



STATEMENT

President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly

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Introductory Remarks

President of the General Conference, Her Excellency, Ms. Zohour Alaoui

Director-General of UNESCO, Ms. Irina Bokova

Distinguished Heads of State and Government

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to be here, at this **Leaders' Forum** of the **39th UNESCO General Conference**. I want to **thank** Director-General **Bokova** for inviting me to address you.

I will start by telling you something you **already know**: *(pause)* **multilateralism is facing challenges**. This is nothing new. The **stakes of disengagement** from our multilateral system *are*, however, **new**. That is because they have **never been higher**. If we don't take action, these stakes will not work in our favor.

This morning, I will share **four** main messages about the future of multilateralism, and UNESCO's role in it.

I. [Role for Multilateralism]

The **first** is that we **need multilateralism** - more than ever before.

The United Nations has now been alive for **72** years. This is a **full lifetime** of multilateralism. It is against this backdrop that we approach today's tests and challenges.

Cooperation between nations has brought us **tremendous benefit**. It has shown us that working **together** yields **more and better results** than when we act **alone**. In **2015**, our international community achieved **two** very important **milestones**, in the form of the **Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement**. If implemented, these

agreements will **protect the planet**, and make it a **better place to live for everyone**.

Multilateralism has also had a major role in **advancing peace**. It has allowed us to rally in support of **peace agreements**, and to **mobilize against threats** to international peace and security. Recently, the UN and its Member States have worked to respond to the **changing nature of these threats**. We have committed to taking **quicker, earlier** and more **inclusive** action to **prevent conflicts** from breaking out. And, led by the **2016 Sustaining Peace resolutions**, we have tasked ourselves with pooling the **vast capacity and expertise** within the UN system **against** old and new threats to peace - from **political violence** to **international terrorism**. Additionally, very soon, we will negotiate the **first international framework** to ensure safe, orderly and regular **migration**.

I want to point something out: these agreements are not like regular contracts. They do not tell us what will happen if a party is in breach, or does not fulfil its duties. That is because the challenges which brought them about are too **urgent** and **interconnected** for this. Humanity cannot afford for any of us to opt out or to choose to act on **one** part of our agreements and not the others. In an **increasingly globalized world**, no **one** body or country can face our problems **alone**. In the same way, if **one** body or country

fails to respond, it could **affect us all**. Which is why **all** of us need to fulfill **all** of our promises.

If we want the next generation to be born into a better world, we only have **one** option. And that is **strong multilateralism**, with the **United Nations System at its core**.

II. [Role of UNESCO]

My second message is that **UNESCO plays a critical role** in our multilateral system.

It has **rallied** actors from all over the world to protect our **shared cultural heritage**. It has promoted cooperation for advances in **education, science and technology**, which benefit us all. As a critical specialized agency, it has offered **vital support** to many **UN** initiatives.

The role played by UNESCO in our multilateral system is really defined by **people** – by the impact that its work has had on men, women, boys and girls. This impact has been felt by a **Syrian student**, who can pursue her dreams through a UNESCO scholarship. It has been felt, too, by a **Zimbabwean child**, who has helped his school transform into a ‘green oasis’ with UNESCO’s support. And it has been felt by the young people who gathered here last week for the **10th Annual UNESCO Youth Forum**. Their ideas will be presented to this **General Conference**. This is a

welcome step to ensuring that **young people** drive their own **solutions** to the challenges they face.

Amidst the success of UNESCO's work, it has suffered **setbacks**. I **regret the decision of member states to withdraw** from membership of UNESCO. Director-General **Bokova** aptly described this as a "**loss for multilateralism**". Make no mistake: any loss for multilateralism is a loss for people and our humanity. That being said, we must continue to find ways to work together so that we can turn setbacks into advances. The key to this is **maintaining dialogue**.

III. [Need for Real Dialogue]

This brings me to my **third** message, which is that **multilateralism must go beyond ceremony**. It cannot be something that takes place only on **formal documents**, or at **high-level events**. If we are to ensure this, we need to prioritize real interaction, and **real dialogue**.

This must happen at **all levels**. But it is particularly important for you, the **leaders**. Political differences between leaders have traditionally meant the difference between life and death, peace and war. Now, they could also mean the difference between a sustainable planet and one that can no longer support the life we are currently living. So, dialogue

is not an *option* - it is a **duty**. And it is a duty not for some - but for **all**.

We do come from **diverse backgrounds**. We do **hold different positions** on the world's most pressing issues. **Our interests, at times, do diverge**. But we have seen that convergence **can** be found - particularly when it comes to our human dignity, peace, the protection of our environment, and our common humanity. **Multilateralism cannot be a competition** where the most powerful prevail. Multilateralism cannot be something we opt into, only when it suits our interests. Multilateralism cannot see dialogue be replaced by a succession of monologue. If we go in this direction, we risk undermining all of the progress we have made since World War II.

To quote a slightly modernized version of lines from UNESCO's Constitution, '*Since wars begin in the **minds of men and women**, it is in the minds of men and women that the **defences of peace** must be constructed.*'

We cannot construct **defenses of peace** on the battlefield. Similarly, **defenses of our planet** will fall if their foundations are weakened by deforestation or rising sea levels. These defences must instead be built in our minds, from **dialogue and exchanges** we have in rooms like this, all over the world. They must be **built** before it is **too late**. And the **United Nations must lead** the charge. It must act

as an honest broker, leveraging its **neutrality** and **experience** for meaningful dialogue.

I want to thank UNESCO, for - today and throughout this week - providing us with a platform for this very important task.

IV. [UNESCO/UNGA Cooperation]

My final message is that cooperation between UNESCO and the UN General Assembly must continue and grow.

I look forward to our collaboration on many issues including:

1/ Peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In April, I will convene a **High-Level Event** in New York to **raise visibility of Sustaining Peace**. It will focus on the UN's reinvigorated commitment to **conflict prevention**, as well as the need for **stronger support for peacebuilding**. My team has developed a **roadmap** for the Event. It aims to ensure that we draw from the **rich expertise, experiences** and **ideas** of stakeholders across the board in preparing for the Event. **Today's meeting** is a key part of this roadmap. UNESCO's work in fostering a culture of peace and "building peace in the minds of men and women" recognizes that peace cannot be sustained on paper only. Peace must be felt in the hearts and minds people. I also hope that I will be inviting many of you to New York in April.

2/ Water and sanitation. These are two essential elements for a decent life. Unfortunately, they are not yet accessible to everyone. In March, I will launch the **International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development"**. UNESCO's leading role in this domain is undeniable, and I count on its support.

3/ Youth, education and the prevention of violent extremism. UNESCO has acted as a **pioneer** in these **three** areas. In particular, I commend its focus on **education** as a tool to **prevent violent extremism**. Next year, I will be organizing a related event in New York. Its aim is to give **louder voices to young people** on issues that affect them, including education and skills training, employment opportunities and youth-led implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. I look forward to engagement with UNESCO and all of you here today;

4/ Climate action. We need **urgent action on climate change** in order to secure a sustainable planet for future generations. UNESCO's work in exploring **science** for a sustainable future, as well as initiatives like "one planet, one ocean", will be critical as we implement the Paris Agreement;

5/ Financing for development. The 2030 Agenda has very significant resource implications across the developed and developing world. **According to UNCTAD**, the **total investment needs** for the Sustainable Development Goals

are an estimated **5 to 7 trillion US dollars per year**. In order to **mobilize** this much-needed finance, we must work to integrate **private investment** and attract **new financial resources**, including from non-traditional actors. We also need to address the **bottlenecks** hampering financial flows towards SDG implementation and the countries in dire need of financial resources. UNESCO and Madame Bokova have time and again made the case for **investment in education**. I am in full agreement with the thinking that **putting resources towards sustainable development, including education, will save us money elsewhere**. History has **discredited the wait-and-see approach of reacting** to crises out of fear **instead of preventing** them in the first place. Financing our Global Goals will be a priority for my Presidency. I will count on all of you for your input and support.

6/ Migration. The adoption of the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** will be a **defining moment** for the United Nations. The emphasis that UNESCO places on the **“human face of migration”** is directly in line with my focus on people. Through its work, UNESCO has shown that promoting respect for **cultural diversity**, and encouraging **social inclusion** of migrants, can **enrich** communities. It can also **prevent extremism** on all sides. As we get deeper into the process of negotiating this Compact, I encourage continued engagement from UNESCO.

Suffice it to say, therefore, that there are **many links** between the **priorities of the General Assembly**, and the experiences and expertise of **UNESCO**. I hope that my participation today acts as one of many steps towards **even deeper engagement** throughout the **72nd Session**.

Conclusion

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today we meet in the format of the **Global Leaders Forum**. So, I address you all as **leaders** - as those who hold the keys to a **better future for us all**.

The tasks that lie ahead of you are **vast**. The **challenges** facing this planet, and the people that live on it, have **never been higher** since the United Nations was created.

I make a call to you today: Let us **recommit** to **multilateralism**. Let us **fulfill the promises** we have made to allow all people to live a **decent life**, in **peace**, on a sustainable planet. Let us mobilize to **strengthen UNESCO**, and the **wider United Nations system**.

And let us all start with a very simple step: by **talking to each other**.

Thank you.