

## **An ambition for UNESCO**

At a time when we see the resurgence of tensions that we thought had subsided, fundamental freedoms being chipped away, and whole communities forced to flee poverty and violence, at a time when demands based on identity and religion are stoking national and international discord, at a time when environmental hazards are materializing, UNESCO's mission is more crucial than ever.

UNESCO must assert itself with ambition as the conscience of the United Nations, to return to the founding words of Leon Blum, it must fully assume the entire scope of its mission and reject any vision that limits its mandate.

It is through education, culture, the dissemination of science and sustainable development and the defence of humanist values that UNESCO can bring new life to the deepest and, in the long term, the surest mainsprings of the United Nations universalist project of peace and democracy.

UNESCO is this unique, legitimate place that affords well-intentioned men and women a space for dialogue, that is not shut off from the tensions in the world, but on the contrary, enables them to address those tensions without resorting to sterile, confrontational attitudes.

This ambition means change for UNESCO, both in the implementation of its missions and in its organization. UNESCO, as a forum for thought and operational organization, has its own primordial place in the United Nations system.

It is essential that it embody fully each of the roles assigned to it, throughout the world, determinedly and effectively, using new technological and conceptual tools, fostering a global approach so as to create synergies across all its fields of action.

### **Education as the stimulus of development and gender equality**

Although school attendance worldwide has increased steadily in recent decades, progress has not been linear. Getting children into schools and combating illiteracy are still a priority for UNESCO, which must strengthen its action by targeting more closely areas that require specific assistance in structuring basic education.

Beyond primary education, the Organization has a global vision of education as a process accompanying citizens throughout their lives so that they may become fully engaged in a changing world. Sustainable Development Goal 4, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, is to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. As lead agency for SDG 4-Education 2030, UNESCO must now implement the four main aspects defined in May 2016.

Science and culture contribute through education to individual emancipation that enables us to combat obscurantism. Education is the key lever to combat isolationism and enable a genuine opening up to others. It helps us to understand and share knowledge and common values, based on respect for difference. That is why education will be my priority. This ambition must be restated, in particular in Africa, including through the support of the great networks that are also the strength of the Organization, namely the Associated Schools network and UNESCO Chairs, innovative ways of promoting international educational and academic cooperation.

Promotion of education must make full use of the opportunities afforded by the digital revolution. Accompanying the establishment of the infrastructure required by modern communications technology is indispensable in plans to support education.

Too many girls still do not have equal access to the secondary education they need to gain the autonomy to which all individuals aspire. And yet it has been shown over and over again that raising the level of girls' education is one of the most effective drivers of social progress and economic development, and it is my conviction as a woman that the road to parity is a road to progress for society as a whole.

### **Re-establishing cultural ambition for UNESCO**

Thanks to its expertise and the quality of its staff, UNESCO has asserted itself as the unopposed world authority in terms of culture. It is at the heart of international standard-setting in the field. These achievements must be maintained and strengthened. Synergies between the different conventions and programmes in the field of culture must be sought.

Culture, however, is often targeted by obscurantists, as it is what connects individuals, a factor of freedom, democracy and development.

Heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is one of the bases of the identity of peoples who have protected it for centuries. To destroy a work or a building of the past is to attack the culture and memory of peoples. From Timbuktu to Palmyra, from Bamiyan to Mosul, whenever a centuries-old work is destroyed, it is humanity itself that is under attack, in its history and its values. We must confront identity-based passions with the pacifying virtues of a world heritage conceived of as being the foundation of a memory shared among peoples in a spirit of tolerance and recognition of otherness and, further, to make of it the basis for a shared vision of the future.

UNESCO is a driving force in the protection and reconstruction of destroyed heritage, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the bridge in Mostar, in Cambodia, in Angkor. The Director-General, Irina Bokova, has been especially engaged in defending the heritage under threat, as in Mali for example. To continue the actions she has launched, such as #Unite4Heritage, this mobilization must be pursued relentlessly, in partnership with international and regional initiatives to find the means to protect cultural property and sites.

This will be the case, for instance, of the partnership with the International Alliance for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Conflict Zones (ALIPH), founded as a result of the international conference held in Abu Dhabi in December 2016.

The fight against trafficking, corollary to the protection of the heritage, and the fight against the financing of terrorism, must be reinforced by making international conventions more effective, by accompanying efforts to harmonize legislation and ensure cooperation between government authorities, and by strengthening a universalist global citizenship education to protect the heritage.

The other pitfall we must confront is the rampant standardization of cultures. UNESCO affirmed forcefully in its 2005 convention that cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity, and that it should be preserved and promoted for the benefit of all. Diversity conveys tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures.

The globalization of trade and the opening up of markets, together with the digital revolution, set unprecedented challenges in terms of access to culture, knowledge sharing, diversity and freedom of creativity, movement of works and fairness of trade. In ten years, we have gone from an age of rarity to an age of mass online access to cultural property. This has far-reaching consequences in terms of funding the creative industries. At the same time, other challenges have arisen, such as neutrality of access to information, and referencing of a diverse offering.

By adopting draft operational guidelines in 2016, UNESCO has acknowledged that diversity must also be preserved in the digital world. This is a new challenge to meet. I undertake to promote all mechanisms that foster the preservation of cultural diversity in the new media.

### **Making UNESCO a key player in sustainable development**

In a world that is reaching its biophysical limits, science, technology and innovation play a crucial role in rising to economic, social and environmental challenges and improving the sustainable management of our natural resources. States today must respond to these challenges and more particularly to the danger to the climate and the environment, in partnership with civil society.

UNESCO plays a major role in the dissemination of tools to combat climate change and promote scientific research and exchanges, as shown by the Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB). It also protects natural sites abundant in biodiversity that is protected and valued by people.

Following the Paris Agreement on Climate Change of December 2015, the Organization can become further involved in the strategic question of sustainable development, as a key player.

As guarantor of independent scientific research conducted for the benefit of the general interest, UNESCO must also foster closer ties between research and public policies so that such policies might benefit further from advances in knowledge, in particular in the field of the social sciences, as reflected in the ambition of the MOST Programme. UNESCO must perform in full its mission of looking to the future and promoting scientific cooperation and education. Work in the field of ethics and bioethics must be continued; UNESCO is the forum for pooling scientific expertise in the matter.

### **UNESCO as an intellectual forum in the service of universal values**

As the Organization bears the intellectual and moral force that led to its foundation at a time of post-war reconstruction, it must strengthen its ties with the great thinkers of our time, intellectuals, scientists, great artists, representatives of all cultures. They must act as the representatives of the universality of human thought and the progress of civilizations so as to convey their own values across borders. The role of the social and human sciences is essential in this respect, in order to better understand and appreciate the great changes in societies, past and present. UNESCO must also rely on the dynamism and creativity of civil society as well as of other agencies in the United States system.

Everywhere in the world, UNESCO defends freedom of expression. The safety of journalists is in this respect a key objective incumbent upon it. The new digital media must also be in the service of this ambition so as to expand its audience.

Lastly, UNESCO is the organization of dialogue between peoples, and not an echo chamber for quarrelling States. It is a place for debate and reflection on the major issues of our time, the House of dialogue where the people who make a difference in science, education, culture and communication can exchange ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect, around shared fundamental values. Conflict prevention must always be a priority so as to avoid stalemates.

### **Making UNESCO more effective to the benefit of all**

The crucial challenges we must all face together require the Organization to act faster, with a clear, comprehensible and effective method of governance. That is why efforts must be continued to make it more present in the field, as close as possible to States and communities, in particular through the continuation of the field office reform.

It is for the Director-General, on the basis of the will of the States, to implement the guidance arising therefrom by finding the necessary consensus and by setting goals that might be identified and evaluated taking into account the realities of the budget.

The Organization must reaffirm its universal nature, which means the participation of each, according to their means, in the funding of programmes. The Director-General must continue to work indefatigably to seek financing, whether it be from States, so that they enhance their responsibility in terms of international solidarity, or through the introduction of new forms of

financing. Cooperation with local authorities, scientific and cultural institutions, foundations and major museums must be institutionalized and reinforced. Greater visibility of available funds must be sought in the framework of structured financing dialogue so as to better allocate extrabudgetary resources in priority programmes.

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This is, in a few lines, the ambition upheld by this candidature, which rests on the idea that more than ever, UNESCO has a major role to play in the world of today and of tomorrow.

**Audrey Azoulay**