



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**

**Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of the opening  
of the 194th session of the Executive Board**

**UNESCO, 7 April 2014**

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Mr President of the General Conference,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentleman,

The General Conference has expressed three strong expectations: that we strengthen our leadership, improve our programmes execution and accelerate our reform.

The Preparatory Group has made the same requests, and I congratulate its Chair, Ms Gisèle Ossakedjombo-Ngoua Memiaghe, Ambassador of the Republic of Gabon, on her efficient and practical conduct of its proceedings.

UNESCO will take all necessary steps to achieve these goals.

During his visit on 27 March, the President of China, Mr Xi Jin Ping, highlighted “UNESCO’s irreplaceable role”, a source of encouragement to help us to take up our challenges.

The first challenge is the crisis in Syria, the most serious international humanitarian crisis in recent decades.

You followed the information meeting on our action inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.

As the conflict enters its fourth year, humanitarian work must be strengthened and complemented by very strong medium- and long-term action, as the development of the entire region is currently under threat.

This is the level at which UNESCO can legitimately act and make a difference, and now is the time for us to intervene. For that reason, I attended the second conference of donor countries, held in Kuwait, and I can testify to the very positive welcome UNESCO received and the expectations that it triggers.

We can already rely on the support of many partners, whom I should now like to thank, in particular the European Commission, Bulgaria, Finland, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium and the Government of Flanders, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women.

We launched the “YES” (Youth Education for Stability) initiative, which focuses on secondary and higher education for young people, who have hitherto been neglected and who are being targeted by traffickers and criminal gangs.

The future of the region depends on them; they cannot be left idle, abandoned and untrained.

I shall be in Washington for the meeting, organized by the British Secretary of State for International Development, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank, on the “No Lost Generation” initiative, with which UNESCO will henceforth be associated.

Through our advocacy, we have helped to win recognition of the importance of heritage protection within the Security Council, and I have launched several appeals, including a joint appeal with the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, and the United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy, Mr Brahimi, on 12 March.

In March, we launched our heritage-protection programme, funded by the European Union, and a round of direct, monthly consultations of national authorities in order to

make real progress in our fields of competence, namely education, media and culture, inside Syria.

We have organized a meeting of experts from all archaeological missions working in the field, which will take place from 26 to 28 May. A full account of the action that we are taking in all areas is contained in document 194 EX/INF.4.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The General Conference gave the necessary momentum to the acceleration of our leadership in the global debate on quality education, the basic sciences, culture and development and knowledge sharing, thus demonstrating the clear directions that we have taken.

In the field of education, UNESCO has kept up the pressure with a view to accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and setting the post-2015 development programme.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report was launched internationally in Addis Ababa, in the presence of Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister, and regionally, at more than 30 venues. It will be presented here, at an Executive Board side event, on 14 April.

The report strikes an urgent note – 57 million children out of school, 100 million young women unable to read a single sentence – and in March we launched a special edition on girls' education during the session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

We are therefore stepping up our efforts in the "last big push" to achieve education for all in 13 African countries, while at the same time supporting the national education for all evaluations preparatory to the world forum scheduled for 2015 in the Republic of Korea.

The *Malala Fund* programme was launched in Pakistan, in February, with the Minister for Education in order to reduce unequal gender access to primary education from 10% to 5% in two years.

Education is the cornerstone of gender equality.

I am encouraged by the democratic fervour currently prevailing in Afghanistan, where 300 women are standing for election and 35% of voters are women.

All of this strengthens our belief that girls' and women's education must be promoted and that our programme in Afghanistan, conducted with the support of Japan and Sweden, must be reinforced.

On 15 March, in partnership with GEMS Education, UNESCO held the Global Education and Skills Forum in Dubai: 25 education ministers attended, the private sector was heavily involved and new partners joined us, not out of charity but rather a desire to invest in education for skills acquisition, human resources training, and employment.

In Dubai we also launched the "Business Backs Education" campaign, which is based on the guidelines on business engagement in education that we set out in 2013 along with UNICEF, the United Nations Global Compact and the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education.

This strengthens our vision, which consists in investing more in education, knowledge and creativity, and you must have followed the speech given in Davos by the President of the Republic of Korea, Ms Park Geun-hye, promoting the creative and knowledge economy as a source of sustainable and renewable development.

This is the approach taken by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has made socio-cultural issues a pillar of its 2015 unified community project and which has signed with UNESCO its first agreement with a specialized agency since the new ASEAN Charter was adopted in 2008.

This is also the conclusion of the discussions of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development, which met in Dublin on 23 March.

Furthermore, it was the main thrust of the appeal made by the European Ministers of Culture who, at the invitation of France, convened last week at the Palais de Chaillot for a meeting, which I attended, with the aim of launching a European

digital strategy based on the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).

That meeting was attended by the President of the French Republic, Mr François Hollande, who delivered a powerful message promoting culture as a motor of development and European integration.

The sustainable development agenda should be used to promote “soft power”, training and skills; much remains to be done, in particular, to integrate culture into the post-2015 development programme.

We repeated this very message in Africa, at the symposium on investing in culture within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

We shall repeat it in New York on 5 May, at the United Nations General Assembly thematic debate, and I call on all Member States to ensure that high-level representatives participate in that debate.

Last December, the General Assembly adopted a third resolution on culture and development, which will lead to national consultations. Many countries have offered to host such consultations, notably Peru, Italy, Ecuador and Serbia, to which I express sincere thanks.

Similar efforts must be made in the field of science; it is in that spirit that in January in Berlin, UNESCO launched the Scientific Advisory Board of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I should like to thank Germany for having hosted that launch event.

The Board, which has now begun its work and is working on many promising leads, will allow us to strengthen our leadership in the field of basic science, which currently barely features on the development agenda.

The most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines the need for urgent action and highlights the consequences of climate disruption on health, the economy and food security. UNESCO can help to provide answers, build capacity and help population groups to adapt and plan ahead.

I recently returned from Barcelona where, alongside the Minister of the Interior of Spain, I opened the first UNESCO category 2 centre on biodiversity, which will coordinate all of the biosphere reserves in the Mediterranean.

This also sets an innovative example of public-private partnerships, for which I should like to thank the Government of Spain, Ambassador Juan Manuel de Barandica, and the Abertis Foundation.

In collaboration with Princeton University, we are making progress in deploying our Africa drought forecasting tool, which has already been installed in Niger and Kenya and which I hope will soon be launched in South Africa, Namibia and other countries.

The new IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Island States has begun its work.

UNESCO recently carried out a large-scale tsunami simulation exercise in the Caribbean, in which a record number of countries and territories – more than 36 – participated.

I take this opportunity to extend condolences to the people and Government of the Solomon Islands, who have been the victims of terrible floods, and to the people and Government of Chile following the recent earthquake and tsunami. These events illustrate the importance – and sometimes the effectiveness, albeit in relative terms – of warning systems.

After three years of hard work, the new flood prevention system that has been implemented in Pakistan, in partnership with UNESCO and the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHRM) in Japan, is now in operation.

This is an important step forwards.

This is what UNESCO should be: an idea in action.

We present ideas at fora such as the Mobile Learning Week, which in February brought together more than 300 international experts in new technology, then we put those ideas into action on the ground, as with Nokia in Pakistan, or with

Mobilink, with which we were jointly awarded the prize for the best global mobile education application last year.

Yet another example of an idea in action was the launch at the Berlin Tourism Fair of the campaign against trafficking, including trafficking in cultural property, in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The promise made to the people of Mali to rebuild their mausolea, too, is an idea in action.

One year after the liberation of Timbuktu, work has begun, and I should like to thank Switzerland for its recent €1 million contribution to that end.

I should also like to commend the joint initiative launched by the African Union and UNESCO, at a side event during the African Union summit in January, to raise funds for heritage, given that immense amounts of funding are required to implement the conventions.

In Egypt, our efforts to rehabilitate the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo are bearing fruit; I sent a delegation there in January, and Italy is prepared to finance the work.

In addition, on 4 April we signed an agreement with the Egyptian Minister of Education, Mr Mahmoud Abul-Nasr to establish a new Regional Centre for Adult Education in *Sirs El Layyan*.

Our programme on the establishment of a network of youth groups in the Mediterranean (NET-MED), with funding from the European Union, was officially launched in February.

Young people are, naturally, a priority of UNESCO programmes and it was with that in mind that, accompanied by His Highness Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Al Saud, I attended the opening ceremony of the International Youth Conference on Volunteering and Dialogue, held in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) on 3 December 2013.

Young people are the primary concern of the new Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, which has just held its first Executive Committee meeting.

Young people are at the heart of our preparatory work for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (Barbados+20), which will be held in Apia from 1 to 4 September 2014 and on which we held a detailed briefing last week.

UNESCO held an inter-agency consultation last August to ensure that young people's opinions were included in the Barbados interregional document.

We have succeeded in establishing youth as one of the four pillars of the Samoa Conference, along with gender, health and the environment, in which UNESCO is heavily involved.

This work serves to boost our preparations for the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, to be held this year in Aichi-Nagoya, for which I am grateful to the Government of Japan.

UNESCO is an organization that puts its ideas into action; we have proven in the past few months that we are a laboratory of new ideas.

We launched an international discussion on global citizenship at the Forum on Global Citizenship Education, held in December in Bangkok.

Simultaneously, in Bangkok, we held the first ever Global Forum on Media and Gender, at which we launched the Global Alliance on Media and Gender in the presence of more than 300 media representatives, journalists and civil society stakeholders.

The United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, launched on the initiative of UNESCO, is now in its operational stage, with support from the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

UNESCO reports breaks new ground; for example, the Report on "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development", which I presented in Stockholm, and the World Water Development Report, launched in Tokyo, which addresses a problem that will be particularly relevant in the future, namely the link between water and energy.



I suggest that the Executive Board hold further substantive discussions on the content of these documents, because it is the substance and implementation of the programmes that should guide our vision for reform and enable us to identify, against the backdrop of limited resources, the most useful leveraging effects and the areas in which the best and most visible results can be achieved.

Excellencies,

All this shows an Organization on the move, sharpening its focus, acting where needs are acute.

Education, the sciences, culture, communication and information – these are key forces for the positive transformation of societies, for lasting peace.

The world needs UNESCO more than ever today, and we are responding to this demand.

We start this biennium with clear purpose, embodied in the Medium-Term Strategy and the Programme and Budget.

This reflects a determination to focus and to enhance delivery.

This embodies a commitment to Global Priority Africa, to Global Priority Gender Equality.

We are taking forward the *Operational Strategy for Priority Africa*, working *with and for* African States, the African Union and regional communities.

I have launched the *Priority Gender Equality Action Plan for 2014-2021* – through training and capacity-building, through deeper mainstreaming in all programmatic activity, to enhance our impact, for stronger results.

We ended 2013 without a cashflow deficit and with the Working Capital Fund fully restored.

We achieved this, because we reduced expenditure for the last biennium by \$145 million, or 22%, compared to document 36 C/5, and because I drew on the

Special Emergency Multi-Donor Fund to cover the remaining deficit of \$42 million, inherited from 2011.

This carried a price for major programmes, which incurred 60% or \$87 million of the reduction.

We undertook deep cost reduction and efficiency measures including – a 20% reduction in corporate service costs, a voluntary mutual separation programme and recruitment freeze, and reductions in activity budgets by 36%.

At the same time, voluntary contributions increased from \$283 million in 2010 to \$362 million in 2013 – we received over \$12 million in donations, and in-kind contributions reached \$65 million.

I am deeply grateful for this support.

Looking forward, despite the \$8.1 million funding gap in the expenditure plan approved by the General Conference, between the savings anticipated on vacant posts and the balance of the Emergency Fund, there are funds to finance the majority of transition costs for this biennium.

Let me report more specifically on where we stand.

Last July, at the request of the Executive Board, I started to prepare an indicative staff restructuring plan based on the \$507 million ceiling.

I maintained the freeze on vacant posts until the end of 2013, with the exception of a limited number that were considered mission critical.

I launched a second voluntary mutual separation programme on 9 September 2013 – 74 staff accepted the offer.

As suggested by the staff associations, a flexible work/leave arrangement was issued – 15 staff applied, of which 14 were accepted, in the interests of the Organization.

After the General Conference, I asked managers to submit detailed restructuring proposals for changes in the organizational design of structures and staffing, including proposals for the abolition of occupied posts.

These proposals were reviewed by the Bureau for Strategic Planning (BSP), the Bureau of Financial Management (BFM) and the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM), to ensure that they are aligned with priorities and approved allocations of the expenditure plan, that structures are coherent, that human resources are strategically allocated and posts are classified and grade levels aligned with the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) classification standard.

The list of occupied posts proposed for abolition was presented to the staff associations for comments – general and specific comments were received and analysed with managers to ensure that a full analysis is presented for my decision.

A third voluntary mutually-agreed separation initiative was launched in March 2014, which 12 staff accepted – overall, 131 staff members have been separated on this basis since late 2011, providing manoeuvrability during the staffing review process.

For information, today, tentative proposals regarding abolitions stand at around 147 occupied posts, while the number of vacant posts is around 250.

Once I have made a decision on which posts are to be abolished, individual staff members will receive a memorandum from HRM informing them of the abolition of their post, offering the choice between an agreed separation or being considered within the redeployment review, to be undertaken within four months.

The letters are planned to be issued soon, and the Redeployment Group will convene after this session of the Executive Board, chaired by the Deputy Director-General, composed of the Assistant Director-Generals, the Director of HRM and the Presidents of the staff associations.

The Redeployment Group will make recommendations for my consideration, following the Staff Regulations and Rules, reviewing the requirements of vacant posts against affected staff opting for redeployment – matching qualifications and experience, performance, integrity and length of service.

Let me be clear – redeployment is not a mathematical exercise.

Not all staff will meet the skills profile required of vacant posts nor are all affected local staff situated in locations where posts are available.

Throughout this process, transparency, dialogue and the applicable rules and regulations will guide us through to its conclusion.

All this involves difficult decisions.

The months ahead will have great impact, especially for staff.

I count on the Redeployment Group to make recommendations that will preserve expertise while ensuring vacant posts are filled.

However, not all affected staff will find posts and match the qualifications required – so, over the next months, we will undoubtedly have to separate some staff.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to all staff for their dedication to UNESCO and hard work during these uncertain and challenging times.

On the one hand, UNESCO is reorganizing itself to become more effective and efficient, allocating resources where Members States have indicated priority should be focused – this is important for medium- and long-term planning.

On the other hand, change of this magnitude requires a shift in operational process, delegation of authority, functional focus, and organizational culture, which can have a deep impact on all involved.

This is all part of the work I started two years ago, and I see several strategic lessons for moving ahead.

First, we must remain firmly mobilized – we have achieved a lot, but we are not there yet.

Strict financial responsibility must remain our byword.

Second, we must continue to strengthen planning, to focus action where it counts most, through enhanced reporting, a stronger learning cycle.

Third, the effective management of extrabudgetary funds is vital, and this is why we are addressing barriers to fundraising and project implementation.

We must continue this reform, to build an Organization fit for purpose.

I am determined to continue streamlining and reducing costs – this has guided changes to the Bureau for Management of Support Services, to the management of the Communication and Information programme by the Deputy Director-General and the review of Executive and Administrative Offices.

Reform is under way across the board – including, for instance, strengthened cooperation with the National Commissions, witnessed in the first annual report, and the streamlined *Publication and Distribution Plan 2014-2015*.

The same drive inspired changes I made to enhance the delegation of authority and revise reporting lines (*DG/Note/14/3*).

This follows the vision of the independent external evaluation of UNESCO (IEE), to position UNESCO closer to needs, resources and partners.

The field network in Africa is now largely functional – we have now clear reporting lines, a clear accountability and coordination framework, clear roles and authorities.

This includes the Africa Department, which plays a strategic role in providing overall coherence.

At the General Conference, Member States defined a clear vision – our task now, and my firm determination, is to work, to deepen our impact and respond to needs.

This starts with major initiatives UNESCO is leading – the *Thematic Debate on Culture and Sustainable Development* at the United Nations General Assembly on 5 May, the *Global Education for All Meeting* in Oman this May, the *Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)* in Samoa from 1 to 4 September, and the Conference on *The Role of ICTs to Access Information*

*and Knowledge for Persons with Disabilities*, in New Delhi, India from 24 to 27 November.

This includes UNESCO's deepening engagement in the United Nations system – in this respect, I am pleased UNESCO has joined the rule of law coordination mechanism, and I will participate in the retreat next month, organized by the Deputy Secretary-General.

We are bringing the same determination to implementing the resolutions of the General Conference – regarding, for instance, work on documentary heritage and the comprehensive study of internet-related issues within the UNESCO mandate.

UNESCO is working flat out to shape the new development agenda that will follow 2015.

In *document 194 EX/14*, you will find full information on our contribution – let me take this opportunity to highlight objectives.

The 2000 Millennium Declaration set forth a humanist vision of a more just and prosperous world, which took shape in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There has been remarkable progress, but it has been insufficient and uneven.

Our tasks now are clear -- we must focus where needs are greatest, we must help countries accelerate towards 2015, and we must shape a new agenda to follow.

The post-2015 processes are moving quickly, and a second round of national consultations is envisaged by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) on six themes – UNESCO, with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), will co-lead the consultation on culture and development.

We have contributed extensively to the *Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals* – through issues briefs, through side events, through support to Member States in drafting resolutions for the United Nations General Assembly.

This process is now entering a critical phase.

Our position is clear.

The post-2015 education agenda should be balanced and holistic, and take a lifelong learning approach, framed by an overarching goal, translated into measurable targets and indicators.

Education should also be integrated throughout the agenda, to catalyse greater synergies.

Science, technology and innovation were largely absent from the Millennium Development Goals – this should be rectified.

Water is essential to sustainable development and peace – we must go beyond the water-related MDG target towards a comprehensive stand-alone goal.

The post-2015 agenda should seek to restore the ocean ecosystem, to build resilient coastal communities and to facilitate scientific cooperation.

Biodiversity is crucial – UNESCO's experience through Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage can help shape sustainable development pathways.

These are challenging times for many societies – UNESCO is working for inclusive development, for engaging youth as agents of transformative change, through stronger linkages between social science research and development efforts.

Culture was absent from the MDG agenda – I am committed to ensuring recognition of the power of culture as a driver and enabler of social inclusion, of poverty alleviation and eradication, of sustainable development.

The post-2015 agenda should also recognize freedom of expression and media development, including with new information and communication technologies, as human rights, as forces for the rule of law and good governance, for greater social inclusion.

Gender equality is essential.

The future agenda should set a stand-alone goal on gender equality, while acknowledging its power across all sustainable development goals – there must be a consensus on this breakthrough strategy for poverty eradication, for development and for peace.

This is UNESCO's vision for a new global sustainable agenda, which we are highlighting in all channels – including the forthcoming Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Annual Ministerial Review.

Shaping the post-2015 agenda is a complex process, where nothing can be taken for granted – we must make our message in every instance, through every track.

For this, UNESCO needs your support.

We have clear positions on education, the sciences, culture, communication – we need Member States to carry them forward through this intergovernmental process.

I appeal to you, to your governments, to embrace UNESCO's messages not just in Paris, but in New York, in every instance where the post-2015 development agenda is being shaped.

On this basis, I believe we can set a new agenda for human dignity and development in the twenty-first century.

Because I firmly believe that lasting defences of peace can only be built in the minds of women and men.

In the minds of girls and boys.

On the benches of schools.

Drawing on shared cultural heritage, on the power of cultural diversity.

Through scientific cooperation and innovation.

Through flourishing freedom of expression.



These are drivers of the innovation every society needs today.

They are the basis for solidarity and inclusion.

This is the message we will celebrate on the 70th anniversary of the creation of UNESCO – during 2015, a milestone year for global sustainable development.

For this, we will mobilize every member of the UNESCO family – starting with National Commissions and including the UNESCO Centres, Clubs, ASP schools, Chairs, Goodwill Ambassadors, the *Creative Cities Network*, the *Cities against Racism* network, our partners in the private sector, in the non-governmental sector, in the media.

I am determined to make the most of this anniversary to raise high the flag for UNESCO, for the values we share and the objectives we pursue.

I have already created an Organizing Committee, to map out planned initiatives and to shape an initial package of ideas.

This work is under way, and I can testify to the enthusiasm that exists already in civil society, in private sector, across the world.

I look forward to discussing this with all Member States, and I take this opportunity to appeal to you for your support and engagement, to which I know you are deeply committed, Mr Chairperson.

This anniversary is a moment to celebrate – it is a moment to renew with the values we share – it is a moment to look forward with new purpose.

The world has changed since 1945, but the message of our Constitution has never been more relevant.

Above all, the 70th anniversary of this Organization will provide an opportunity to craft a new solidarity for new times, on the basis of dignity, equality and mutual respect, and I am ready to work closely with you, Mr Chairperson, Mr President, and with all Member States, to make this a moment of strength.

In a world changing quickly, in times of uncertainty, this message has not aged a day.

Thank you.