



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

**Address by Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**to the High-Level Round Table on “Inclusive Societies, Sustainable  
Planet” on the occasion of *World Philosophy Day 2013***

**UNESCO, 21 November 2013**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to welcome you to this House.

As you know, UNESCO is a quintessentially optimistic institution.

Our constitution – indeed, our very identity as an Organization -- is grounded in a very sober analysis of how the disasters of the 1930s and 1940s happened and of how their recurrence could be rendered impossible and eventually unthinkable, on the basis of deep and sustained intellectual and moral solidarity between all peoples.

This vision of peace through solidarity embodies what I see as UNESCO's foundational 'realistic optimism.'

It is a deep conviction that things can be changed for the better, founded on thinking about what could go wrong, driven by an awareness that solidarity cannot be taken for granted.

This means we must look to the future and not be afraid to ask difficult questions.

In 30 years' time, will we live in a world where science and technology sustain human empowerment, or rather serve as new technologies of social control, creating 'virtual chains' for digital subjects?

Will we live in inclusive knowledge societies, or will the prosperous have parted company from their fellow citizens, living in gated communities, while those left behind fight for residual bits of reduced global prosperity?

Will persistent failure to take seriously the challenges of environmental change – see what happened in Philippines and its effect on the population - have reduced whole regions to wastelands, leaving our ocean acidified, because we pretended we had the capacity to manage and mitigate the impact of climate change?

Looking at worrying trends underway across the world today, these futures cannot ruled out.

It is our duty to make possible the positive alternatives.

And, I believe, it is our founding optimism that assures us we can.

This Round Table organized today and this *World Philosophy Day* are opportunities to bring the full weight of philosophy to bear on these questions, to explore ways to prevent radically exclusive societies or a radically unsustainable planet.

These two issues -- and above all their combination -- reflect major themes running through the history of philosophy.

The risk of seeing the prosperous part company from their fellow citizens raises the question of justice, which has been central to philosophy since its origins.

Justice has been a key theme in the General Conference which was just closed, as it has always been in this Organization.

As John Rawls said,

*Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.*

What does justice mean today?

What are its links with social cohesion, inclusion and tolerance in societies marked by growing urbanization, rising diversity, deepening inequalities?

I would suggest that justice means no decent society can be shaped only by the interplay of formal rights and obligations.

An inclusive society is one not just equipped with the mechanics of justice, but also endowed with the emotional texture of solidarity.

Societies, as you know, are patterns of meanings and shared experiences within which fellow citizens recognize and relate to one another at many different levels.

This calls for more integrated policies, and this is essential to what could be called “social sustainability.”

This is a key feature of my understanding of the new humanism that I have made a guiding principle for UNESCO’s action.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je viens d’évoquer le problème traditionnel – bien que terriblement complexe – de la justice entre les humains.

Mais l’évolution du monde actuel nous appelle à intégrer une dimension supplémentaire : comprendre comment les humains interagissent avec leur environnement non-humain.

Le changement environnemental mondial – qui englobe le changement climatique, la perte de la biodiversité, la pression sur les ressources en eau douce – est souvent considéré comme un enjeu d’abord technique et scientifique.

En réalité, c’est surtout un problème social et humain.

L'activité humaine contribue à façonner l'environnement – et contribue à le fragiliser - et notre environnement en retour façonne les sociétés dans lesquelles nous vivons.

La durabilité de notre planète a une incidence directe sur la durabilité des sociétés.

Et j'ai lu avec grand intérêt comme certaines notions comme celle de «l'appropriation » proposée par le professeur Zarka, permettent de comprendre à la fois comment les humains se blessent entre eux en société, et comme ils blessent le système planétaire.

Plus la réalité devient complexe, plus nous devons y réfléchir et l'objectif premier de la philosophie est d'encourager cette réflexion critique. Elle joue un rôle essentiel et doit être enseignée et pratiquée, dans les écoles, dès le plus jeune âge, pour former les citoyens éclairés de demain.

La tâche de l'UNESCO est d'agir comme laboratoire d'idées et je suis reconnaissante aux professeurs Yves-Charles Zarka, Ali Benmakhlouf, Tanella Boni et Ioanna Kuçuradi de venir partager leurs idées à l'UNESCO, pour cette journée de la Philosophie, et de dire avec nous que la construction d'un avenir meilleur est à la fois une tâche philosophique mais aussi un défi pratique.

Je vous remercie.