



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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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,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Nicholas Burnet,
Assistant Director-General for Education
on the occasion of the inauguration of the UNESCO
Chair in Children,
Youth and Civic Engagement, National University
of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)

Republic of Ireland, 4 March 2009

Address by
Mr Nicholas BURNETT

Assistant Director-General for Education
of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
on the occasion of the visit to the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)
to mark the inauguration of
the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement

Republic of Ireland, 4 March 2009

Your Excellency, President Mary McAleese,

Dr James Browne, President of the National University of Ireland, Galway

Professor Dolan,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I am here today to help mark the inauguration of this exciting and innovative new UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, and it is a particular honour to do so in the esteemed presence of Her Excellency, President Mary McAleese, who is such a staunch advocate of the values and ideals that UNESCO works to promote.

My sincere thanks also to the President of NUI Galway, Dr. James D. Browne, for supporting this UNESCO Chair and my greetings to the Chairholder, Professor Pat Dolan, Director of the Child and Family Research Centre. Professor Dolan's veritable passion and commitment to family health and wellness is evidenced by his over 20 years of professional experience, much of it spent working directly with youth and in the community. It is therefore with great pleasure and anticipation that UNESCO welcomes Professor Dolan into the circle of eminent UNESCO Chairholders worldwide.

As you may know, there are currently 628 UNESCO Chairs and 60 UNITWIN Networks established across 125 different countries in all world regions and involving over 750 different institutions – yet this represents the first UNESCO Chair to be established in the Republic of Ireland. With its aim of promoting civic engagement and leadership skills among children and youth, and fostering international debate on civic engagement as an educational policy issue, it is a particularly fitting first UNESCO Chair as it epitomizes both the values and spirit of UNESCO, and the goals and objectives of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme.

What are these goals and objectives? President McAleese once said that the theme of her Presidency would be “building bridges.” If I may be so bold, I will borrow this theme from President McAleese as I believe that it sums up the spirit of UNESCO’s Chairs Programme, which seeks in essence to “build bridges” among institutions, disciplines, and countries around the world in an effort to promote the values enshrined in the Preamble to UNESCO’s Constitution: “full and equal opportunities for education for all, ... the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and ... the free exchange of ideas and knowledge.”

UNESCO Chairs build bridges between institutions, serving as a sort of intermediary between the academic community and policy-makers, and seeking also to provide both groups with a greater voice in the context of the UN system. That is certainly one of the goals of the Chair we are here to inaugurate today.

UNESCO Chairs also build bridges between disciplines. The promotion of civic engagement requires interdisciplinarity, necessitating education in politics, the cultural environment, communications and media, and much, much more. Moreover, holds policy lessons not only for the Ministry of Education but also for many other sectors such as Labour, Justice, and Health and Sport.

Finally, UNESCO Chairs build bridges between countries around the world, in particular between countries of the North and the South. The UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth, and Civic Engagement will do this through its partnership with Universities and Centres in Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Zambia and through the international network of UNESCO Chairs, including, for example, the Chair in Education for Pluralism, Human Rights and Democracy, of the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, we are confident that this new UNESCO Chair will be building many bridges, and that these bridges will help lead us to a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future for all. This is all the more important in light of the current global economic and financial crisis.

Thank you.