

Opening Address

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me welcome you to this conference on *Education for Shared Values for Intercultural and Inter-faith Understanding*, which addresses this theme in the Asia Pacific Region.

The urgency of our work was not determined by 9/11, but this terrible event highlighted situations and perils that have dogged the planet for decades now, and which UNESCO has striven to grapple with since its creation. However, the willingness of individuals to annihilate themselves at the same time as they annihilate innocent others, and indeed as many others as possible, represents a distillation of nihilism that disturbs everybody, and flies in the face of our deepest instincts, and values.

But this is only one expression of forces that manifest themselves along the spectrum of hatred and violence, and which feed upon radical perceptions of differences. From Rwanda to Bosnia we have seen the extraordinary scale of human suffering that can be unleashed, quickly and decisively, in the name of fear of the other, and not a distant other, but one who was proximate, and who had been a neighbour for centuries. Indeed, I understand it was the Honourable Delegate from Indonesia, who during our last Executive Board, remarked that three of the four Pillars outlined in the Delors Report were relatively easy to accomplish, but that the fourth, 'learning to live together,' remains the biggest challenge.

Globalization does not explain all recent violent phenomena. The increase in exchanges and the interpenetration of economic, social and cultural goods do much to meet human aspirations everywhere. However, globalization undeniably contributes to the sense of loss of identity, and to the search for what is perceived as an older purity and coherence. Paradoxically, those who wage war, terrorists and ethnic-cleansers also seek the mythical, perfect community, but they seek it through bloodletting.

The defence of authenticity is a human need, but it cannot seek to rupture the interdependence of humanity and the obvious necessity of 'living together.' For if human beings do not 'live together' they will fall together, as the catastrophic world wars of the last century amply demonstrated.

The challenge posed by terrorism to our understanding of the world is that it tends to thrust upon us an inhuman, indeed demonic vision of another whom we do not know very well. We think that the world is small, a kind of global village, but the actions of the terrorists, the justifications they give for their actions, and the spontaneous reactions, and sometimes over-reactions, of people to terrorist strikes, resemble strongly the attitude of peoples in the past who did not know the peoples of neighbouring states very well, and who could be easily enlisted in wars against a phantom image of their neighbours. However, on account of the fear of globalization, ongoing migration and increasingly diversifying societies, this demonic other threatens the peace of our societies.

In the UNESCO General Conference of 2001 the members of the Conference unanimously passed a resolution (No. 39) affirming that 'the values of tolerance, universality, mutual understanding, respect for cultural diversity and the promotion of a culture of peace, which are central to UNESCO's mission, have acquired new relevance for inspiring action by international organisations, States, civil society and individual citizens.' The Conference went on to express

'its firm conviction that, based upon its mandate and within its areas of competence—education, science, culture and communication—UNESCO has a duty to contribute to the eradication of terrorism, drawing upon on its character as an intellectual and ethical organization.'

This position was consonant with the Organization's "culture of peace" programme, which was predicated upon a broad understanding of culture, and the way culture was abused to lay the foundations of war, and notably "ethnic" war. Some of these wars clarified our understanding of the importance of religion in identity: in some cases to identify by name a nation was to name its religious affiliation. It goes without saying that the role of religion and spirituality have has been underscored in the work of UNESCO: the Delors report stressed that 'the teaching of the history of religions and customs can thus serve as a useful benchmark for future behaviour.' At a conference in Tashkent, in the month of September 2000, the participants underlined the necessity of innovative approaches in education for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. The recent manifestations of terrorism, the twisting of religion to represent justification of violence, and the risk of "falling together" required that the thrust of UNESCO be focussed somewhat more. This is why, in February 2003, at the opening of the interagency meeting in Paris on *Promoting Peace and Security through Education and Science: Elements for a UN Strategy against Terrorism* the Director-General noted that 'It is essential to encourage the acquisition by all learners of a basic level of knowledge and understanding of the world's main cultures, civilizations, and religions.'

But mutual understanding is a possible goal only if it is grounded in commonly held values. Education for Tolerance, Peace, Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship can be effective only if they repose upon these values. The medium-term strategy of UNESCO for 2002-2007 stresses, 'mutually shared values through education' (para.67) in addition to dialogue and harmonious interaction between cultures. The respect and understanding of differences is one pillar of our action, but success can only be attained if there is another pillar, the universalism that is derived from "the human condition" and the commonality of responses to that condition that emerge in different civilizations and faiths.

The challenge to the UNESCO's work for peace is a vast one, for not only does it mean working along the axes of universality and difference, it involves what Pierre Weil calls a shift from 'a fragmentary view of peace,' which is to say, a state of non-war, to 'a holistic vision of peace,' with its roots in the individual's being internally at peace, to the intricate relation of the individual to the surrounding world, both proximate and distant, and to the individual's relationship with the past. Accordingly, quality education must address the interaction of a person with a series of enveloping, concentric rings- family, community, society, country, the world. In his speech to the interagency group cited above, the Director-General stressed that the overall task of those working for *Education for All* was 'a larger vision of education, one focusing on a new vision of quality education encompassing all aspects of human development: values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills.'

None too surprisingly the issues that must be addressed are not neatly boxed: they tend to overlap, and they tend to multiply. Genocide rubs shoulders with human trafficking; for these dramatic crimes are not just denials of elementary human rights—they often share elements of ethnic stereotyping. Sexual slavery is also a part of gender issues. Child prostitution is no less a basic issue of human security than is the right of a minority to live on a territory with others. Attitudes to migrant workers sharing the same beliefs but coming from a different region pose the question of intercultural dialogue from yet another perspective. Still more issues involving trans-national crime are sure to be addressed in education following the session of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination of May this year.

The complexity of the task is also daunting because the weight of history and human experience does not spontaneously dictate the right way out: memories are long and the dynamics of war leave lasting marks. Individuals can be deeply damaged, and may pass on the damage to their children. The positive contributions of all human cultures, including spiritual traditions are also interwoven with ambiguities and divisiveness. Moreover, shared values may not always be positive. Our colleagues, who work in the UNESCO offices worldwide, and not just in post-conflict countries, are well versed in the intractability of situations and attitudes.

Finally, no single discipline or sphere of activity can solve the problems on its own. Well might we be deeply concerned that history textbooks provide a “balanced view” of the past, but we also know that most of the useable and formative history learned by children is learned outside of school, from family, from the media, from films, from theatre, from comic books, and from other sources as well. Well might we strive, and we should strive, to eliminate the mechanisms of violence and oppression from school dynamics, but a child may well return to a society where those forces are given full rein. Multi-cultural and multi-ethnic curricula have been used in societies that exploded, ripped apart by the forces that the education system bravely strove to tame.

In institutional terms for UNESCO this means that intercultural and inter-faith understanding, and the understanding of shared values, must be a movement staged across a broad front, drawing upon the energies of all UNESCO sectors. In the last few years the culture sector of UNESCO has brought together eminent religious figures, philosophers, historians, anthropologists and sociologists in well-publicized meetings, within the perspectives laid out in Tashkent, which flagged the importance of academic research, favoured through the network of UNESCO chairs. Among other meetings are the conference on *Global Ethics and Good Governance: Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue*, held in Paris on 5-7 May 2003, and the *International Congress on Dialogue of Civilization, Religion and Cultures in West Africa*, held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 15-17 December 2003. The Oslo Global Meeting of Experts, on 2-5 September 2004, addressed a theme close to that of this conference, *Teaching for tolerance, respect and recognition in relation with religion or belief*. The Social and Human Sciences sector addresses similar topics, many of them relevant to our work, such as initiatives for professional ethics for teachers and the development of ethics teaching programmes. A major theme related to peace is water, which various programmes of the Science Sector deal with. In cooperation with the European Commission, the Communication Sector promotes media literacy in the schools of the Mediterranean region and in Thailand initiated the preparation of a secondary school teacher guide on media education. Many of these initiatives are cross-sectoral, bringing the Organization into new practices of synergy. The Ohrid Declaration, signed by the leaders of the countries of Southeast Europe in August 2003, recapitulated this cross-sectoral vision in a given regional context.

It goes without saying that many of these initiatives involve close partnerships with UN agencies and civil society organizations: the World Programme on Human Rights Education is developed by the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights and UNESCO, and will be launched in 2005. This programme provides UNESCO with the opportunity of mainstreaming into Education for All a vital theme for quality education.

As an international organization UNESCO also understands that common approaches will call upon the diversity of cultures. The dialogue is not intended to help different peoples of different cultures and faiths attain an abstract understanding of one another: it is intended to promote *within them* the approaches needed to shape “living together”. Some approaches work better in some cultures than in others, but the dialogue develops approaches that can also be used

elsewhere. Human history is also the history of cross-fertilization, and UNESCO is called upon to play an honourable role in that process.

For this reason, your conference has, in addition to a regional importance, a worldwide importance for UNESCO, and what you accomplish will be closely watched in other regions. Already UNESCO national commissions and its field offices, the Associated Schools Project (ASP) network, Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) and our partners, such as the World Education Fellowship (WEF), Asia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APNIEVE) and Asia Pacific Centre for Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), have made a substantial contribution in this area. Let me signal just one of the most recent accomplishments, the publication by the Bangkok Regional Bureau of Education of *Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments*.

In his address to the Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism the Director-General noted that

A key concern for UNESCO is the promotion of quality education to prevent violence, to strengthen a climate of tolerance and security, and to foster the development of values of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding as well as capacities for the non-violent resolution of conflicts. This action requires substantial time and resources, as it calls for far-reaching changes in teacher training, the revision and development of textbooks and curricula, and the general improvement of learning environments so that stereotypes, violence, prejudice and discrimination have no place.

It is important to stress quality in the context of this conference and the themes that it addresses: the diversification of societies, largely as a result of migration, urbanisation and cultural change, combined with increased sensitivity to the numerous different aspects of individual and group identity, places new burdens upon education systems. These threaten to undermine education quality if they are not dealt with adequately, but at the same time they encourage a dynamic of research, experimentation and exchange of experience that can mightily advance the agenda of quality education.

The organizers of this conference are addressing all these themes and others. It is manifestly not a talkfest. Workshops will be a key component to commence the design of curriculum frameworks and modules, and teacher/student resource material, relating to intercultural and inter-faith understanding. The integration of values is part of that work. It will pay close attention to the crucial question of supportive learning environments. It is not abstract, as it draws upon alternative approaches and methodologies that have worked, and possibly have not worked, in various post-conflict situations. It brings together educationists, including teachers and students, government policy-makers and advisers, leaders of religious and cultural organizations.

Your work is framed in a larger, integrative process—the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, which begins next year. UNESCO is the lead agency. Educating for sustainability focuses on quality education, at all levels, reorienting programmes, public understanding and training. The International Implementation Scheme for the Decade identifies four key values that underpin sustainable development:

Respect for the dignity and human rights of all people throughout the world and a commitment to social and economic justice for all; *respect* for the human rights of future generations and a commitment to intergenerational responsibility; *respect* and care for the greater community of life in all its diversity which involves the protection and restoration of the Earth's ecosystems; *respect* for cultural diversity and a commitment to build locally and globally a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace.

It goes on to say that 'education constitutes the central pillar of strategies to promote such values.'

The key word here is respect. This subsumes, or makes possible, many of the other terms that describe the goals we are attempting to attain. The word is in all cultures, civilizations, faiths and religions, for the relationship of human beings to the divine begins with respect for the divine.

There are many targets that humanity will have difficulty reaching if it does not successfully grapple with the challenges of education for values. Many of the countries that risk not attaining the goals of Education for All are countries undergoing, or which have recently undergone conflict, usually civil war. There will be no sustainable development if conflict precipitates us into a "clash of civilizations." But lasting peace, and lasting development require security that goes beyond the state of "non-war". Neither political nor social stability will be realized if groups within society are threatened. Fear, discrimination and intolerance instill the habits of mind and habits of being that erode living together. In an age of globalization we are all aware that we are faced, in the mid-term or the long-term, with a common destiny. For it to be one we can live with happily it must be suffused with common values, and this is your work, here and beyond.

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