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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 Global Citizen Forum**

Monaco, 8 October 2015

Mr Armand Arton, Founder of the *Global Citizen Forum*,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the *Global Citizen Forum*.

I must say it is a special pleasure to do so here, in Monaco.

The Principality of Monaco may be one of UNESCO's smallest Member States – it is one of the greatest champions of the values and objectives that guide all UNESCO's action, for which I am deeply grateful.

UNESCO was created in 1945, in a world rebuilding after a devastating war.

The Organisation is founded on the idea that peace, to be lasting, must be built in the minds of women and men, through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

Today, seven decades later, this idea has never been so urgent.

On the one hand, opportunities have never been so great, for exchanges and dialogue, understanding and respect.

Societies are never been so interconnected.

Thanks to new media, a new global public space is emerging that crosses all boundaries.

This is a blessing for more inclusive, sustainable and just development – we see this embodied in the new *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, agreed by all States, on 25 September.

The *2030 Agenda* sets forth 17 Sustainable Development Goals that are universal and far-reaching – to end poverty and hunger, to combat inequalities, to build peaceful and inclusive societies, to protect human rights and promote gender equality, to ensure the lasting protection of the planet.

In the words of the Declaration, this is “*an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people.*”

This new Agenda comes at a time of unprecedented turbulence...

Across the world, we see conflicts tearing societies apart, with civilians hit hardest.

We see the unprecedented rise of violent extremism, along with what I have called ‘cultural cleansing.’

We see humanity’s cultural heritage destroyed and looted.

We see communities persecuted on the basis of their religion and ethnicity.

We see education under attack, children forced out of learning.

We see freedom of expression challenged, journalists killed.

We see new divides emerging against perceived ‘Others’.

At the same time, we are reaching the limits of our planet, with the rising consequences of climate change.

The refugee crisis around the Mediterranean and in Europe shines light on the complexity of the challenges we face – driven by devastating conflicts and humanitarian crises in Syria and Iraq and further afield, forcing millions to flee and cross borders, raising issues for the region and much further afield.

Responding to these challenges calls for new ways of thinking, new ways of acting.

The world is transforming – we need to change with it.

This is the importance of the notion of global citizenship.

This is not a legal term, but rather a sense of solidarity with others and with the planet.

This is about recognizing the rights and dignity of every woman and man.

This is about shared responsibility towards the well-being of everyone, wherever they live, whatever their circumstances, because humanity is a single family, sharing a common history and a destiny.

Global citizenship is a sense of belonging to a world that is one.

The Saudi cosmonaut Sultan bin Salman Al-Saud spoke about this after his first trip in space:

The first day or so, we all pointed to our countries. The third or fourth day, we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were aware of only one Earth.

We cannot all go to space...but, today, we must all become global citizens.

This calls for new skills – to promote respect for the planet and understanding between cultures, to develop new values and behaviours of solidarity, to harness the energy of young women and men for the benefit of all.

This has never been so important.

Opportunities for exchange and understanding have perhaps never been so great – but intolerance is on the rise.

We see a rift between those who believe in a single humanity and those who reject diversity, dialogue and living together.

These are the stakes raised by deepening poverty and inequality, between and within societies.

These are the stakes raised by cultural cleansing in Syria and Iraq.

These are the stakes raised by an increasing humanitarian and refugee crisis.

Being a global citizen means standing together on the basis of equal dignity.

Being a global citizen means sharing the wealth of diversity as a force of renewal not distrust.

This must start as early as possible...with children, with young women and men.

This must start on the benches of schools.

Young people are leading change – they are also its first victims.

This is why I believe we are in a race today.

A race to educate, engage, nurture, and include all young women and men.

A race for the hearts and minds of young women and men in poor neighbourhoods, in rural areas, in refugee camps.... for the hearts and minds of young women, forced into marriages, out of school.... for the hearts and minds of young men, lured by violent extremism.

We must provide young women and men with a sense of solidarity as global citizens, give them the skills and values they need to tackle the challenges of our times.

Education is the first defence of peace.

Education today must be more than transmitting information and knowledge.

It must be about learning to live in a world under pressure.

It must be about new forms of cultural literacy, on the basis of respect and equal dignity.

It must be about laying the foundations for a culture of peace.

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

Global citizenship education is priority for UNESCO today.

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

We all know the power of education as a human right, a force for gender equality, a transformation multiplier – to strengthen health, to reduce child mortality, to redress inequalities, to embed peace.

Since 2000, there has been great progress in promoting education for all – but the world remains far off mark.

According to UNESCO, 59 million children remain out of school today.

250 million children are not learning the basics, whether they are in school or not.

The situation is worse for girls, and in conflict situations, where 34 million children are out of school.

Among these, there are almost 3 million girls and boys from Iraq and Syria -- either displaced internally or in neighbouring countries.

This lost generation throws a shadow over our common future.

At the same time, only 2 percent of humanitarian aid goes to education – ten times less than what is needed.

These children have little hope and no skills -- we must provide them with opportunities to become everything they wish.

This is UNESCO's response to refugee crisis, to support children, young women and men affected by the conflict in Syria and the crisis in Iraq.

The region cannot afford to lose this generation.

The world cannot afford it.

This is about human rights – this is about development – this is about security.

This is why UNESCO is supporting education, skills training, remedial classes, psycho-social support to children, internally displaced and refugees, across the region, in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

We are working to bridge learning gaps and enhance teaching quality for some 20,000 students in Iraq.

In Jordan, we are supporting the Ministry of Education and some 50 centres across the country.

In Lebanon, we are working to support youth, schools and teachers.

Through the *NetMed Youth* project, UNESCO is promoting the positive engagement of young women and men in 10 countries across the Mediterranean.

We are working with religious leaders, with media, with universities across the region, to strengthen youth engagement for peace.

We must nurture the rise of a new generation of global citizens -- to eradicate poverty, to enhance social inclusion.

Human rights and dignity must be the starting point of all our efforts.

This calls also for action to prevent and counter violent extremism, in Syria and Iraq, across the world.

Two weeks ago, President Barack Obama said during the *Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism* he hosted at the United Nations:

Ideologies are not defeated by guns but new ideas. The path is not less democracy but more democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

On the same occasion, Prime Minister David Cameron pointed to the vital importance of starting as early as possible, to address the building blocks of violent extremism, in schools.

This is the new frontline for hearts and minds of people today.

Young people are learning how to hate -- we have to teach them peace.

This is the goal for the first-ever *High-Level Conference on Countering Violent Extremism through Education* UNESCO is organising on 6 November, with the United States and partners.

The same spirit guides the *Teachers' Guide for Countering Violent Extremism* UNESCO is developing to support educators across the world.

With the United States and Brazil, we are supporting teachers in teaching respect and tolerance in classrooms, in Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Indonesia and Kenya.

Similar goals underpin all UNESCO's work to strengthen education for human rights, to advance Holocaust Education, to counter all forms of discrimination and racism.

This includes action to fight youth radicalisation.

On 16 June, UNESCO organised the high-level international conference on *Youth and the Internet: Fighting Radicalization and Extremism*, where I launched a new framework for action, *Empowering Youth to Build Peace*.

Our goal is to equip young people with knowledge, skills and values to engage as global citizens online, resilient to radicalization.

This builds on UNESCO's global social media campaign -- #Unite4Heritage – I launched last March in Baghdad, to challenge hate propaganda, to strengthen young voices around shared values.

This is a key part of UNESCO's wider action to stand up to violent extremism.

This includes work to halt impunity for the war crimes of cultural cleansing.

On 24 September, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, with UNESCO's strong support, transferred the first suspect to the International Criminal Court accused of destroying and looting mausoleums and World Heritage Sites in Timbuktu, Mali.

This involves stronger action to stop the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

Following United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 of last February, UNESCO is working with INTERPOL, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, to support countries across the world, to strengthen legislation, to build capacity, to stop this channel of financing to terrorism.

All of this is about global citizenship.

This is our response to hate propaganda, to acts of violence that seek to divide humanity, to weaken the grounds for peace.

For the same reason, we must stand up for freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, wherever they are threatened – this is UNESCO's mandate, and we

leading forward the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

Global citizenship is also about harmony with the planet.

Education will be crucial to implementing the new *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, agreed by States last month.

Sustainability requires changes in how we produce and consume.

Fundamentally, it requires new ways of seeing the world, new ways of thinking about our responsibilities to each other and the planet, new ways of acting and behaving as global citizens.

This is the importance of education for sustainable development, a key part of UNSCO's work for global citizenship education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been twice to Iraq over the past year, and this is the message I heard from Prime Minister Al-Abadi:

Ignorance is our public enemy number 1, as youth who do not know their own story are easy targets to the distorted discourses of extremists: they reject their neighbours and do not realize they are brothers.

This is true in Iraq, in other conflict situations.

It is also true in Europe, where nothing could be more dangerous than to allow hatred and rejection of 'others' take root across the continent.

More than ever, we need new forms of cultural literacy, between and within societies, to enhance respect for the diversity that enriches us and the human rights that bring us together.

Cultural diversity is a reality for all societies today – and this calls for new policies of inclusion and participation.

To move forward, we need every actor on board, from civil society to the private sector, to connect the dots, to foster the innovation the world needs today.

In the words of the late Czech President Vaclav Havel:

Nobody can save the world alone, but everyone should behave as though this were indeed possible.

Each of us has a responsibility to others.

Each of us has a responsibility to the world.

This is about human rights and dignity.

This is about inclusion and peace.

Fundamentally, this is about the kind of societies we want to live in.

Socrates said:

I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world.

This must become not only the credo of this Forum -- but a rallying cry for young women and men across the world.

This idea stands at the heart of UNESCO's mission – it has never been so important.

Thank you.