



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 Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the lecture “Preventing violent-extremism in the 21st  
century: fostering a new generation of global citizens” at the Center for  
Conflict Resolution**

**Salisbury University, 4 April 2017**

Professor Brian Polkinghorn, Executive Director of the *Center for Conflict Resolution*,

Dear Professors, Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you.

I am deeply honoured to receive the President's Medal of Salisbury University.

I accept this award as a sign of your support to UNESCO's action for peace, as a reflection of the values we share.

This is my first visit ... but I must say I feel at home.

I feel at home, because I was a Fellow at the *School of Public Policy*, at the University of Maryland, in 1989.

I feel at home also, because it is a true honour to speak at the *Center for Conflict Resolution* ... I should say the *Bosserman Center for Conflict Resolution*.

I know the founder of the Center, the Reverend Phil Bosserman, Professor of Sociology and Peace Studies at Salisbury University, had a special place in his heart for UNESCO.

He used to say he began his life-long dedication to peace as a young man, an Emporia High School delegate to the UNESCO General Conference in 1948.

1948...!

Reverend Bosserman was a teacher and a preacher.

He was a champion of peace, imbued with values at the heart of UNESCO.

Empathy and compassion.

Solidarity and cooperation.

UNESCO was born in London in 1945 and is based today in Paris.

But the Organisation bears the deep imprint of this country and its values.

It was the American poet, diplomat and Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeish, who penned the lines that open our Constitution:

*“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”*

I invite all young women and men to read this Constitution.

It is safe to say the spirit of the United States is written into our DNA...

I see here the importance of the *Bosserman Center for Conflict Resolution*.

The search for peace may be as old as humanity itself.

We know there are many theories on how to build and sustain peace.

Some point to regime type, to the link between democracy and peace.

Others underline the importance of institutions and norms, to advance order and justice, in a world of both power and ideas.

All of these are, of course, essential, but I would say they are not enough, and here we return to the message of the UNESCO Constitution.

The Preamble states:

*“A peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of peoples of the world [...] peace must be founded, if is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”*

Written in the aftermath of the Second World War, these words resonate still powerfully today.

The stakes are high.

Across the world, we see conflicts changing shape, with culture moving to the frontline.

Culture has always been the victim of war, from collateral damage, from direct targeting and looting.

What we see today is new.

It is new in scale and nature, and this is why I have spoken of ‘cultural cleansing.’

In 2001, we all remember the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, in Afghanistan, ordered by the Taliban.

In 2012, eleven years later, we saw violent extremists take control of the fabled city of Timbuktu, in Mali, and destroy the city’s mausoleums.

At the time, the French news agency AFP interviewed a man said to be part of the violent extremist group controlling Timbuktu.

*“There is no world heritage,”* the man claimed. *“It doesn’t exist.”*

I believe this captures the challenge we face.

Since then, in Iraq and Syria, along with a tragic humanitarian crisis, we have seen the systematic violation of human rights and persecution of people on ethnic and religious grounds.

We have seen the intentional destruction of irreplaceable cultural landmarks, and organised looting for illicit trafficking.

We have seen the destruction of schools, horrendous killings of journalists, attacks against the symbols and institutions of free thinking, against the values we share.

All of this is part of the same strategy of 'cultural cleansing.'

This seeks to destroy identities by eliminating heritage and cultural markers.

They seek to weaken social fabrics, by destroying sources of belonging and renewal.

They attack pluralism, to impose exclusive visions of identity.

Nowadays Internet is another front in this struggle.

Violent extremism is fuelled by a global media campaign that targets young people, to radicalise and recruit.

Some 60,000 twitter accounts support Daesh, with an average of one thousand followers.

This campaign is very often high-quality, multilingual, and well-targeted, drawing on major films, video games and music videos...

In 2016, there were 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq, in Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen.

We see this threat echoed in terrorist attacks across the world.

Two weeks ago, London was targeted.

Last June, we saw the horrendous attack that killed 49 people and wounded 53 in Orlando.

In 2015, in 2016, Paris was struck twice.

These attacks show the vulnerability all societies face from a threat that has many faces and knows no borders – as we have seen in Mali, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq, Indonesia...

I believe violent extremism is a thread tying all this together.

I know many experts, researches, search for the reasons, but there is no single cause for its rise.

Nor is there a single trajectory leading someone to extremist violence.

What we do know is that 'hard power' is not enough to counter a threat that draws on an exclusive vision of the world, that builds on false interpretations of faith, hatred and intolerance.

We need 'soft power'.

We need the message of the UNESCO Constitution, the message of Archibald MacLeish.

I believe we all agree that no one is *born* a violent extremist.

Violent extremists are made – they are fuelled.

Young people are learning to hate – we must teach them peace.

Violent extremists promote fear and division -- we must respond with opportunities for civic engagement, with skills for intercultural dialogue.

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.

This must start on the benches of schools.

We need education, to empower young women and men, to disarm processes that can lead to violent extremism.

This calls for new educational policies that ensure safe and non-violent places of learning.

This calls for new educational content and teaching, to promote dialogue and mutual understanding.

These goals underpin all UNESCO's action to take forward Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education, at the heart of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, agreed by all countries in 2015.

UNESCO is acting across the field to take it forward.

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

The former United States Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke at this conference, and I recall his words:

*“By arming young minds with a world perspective rooted in respect, social justice, diversity and critical thinking, we can not only counter radicalization as it arises, but prevent its growth in the first place.”*

These, indeed, are the stakes.

Last September, 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.

This February, in Ottawa, I was honoured to open the *UNESCO Week for Peace and Sustainable Development*, with the support of Canada, to explore how to teach peace and global citizenship.

We need to act across the board, to transform education and to support educators.

This guides the normative tools developed by UNESCO -- our *Teachers' Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism* and our forthcoming *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.

We lead the same work in West Africa, with the *International Organisation of La Francophonie*.

We are supporting education to prevent violent extremism in Morocco, in Mauritania, in Senegal.

UNESCO has also crafted guidelines for human rights education – the 2006 *Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, the 2011 *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*.

Taking this forward calls for new partnerships, a new openness with civil society.

This is the importance of UNESCO's first *Chair on Global Citizenship Education* at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I would highlight here also the work of the *UNESCO Chair on Genocide Education* at the University of Southern California and the *UNESCO Chair in Genocide Prevention* at the State University of New Jersey.

In this respect, I wish to single out the outstanding leadership of Dr Mark Brennan, *UNESCO Chair for Rural Community, Leadership, and Youth Development* at the

Pennsylvania State University -- he is one of UNESCO's greatest champions in the United States.

UNESCO is leading the world in advancing Holocaust education -- in turbulent times, I believe that we must teach this history to never forget, to fight racism and hatred today, to prevent new genocides in the future.

The same spirit underpins the exhibition, *People, Book, Land: The 3,500 year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land*, organised with UNESCO and the *Simon Wiesenthal Centre*.

We launched the exhibition at UNESCO in June 2014, followed by the United Nations Headquarters in March 2015, and it has now travelled the world, to the Knesset, the US Congress, the Vatican, Buenos Aires and Baku.

All this reflects our shared conviction that education must be more than transmitting information.

Education is about values.

It is about critical thinking.

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

It is about cultural literacy, respect and equal dignity.

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

Fundamentally, education must be about laying the foundations for peace.

I see this as a new frontline today, across the world...especially in conflict situations...

Unfortunately, the tragedy is that there are today 34 million children and adolescents out-of-school in conflict-affected countries.



Education in emergencies must become a global priority – we cannot lose a generation to despair and violence...

This is why, in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon, in Jordan, UNESCO is investing in education for young Internally Displaced Persons and refugees.

This is why in Afghanistan UNESCO is leading a literacy program for the Afghan police, to improve the rule of law and confidence in the judicial system.

We are acting also in the digital world.

People speak of a new generation of ‘digital natives.’

I believe we must nurture a new generation of ‘digital citizens.’

Young women and men are building new online communities, new forms of dialogue.

But we know the Internet can also provide a megaphone for violence, for views that reject human rights, that sow discord.

This means crafting counter-narratives, bolstering media literacy skills, to promote tolerance and respect.

In June 2015, UNESCO held the first *International Conference on Youth and the Internet – Fighting Radicalisation* – we held a second *International Conference on Countering Youth Radicalization in Cyberspace* last November in Quebec, Canada.

We must provide young people with skills to reject hate speech and counter propaganda, to defend the values at the heart of humanity.

This is why I went twice to Iraq - in 2015 to the University of Baghdad to launch a new global social media campaign #Unite4Heritage and last year to Baghdad and Erbil.

The same goals underpin UNESCO’s action to safeguard cultural heritage and diversity – in Mali, Iraq, Syria.

Because we believe that culture is more than buildings and stones.

It is about identities and belonging.

It is about protecting values from the past that are important today and tomorrow.

This is the message at the heart of the historic United Nations Security Council Resolution adopted just some days ago, on 24 March, on the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflicts.

This is UNESCO's message in Mali.

In 2013, I visited Timbuktu after its liberation, with French President, and we promised to rebuild the mausoleums destroyed by violent extremists.

In July 2015, I returned to Timbuktu to celebrate the reconstruction of all 14 mausoleums.

I saw not only the joy but I had the feeling we were giving back to them their identity.

I saw the pride and strength this gave local communities

This matters for each of us, as members of one humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said:

*"Freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be achieved."*

This idea is built into UNESCO.

Freedom must be nurtured, it must be promoted, it must be defended.

This is what UNESCO and the United States are doing together, and this is why I am convinced UNESCO has never mattered so much for the United States – and the United States has never mattered so much for UNESCO.

I believe we are in a race today.

This is a race to educate, nurture, include all women and men.

This is a race for the hearts and minds of young women and men in poor neighbourhoods, in rural areas, in refugee camps, in conflict situation...

This is a race to provide every young woman and man with a sense of solidarity as global citizens, to give them skills and values to tackle the challenges of our times.

This is UNESCO's message, and I believe these are values and goals we share with the *Bosserman Center of Conflict Resolution*, and with the Salisbury University.

I thank once again Professor Polkinghorn for this invitation, and each of you for your support.

I am deeply honoured to be awarded the President's Medal of Salisbury University.

Thank you.