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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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Объединенных Наций по
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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

on the occasion of on the Ethics in Action event

Casina Pio IV in the Vatican Gardens

Vatican, 16 October 2017

Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the *Pontifical Academy of Sciences*,

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the *UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network*,

Professor Wagner, *UNESCO Chair on Learning and Literacy, University of Pennsylvania*,

Excellencies, Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to speak before such a distinguished group at this special session on Education and *Ethics in Action*.

I wish to thank Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Professor Sachs, the *Religions for Peace* movement as well as the University of Notre Dame for this initiative.

I can hardly think of a better setting for this than the historic Casina Pio IV.

It is a true privilege to be in this villa, an architectural treasure of the 16th century, home to the *Pontifical Academy of Sciences*.

One of the most inquisitive and greatest minds of all times, Galileo Galilei, was the first head of the *Accademia dei Lincei*, giving birth to this great international, intercultural and secular institution.

The Academy promotes scientific progress -- it also encourages reflection on the ethical and environmental responsibility of the scientific community and I commend you for this.

This perhaps has never been so important, at a time of such far-reaching technological change, which is placing difficult ethical questions at the fore of all progress.

Two years ago, I had the honour to meet His Holiness Pope Francis here in the Holy See.

We discussed the importance of education at a time of deep changes.

I remember well the words of His Holiness:

“Education is an essential dimension of human dignity and for the fight against exclusion and poverty.”

Fifty-two years after the II Vatican Council and the *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration, which addressed the universal right to education, Pope Francis is carrying forward this vision of education as a transformative force for peace and development.

This message was at the heart of the visit of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness Pope Francis, to UNESCO in June 2015, on the occasion of the conference *Educating Today and Tomorrow*.

All this resonates deeply with UNESCO’s mandate to build the defences of peace in the minds of men and women, through the power of education, culture, communication and science.

Crafted in 1945, I see this mission as embodying the spirit of the new humanism the world needs today... in a new century... in times of turbulence, when societies are transforming deeply, when the impact of climate change is deepening, when violent extremism is rising, when we face the most severe humanitarian crisis since World War II.

Pope Francis expressed this powerfully in his encyclical *Laudato Si*.

In his words:

“In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good becomes [...] a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest.”

This expresses the essence of education.

Education is a human right.

It is a public good and a public responsibility – and I would say a moral responsibility and a societal responsibility.

Fundamentally, to quote His Holiness again, it is a ‘summons to solidarity,’ to current and future generations.

This is why I welcome the presence today of so many faith leaders, for the influence their voices carry with women and men around the world.

Education is the most powerful way to equip children and youth with the values, skills and knowledge they need to tackle the challenges of the world today, to craft solutions, to drive positive change.

This idea stands at the heart at the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted by all countries in 2015.

Education is embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the new Agenda, and it is a force for progress across all 17 Goals.

But not just any education.

...quality and lifelong education.

...education that is inclusive, that leaves no one behind.

...education that is founded on ethics and human rights.

Today, more than ever, we must educate for inclusion, for dialogue and tolerance, for living together, we need to teach solidarity, mutual respect and peace.

I see this as the frontline in our struggle to build a more just, more peaceful world.

The stakes are high.

In 2000, the world committed through the UN Millennium Development Goals to achieve universal primary education and gender parity in education by 2015.

We saw tremendous progress, but we remain far from the mark.

Some 750 million adults today still lack even the most basic literacy skills -- most of them are women.

Some 264 million children and youth are not benefiting from school education at all – most of them are girls.

Over 300 million children and youth are not learning the basics *even* when they go to school.

Only 60 percent of countries have achieved parity in primary education and only 38 percent in secondary.

And yet we all know the power of education.

If all girls and boys completed secondary education, 420 million people could be lifted from poverty.

This would reduce the number of poor people by more than half globally, and by almost 2/3 in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Think about the impact of these numbers... on individual women and men, on families, on communities...

...especially for girls and women, who still face the steepest challenges.

Being born a girl today remains a primary cause for exclusion.

Too many girls, in too many countries, are forced out of school, into work, into marriage, into poverty.

This simply cannot stand if we want to implement the 2030 Agenda.

This throws a shadow over the development of entire societies.

In this new age of limits -- limits of resources, limits of the planet -- at this time when every country is seeking new sources of dynamism, of innovation, no society can afford to turn its back on 50 percent of its human ingenuity.

For me, the face of the new global agenda must be that of a young girl, healthy, learning, in safe conditions, not forced to marry or work.

This young girl must be the starting point for all our action and the measure of its success.

Fundamentally, this is the promise of the *2030 Agenda*, to leave no one behind.

As UNESCO Director-General, I have made gender equality a priority of my mandate, from the launch of partnerships, to celebrating the *UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education*, to empowering girls to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Here again, I see a fundamental role for faith leaders, for community and traditional leaders.

This is why Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, who has just led a month-long, 11,000 kilometre, march across India to end child trafficking and abuse, is bringing together leaders from different faiths, to speak in schools against violence and intolerance.

I remember the words of a village chief in Senegal, where UNESCO is running a literacy programme with Proctor & Gamble.

He told me:

"I noticed that the educated take notes and make decisions. Those who are not educated only listen, forget, and then are deceived and misled. So I decided to do everything to promote education for all the members of my community."

Genuine, positive change must start with inclusion, with respect for human rights -- this must remain the moral compass guiding all our efforts.

This is the meaning of UNESCO's work on Global Citizenship Education, at the heart of the education Sustainable Development Goal 4.

This is not about citizenship in the legal sense.

It is about learning to live together in societies under pressure.

It is about connecting the dots between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Being a global citizen today calls for new ways of seeing the world, new ways of thinking and behaving.

Being a global citizen means sharing the wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity as a force of renewal, belonging and innovation.

We share with Pope Francis the idea that education is about practicing a "*grammar of dialogue*" – a wonderful way of putting it - which is a foundation for exchange, for mutual understanding and respect, to make the most cultural and religious diversity as a strength of our common humanity.

This must start as early as possible, on the benches of schools.

Global citizenship education is a pillar of the *Global Education First Initiative*, launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2012 and led forward by UNESCO.

We are taking this forward through pedagogical guides, through teacher training, through new partnerships, through the launch of a *Clearing House on Global Citizenship Education*, hosted by UNESCO's *Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding*.

We are supporting young women and men, through the networks of UNESCO's *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development*, in New Delhi.

Here, informed by neurosciences, we are working on curricula to encourage critical thinking, empathy, compassion and mindfulness.

We are developing resources to support policy-makers, to assist teachers, to promote education for peace, human rights, interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

All this is essential to our work to prevent violent extremism.

We know no one is born a violent extremist...

Young people learn to hate – we must teach them peace.

Education is the way to undermine prejudice, by fighting ignorance and indifference.

Violent extremists preach exclusion and hatred.

We must teach human rights, dignity, tolerance and solidarity.

Violent extremists breed on mistrust, on fears of others, on a lack of confidence in the future.

We must provide young women and men with a renewed sense of belonging to society and the global community, with a new vision of the future.

UNESCO is acting across the board to nurture the power of education to prevent violent extremism.

In November 2015, we held the first *High-Level Conference on Education to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism*.

A year ago in New Delhi, UNESCO and the *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development* organized the *International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education*, to explore the power of education to prevent violent extremism.

We have developed normative tools – a *Teachers' Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism* and a *Guide for Policy-Makers on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education*.

We are building capacity for educators in Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

This is also why UNESCO is leading the world in advancing Holocaust education -- we must teach this history to never forget, to fight racism, anti-Semitism and hatred today, to prevent new genocides and new mass violations of human rights in the future.

We work in the real world, and also in the digital world, to bolster media literacy, to defend human rights and tolerance against those who use the internet as a megaphone for hatred.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All this reflects the vision we share of education as an ethical imperative.

Education must be more than transmitting information.

Fundamentally, it is about values.

It is about critical thinking.

It is about the ethics of development.

Education must be about learning to live in a world facing limits, in a planet under pressure.

We see this same spirit in Pope's France encyclical *Laudato Si*, which calls for *"urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources" through "distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality [...]."*

The universality of climate change touches on the very essence of our common humanity, affecting how we live with others, with our our planet, for future generations.

Climate change is not only a political and scientific challenge -- it a matter of ethics and values, ones that must be transmitted through cultural and educational action.

This guided UNESCO's leadership of the *United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)* -- and this inspires our action today, to take forward education for sustainable development with schools and education systems across the world.

This is, fundamentally, about each us leading the way... through our behaviours, attitudes, consumption patterns... through our commitment to solidarity, our determination to draw on all sources of knowledge, to respect every woman and man and the world that nurtures us.

In 2015, before the United Nations General Assembly, His Holiness Pope Francis said:

"We cannot permit ourselves to postpone 'certain agendas' for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of world-wide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need."

UNESCO was created on the conviction that nothing can be accomplished without education, and I believe this great humanist message has never been so vital.

This is about human rights and dignity.

This is about how we wish to live today and in the future.

This is about the societies we wish to build for the future.

This is why our debate today is so important.

Thank you.