

## **Toespraak/landenstatement van de minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Ingrid van Engelshoven, bij UNESCO op 13 november 2019**

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

75 years ago Europe tasted freedom again. We treasured it, we devoured it, we celebrated it.

And we decided: never again should we lose control over our peaceful co-existence.

The United Nations came into being.

The foundations for the work of UNESCO were built.

And the Universal Declaration on Human rights was written, inspired by UNESCO's efforts to assemble great thinkers from all over the world. Freedom complemented by collaboration. Universality supplemented by plurality of expression. Unity in diversity.

However, 75 years later... freedom and equality still need our full attention.

In the light of the rise of populism, for instance, and of fake news and misinformation. And unfortunately, war, conflict and terror are still present, today. They destroy our cultural heritage, the heart of our identity. Over and over again history is one of our best (and brutal) teachers.

65 years ago, some ten years after the end of the Second World War, the 'The Hague convention' to safeguard cultural heritage during conflict also saw the light. We believe UNESCO plays a vital role in uniting the international community to safeguard and restore heritage, and to stop illicit trade in cultural goods.

In this respect, The Netherlands is keen on working with the international community, and taking responsibility as a member of the committee against illicit trade in cultural goods.

Freedom to express our culture and identity is vital. Yet this identity is forever changing. Collaboration and connecting to others, transforms us and our cultures. Safeguarding cultural heritage all around the globe, including intangible heritage, is vital. It contributes to mutual understanding, builds trust and paves the way for dialogue between peoples.

The Netherlands is proud to be part of this dialogue within the committee dealing with intangible heritage.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

To live in freedom also means looking back at the past with an open mind, including at painful histories, and to involve everyone in our open societies in this debate. Colonial heritage and slavery are also part of our history. Material evidence of this past is present in our museums. In certain cases this is contested.

I attach great value to the role UNESCO plays as a platform for dialogue on our past, including on our colonial past and colonial collections, for example in the Return Committee and the Slave Route project.

This last project contributes to a better understanding of different aspects of slavery, which helps the dialogue within our diverse societies of today. And so does the project 'Root to Freedom' of the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, a valuable addition to the Latin American and Caribbean list of the 'memory of the world' program for documentary heritage.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

2020 will be a remarkable year for the Netherlands. We will host UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day in April in The Hague.

The Netherlands strongly supports UNESCO's work on the protection of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. We have a longstanding tradition in human rights and press freedom and are honoured to facilitate the discussion on these important topics, next year.

Basic freedoms and human rights are among the most important ingredients of democracy. These values relate to a life lesson we try to teach the youngest in our schools: being able to share life with others.

It is a life-long lesson and activity that never loses its value and impact.

Freedom and collaboration therefore means: remembering our childhood lessons of sharing. Through open access to knowledge, open science, open data; through making our algorithms transparent and using artificial intelligence responsibly.

In order to safeguard freedom during times of [digital] societal transformation, we need a dialogue between science and society, aided by a dialogue between the social sciences and the natural sciences with its technical innovations.

All positive transformation is caused by openness, dialogue and collaboration. This is why we attach importance to the Social Transformations programme of UNESCO.

In that light I expressed my enthusiasm in hosting last months' event on Artificial Intelligence and ethics, [together with Mme Azoulay]. Drafting a new recommendation on AI and ethics is a way to make all voices heard, while shaping our exciting new future together.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

In the years to come, UNESCO will once again show its value as a platform for the world to come together.

As a member of the Executive Board The Netherlands will continue to support UNESCO's mandate.

Living in Freedom, collaborating, respecting Unity in Diversity, using culture as a way to sustainable societies, reconciling with the painful pages of our past, celebrating freedom of expression, as well as sharing science for society. These are among the challenges of our time, to keep freedom alive. 75 years ago and now.

Thank you.