

New Zealand Plenary Speech to the 40th UNESCO General Conference

Tihei mauri ora!

Te Whare etu nei, tena koe !

Te papa i waho nei, tena koe !

Te mana whenua o tenei rohe, tena koutou

Te hunga mate ki te hunga mate, haere haere haere

Te hunga ora ki a tatou te hunga ora

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa

We greet this house, we greet this land, we greet the people here.

We think of those who have gone before us, we give thanks for those of us here today.

Greetings to each of you, from New Zealand, Aotearoa.

Mr President

The Christchurch terrorist attacks of 15 March 2019, which took the lives of 51 innocent people in their place of worship, shook our nation. It was an attack the likes of which our country had never seen before – designed to weaponise the internet, to go viral, to re-victimise our community, de-humanise the victims and their families, to spread fear and hatred, and to inspire more violence.

Our government was decisive in its response - there was no room for hate. As our Prime Minister said during the National memorial service:

“we cannot confront these issues alone, none of us can. But the answer to them lies in a simple concept that is not bound by domestic borders, that isn’t based on ethnicity, power base or even forms of governance. The answer lies in our humanity”.

This recalls the opening to the Constitution of UNESCO “it is in the minds of humanity that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

Knowing though, that this hatred continued to breed both on and offline, on 15 May 2019, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron convened government leaders and technology companies in Paris to announce the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.

Since this first meeting, tremendous progress has been made to prevent the abuse of the internet as occurred in the Christchurch attacks. This includes the following tangible outcomes which were announced at a Leaders Dialogue in September hosted by Prime Minister Ardern, President Macron, King Abdullah of Jordan and the UN Office of Counter Terrorism:

- Radical restructuring of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism into an independent body
- The launch of a new crisis response protocol to coordinate and manage impacts of terrorist and violent extremist attacks with an online component.

- The establishment of a Christchurch Call Advisory Network comprised of civil society and NGO representatives
- There are now 48 countries, 3 international organisations and eight tech companies who have declared support for the Call.

A founding principle of the Call is to ensure that action taken be consistent with the principles of a free, open and secure internet, and without compromising human rights and fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression.

UNESCO is well placed to ensure these rights remain at the forefront in addition to its expertise in education, media literacy and countering violent extremism. Its multi sectoral approach lends itself well to the multi-stakeholder diplomacy that underpins the Christchurch Call.

New Zealand is pleased that UNESCO has expressed its support to the Call and we thank Director General Azoulay for being present at the recent leader's dialogue in New York. We look forward to working with UNESCO as we continue to promote meaningful action to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.

Mr President

The solidarity demonstrated among New Zealanders after the March 15 attacks led the National Commission to intensify its efforts to carry out UNESCO's mandate in New Zealand.

This included the Commission initiating a national youth diversity forum which brought together 90 young people of diverse faiths and cultures from around the country. What was built over two days was a network of young New Zealanders, passionate about whanaungatanga—kinship and connection—who will demonstrate leadership in the decades to come.

The young people called for the nurturing of strong and inclusive communities that enable courageous inter-generational conversations, and where all people can find a sense of belonging and contribute to shaping the future of our nation, Aotearoa.

Mr President

New Zealand encourages UNESCO to maintain a strong physical presence in the Pacific when designing the new field office structure. To put it simply, as we respond to contemporary global challenges, UNESCO needs the Pacific and the Pacific needs UNESCO:

He waka eke Noa – we are all in this together.

New Zealand particularly values the work that the IOC is doing on Oceans for Small Island Developing States. We look forward to supporting the Decade for Science of Ocean Sustainability, a framework that recognises the important contributions of traditional knowledge, culture and science.

Mr President

New Zealand has put wellbeing at the centre of policy-making, through the adoption of a government wellbeing strategy. This approach supports productive, sustainable and inclusive intergenerational development. Importantly, as we are an increasingly interconnected, global society, we have a responsibility to foster informed, active global citizens. The National Commission is supporting domestic Global Citizenship Education which enables our young leaders to make important contributions nationally and internationally.

Finally, Mr President, we want to register that New Zealand supports the proposed amendment to Article V of the Constitution. We believe this amendment will promote greater diversity and foster fresh thinking that will help sustain the vitality of UNESCO in the years to come.

Working together, we will continue to 'construct the defences of peace'.

No reira,

Tena Koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa