



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
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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 Event on Education for Preventing Violent
Extremism**

Brussels, 21 March 2017

The Honourable Mr Pavel Telicka, Vice-President of the European Parliament,

The Honourable Mr Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Member of the European Parliament,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank Mr Pavel Telicka, Vice-President of the European Parliament and the Honourable Mr Ilhan Kyuchyuk for hosting this event on a question that goes to the heart of peace and security today.

In 2015 and 2016, violent extremists targeted France.

In March 2016, violent extremists struck Belgium.

In December 2016, Germany suffered an attack at a Christmas market in Berlin.

These attacks show the vulnerability all societies face today.

They show also the resilience at the heart of Europe, the depth of our commitment to the values we share.

Human rights and dignity.

Democracy.

Solidarity in action.

Europe has been attacked, but the threat knows no borders – as we have seen in Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Mali, Indonesia, Afghanistan...

This threat has many faces.

In Iraq and Syria, along with a devastating humanitarian crisis, we have seen the persecution of people on ethnic and religious grounds.

We have seen attacks to eliminate the culture of coexistence at the heart of the region.

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

We have seen the destruction of schools, horrendous attacks on journalists.

...violent extremism is the red thread tying all this together.

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' also.

We need the message of the UNESCO Constitution, to build the defences of peace in the minds of women and men.

I see this as a global battle for hearts and minds, and, in this respect, I wish to commend the work led by the European Union...

There is the 2014 *EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*.

There is the 2015 *Paris Declaration* of EU Education Ministers, on promoting citizenship, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

There is the European Parliament Resolution of 25 November 2015, on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations.

There is the 2016 European Commission Communication on preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism.

All these set out a comprehensive strategy to not just *counter* violent extremism but *prevent* its rise – this same idea stands at the heart of UNESCO's action, and our contribution to the *UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* and the *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*.

My message today is clear.

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 education, with skills with opportunities for civic engagement, for intercultural dialogue.

Taking this forward calls for new political will, new partnerships, a new openness with civil society ...to counter hate speech ... to reject calls for exclusive populism...

This was UNESCO's message at the *Civil Society Forum–Neighbouring South*, organized by the European Union last May and at the *2016 Mediterranean Forum for Intercultural Dialogue*, organized by the *Anna Lindh Foundation* last October.

Violent extremists preach exclusion and hatred.

We must teach human rights, tolerance and solidarity.

I see this as a new frontline today, in Europe and across the world...especially in conflict situations... there are today 34 million out-of-school children and adolescents living in conflict-affected countries.

Education in emergencies must become a global priority, and I commend the EU commitment to increase its engagement here, and call for all to follow suit ever more – we cannot lose a generation to despair and violence...

Violent extremists breed on mistrust, on fear 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 approaches to education.

We need new policies, that ensure safe and non-violent places of learning.

We need new contents and teaching approaches that promote dialogue and mutual understanding.

These goals underpin UNESCO's leadership in taking forward Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education.

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

Last September, 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.

Last month, in Ottawa, I was honoured to open the *UNESCO Week for Peace and Sustainable Development*, with the support of the Government of Canada, to bolster global citizenship education.

We must act across the board, to transform education and 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*.

With the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 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*.

UNESCO has also crafted education guidelines for human rights education – there are the 2006 *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* and the 2011 *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims*, led with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

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 today are building new online communities, new forms of dialogue.

The Internet can also provide a megaphone for violence, for views that reject human rights, that sow discord.

This is the importance of sharing best practices, for counter-narratives, for bolstering media literacy.

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.

Fighting hate speech is vital here – I wish to commend the *Code of Conduct* approved in May 2016 by the European Commission with such companies as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft, to combat illegal online hate speech in Europe.

Violent extremists say humanity is not a single communitythey say diversity is dangerous...

We must help young people respond by showing dialogue between cultures as the driving force of all history.

This is why I went to the University of Baghdad in 2015, to launch a new global social media campaign -- #Unite4Heritage -- to strengthen the narrative of shared values and heritage.

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

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, for resilience, for reconciliation, for reconstruction.

In 2013, I visited Timbuktu, at the invitation of President Francois Hollande and promised to rebuild the mausoleums destroyed by violent extremists.

In July 2015, I returned, with H.E. Rama N'Diaye Ramatoulaye Diallo, Minister of Culture, to celebrate the reconstruction of all 14 mausoleums.

This matters for the people of Mali – it matters for each of us...especially for young people.

Similar objectives underpin UNESCO's *Networks of Mediterranean Youth* NET-MED Youth project, funded by the European Union -- empowering young women and men with new skills and opportunities, in 10 countries around the Mediterranean.

This is why UNESCO launched, with partners, the new *Education Cannot Wait Fund*, at the *World Humanitarian Summit*, to advance education in conflicts – and this is the importance of UNESCO's *Education Response to the Syria Crisis*, in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe our message today is clear.

Building a more just, more peaceful, more sustainable future for all must start in schools.

For this, we need a new vision of education....

... to reach every girl and boy, especially girls.

...to promote dialogue and understanding between cultures, and strengthen the resilience of societies.

Education must be more than transmitting information and knowledge.

It must be about learning to live in societies under pressure.

It must be about new forms of cultural literacy.

It must be about new skills for new times – to give learners tools to make the most of diversity, to develop new values and behaviours of solidarity.

In this spirit, I wish to thank once again the European Parliament – especially Mr Pavel Telicka, Vice-President of the European Parliament and the Honourable Mr Ilhan Kyuchyuk -- for its leadership, and each of our distinguished panellists for their engagement.

I know this is a special week for all Europeans, with the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties.

I believe we can all take courage from the determination for peace through dialogue and cooperation that is the beating heart of the European project – this has never been so vital, on the continent, for the world.

Thank you.