



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 Civil Society / Education on Human Rights event

New York, 27 September 2012

Excellency Mr. Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy,

Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom
of Jordan,

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you for this timely initiative and the opportunity to share the vision of
UNESCO.

We live in increasingly diverse societies. To achieve lasting peace, coexistence is
not enough. It has to be upheld by mutual respect, by genuine dialogue.

This issue goes to the heart of UNESCO's Constitution, which declares -- "*it is in
the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be built.*"

This is difficult, and it can never be taken for granted.

The new global public space created by the internet has opened new opportunities
for dialogue.

But it has also become easier for those who seek to incite hatred to disseminate
aggressive content and fuel intolerance or ignorance.

Our world is more connected and also more fragmented.

There are no easy answers.

To succeed, we need to act at two levels.

First, we must stand firm on principles.

Eleven years ago, UNESCO adopted the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*.

This declaration states that the defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity and fundamental freedoms.

This means also that no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights, nor to limit their scope.

In times of uncertainty, all must reaffirm their commitment to tolerance and dialogue on the basis of respect and understanding.

Second, we must improve considerably our cultural skills -- what I call our global "cultural literacy".

The social media and the Internet show we need stronger and new forms of dialogue and exchange.

This includes inter-religious dialogue -- which must be woven into a broader process of intercultural dialogue, to enhance understanding between individuals of all beliefs and convictions.

Our task is strengthen collective capacities to articulate universal values and cultural diversity, to fashion new ways to live together in an age of diversity.

This starts on the benches of schools.

Through education, we can teach children not to hate from the very young age.

Through education, we can raise tolerant leaders.

Through education, we may establish a lasting culture of peace.

This is the importance of the United Nations Secretary-General's new *Education First* initiative that was launched yesterday -- to deepen education as a force for peace, by promoting shared values, by fostering new forms of global citizenship.

This is the goal of the *Teaching Respect for All* initiative UNESCO launched earlier this year with the United States and Brazil – to develop teaching materials and curricula for anti-racism.

Our goal is to identify policies and legal frameworks that integrate human rights education, to foster good teaching practices.

This is why UNESCO leads also in promoting Holocaust Education.

The Holocaust provides a poignant starting-point for human rights education, including lessons from recent genocides.

We work to design new educational materials to explore this complex issue with young minds in the classroom.

To disseminate this material, UNESCO is harnessing the full force of its global networks – working through our *Associated Schools Project Network*, of more than 9000 educational institutions stretching across 180 countries.

I wish to end with one last point.

At a time of rapprochement of cultures, it is important to give a voice to everybody, it is important for everyone to have chance to speak out, to develop self confidence.

Hatred can develop quickly when one feels that one's own culture, one's identity is neglected or disrespected.

And I do remember the very important of Martin Luther king "*I have decided to stick with love, because hatred is too great a burden to bear*"

Culture has tremendous power here.

I have seen this personally in South East Europe.

The reconstruction of the Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar, in Bosnia Herzegovina, with the support of UNESCO, provides a strong symbol of reconciliation, bringing together communities from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

UNESCO's *General History of Africa* is another important effort to respond to this need, to restore dignity and self confidence, highlighting the richness of African identities and history.

This is why UNESCO is also active on the ground, helping to train young people to protect their cultural heritage.

All of this makes a huge difference.

When extremists seek to incite hatred or destroy a people's identity, they attack culture first, because they know monuments are not just stones, but values.

We see this happening today in Mali, in Libya, in Syria.

UNESCO is deeply committed to protecting culture as a lifeline for peace and dialogue.

And let me commend the longstanding efforts of Italy in this regard.

I take strength from seeing all of us gathered today for the promotion of these shared principles and our shared determination to translate them into action.

Thank you very much.