt the **Jugaad mind-set**, which is an approach based on the principles where, abundance is found in scarcity, adversity is turned into opportunity, solutions are innovative, the status quo is constantly questioned, and where people work with their hearts.

UNESCO needs to **make impact and measure outcome**. To be **effective**, UNESCO has to do the right things. To be **efficient**, UNESCO has to do things right.

More than ad-hoc temporary boosts to its revenue, UNESCO needs **stable, predictable and sustainable funding** by further opening up to external partners and creating an ecosystem of innovative revenue models to expand its capacity to deliver and improve the cost-effectiveness of programme implementation.

Moreover, UNESCO's ability to attract funding is directly associated with its **credibility**, level of transparency, accountability, and with its ability to deliver impactful and evidence-based results that demonstrate value to Member States.

However, if UNESCO wishes to significantly enlarge its funding base and access alternative funding, it has to look to **professional fundraisers**. UNESCO's success stories have potential for fundraising and some themes even qualify for structural crowd funding.

The Secretariat is of paramount importance in these transformations, where managers are leaders and staff members are talents. **Empowered leaders and talents** are accountable for their responsibilities and act accordingly. The Director-General should encourage initiative, experimentation, creativity and network building. All of this with greater oversight, transparency and accountability inward, outward and at all levels.

UNESCO built up over the decades a unique set of partnerships and networks, starting with its National Commissions, forming a far-reaching web of synergies and relationships, waiting to be leveraged in new and creative ways, including crowd sourcing. UNESCO's outreach needs to be more innovative to ensure that the **multiplier effect** attains its full potential.

The interlinked Sustainable Development Goals engage many stakeholders. UNESCO must focus on its **comparative advantage** and support the work of others where appropriate. A new culture of partnerships means preferring synergy to turf battles, collaboration to competition, an understanding that we either succeed together or not at all.

The position of Director-General is not a job. It is a mission, a **vocation** to serve, a commitment to put UNESCO's interest before one's own. Such a vocation does not suddenly emerge on the eve of an election.

An inspiring Leader for UNESCO is:

One who leads by example.

One who is fair and impartial - a consensus builder.

One who believes more in responsibilities than prerogatives.

One with team spirit and faith in the personnel.

The new Director-General must strive to make UNESCO the best possible organization: a model of transparency, accountability, ethics, innovation and results - one that serves all Member States based on their needs, since one size doesn't fit all - one that recognizes the multidimensional aspect of poverty and follows the ethos of "**Leaving no one behind**".

UNESCO has been through troubled times. This ordeal can be turned into a new opportunity - not relying on past models, but **leapfrogging to a new model** fit for the era of connectivity.

This is, of course, an immense ambition. But as Sergio de Mello once said: "Unless we aim for the seemingly unattainable, we risk settling for mediocrity."

Let's aim for "the seemingly unattainable".

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