

**Conférence générale**

31e session
Document d'information

Генеральная конференция

31-я сессия
Информационный документ

inf

Paris 2001

General Conference

31st session
Information document

المؤتمر العام

الدورة الحادية والثلاثون
وثيقة إعلامية

Conferencia General

31ª reunión
Documento de información

大会

第三十一届会议
资料性文件

31 C/INF.10
18 October 2001
English & French only

Address by
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the opening of the general policy debate
31st session of the General Conference

UNESCO, 16 October 2001

Mr President of the General Conference,
Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than 50 years ago, human beings woke up in the midst of ruins ... “Never again”, they said.

Our Organization arose from their determination to move beyond the rationale of war by creating the conditions for a trusting dialogue among peoples. The message in our Constitution seemed cruelly relevant on 11 September last, when blind violence and fanaticism reached a new threshold in the intolerable.

For a little more than a month, all over the world, there has been bewilderment and attempts to find explanations. In the opinion of some, we may be witnessing the first act of a predestined tragedy, a “clash of civilizations” – the inevitable conclusion of a long historical process. Others, short-sightedly, confuse two concepts: they see terrorism and Islam as indissociable. There are also those who seek to establish a hierarchy among the different cultures and the different religions. Many, and probably the majority, are despairing of the promises that the new millennium seemed to bring with it.

All these are false or despairing theories that we must condemn and reject.

In founding the United Nations, the international community gave us grounds for hope. It provided itself with a forum in which to discuss, collectively, courses of action and legal texts, universal in scope, which would enable it to deal with acts that, unpunished, would create conditions for a new generalized flare-up.

Within this system, UNESCO has a crucial role to play, even if its action is not based on the short term, because the essential political, diplomatic, security and financial initiatives that are currently being taken by the international community must be supplemented by others with a “cultural” dimension so as to ensure that they are permanently effective.

In the same way that every effort must be made to stem the funding for this new international terrorism at the source, and to dismantle its active networks, there is a need to combat the cultural and ideological pretexts on which it relies to support itself and spread its influence.

It is erroneous and even dangerous to regard exclusion, discrimination and poverty as the roots of terrorism. However, it must be clearly stated that these evils are used as an excuse by those looking for recruits to fight the personal war that they are waging against humanity.

All the more reason to make greater efforts and to try to find both a coherent and a global answer to it. The United Nations, and the constellation of institutions that are attached to it, constitute precisely the place where such a coherent and global answer can be forged. And it is probably for this very reason that the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded jointly to the United Nations and its Secretary-General “for their work for a better organized and more

peaceful world”. This Prize is strongly symbolic of the conviction that peace and international security can now only emanate from a collective and concerted resolve, organized on a worldwide scale. It marks an occasion for all of us to reaffirm our commitment to multilateral cooperation, which is obviously the only framework in which to grasp and deal with the problems of a globalizing world. It is also an occasion for me to offer my sincere congratulations to Kofi Annan for this distinction that honours all of us.

These tragic events will have suddenly placed the values that are at the heart of UNESCO’s mission – tolerance, dialogue, respect, mutual understanding: in a word, the culture of peace – at the head of the list of international priorities. It is clearly the message which the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, which we are celebrating in 2001, intended to convey. It is all the more relevant to the present. We must redouble our efforts not only to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the diversity of cultures but also the ability to accept others, regardless of difference, and to include them in a willingness to “live together”, which is what we now need most.

Of course, UNESCO is duty-bound to do more, and even better, in order to achieve progress towards the objective that it has been pursuing since its inception. We can certainly not avoid an in-depth re-examination of the means to be used in order to reach those whom, clearly, we have not succeeded in convincing. The goal is not to reinvent what exists, but to reconsider, in the light of the recent events and the conclusions that we must draw from them, our modes of action and the sectors of the public that we must reach.

More generally, we shall have to take part in setting up, on an international scale, the machinery for a new mode of dialogue. Over and above dialogue between States, whose wheels are now relatively well oiled, we shall have to invent rules governing dialogue between States and those entities that we now call, somewhat vaguely, “civil societies”. It is precisely the task that awaits the United Nations as a whole if its aim is to take up the challenges of globalization. UNESCO, which has maintained a long-standing, almost symbiotic, relationship with non-governmental organizations and intellectual and professional communities, can make a useful contribution to this debate.

Mr President,

The General Conference at its 31st session has before it a document – the Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007 – which embodies our vision of UNESCO’s role and responsibilities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This vision has taken shape over the past two years, but the events of recent weeks have, unfortunately, served as tragic confirmation of its relevance.

It is entirely organized around the promotion of two principles that are as fundamental as they are inseparable: universality and diversity. Here, indeed, we have a tension that has inspired UNESCO’s action since its foundation, but one which has taken on new significance in a globalizing world.

As the outlines emerge of a system which, above and beyond relations between States, is becoming genuinely global, the need is felt in many areas of the economy, society and culture to define new rules of action, to establish standards and principles of regulation, or quite simply of operation, which are acceptable to all, since they rest on values that are recognized and shared by all.

Today, universality is probably the real challenge of globalization, in that we want globalization to benefit all and humanity as a whole. This is particularly true in the areas of

concern to UNESCO: with increasing deregulation and privatization in various spheres of society, UNESCO must stand ready to defend education, science, and culture as individual goods, vectors of values and meaning that must be preserved on behalf of humanity as a whole. I am convinced that UNESCO will thus be called upon in the years ahead to reinforce its standard-setting action considerably in order to protect and strengthen what we must now call the “common public goods”.

Today, however, this universality must necessarily be seen in the context of the acknowledgement of diversity – diversity of needs and aspirations, environments and ways of life, systems of thought and belief. The harmonious management of diversity, in a way that takes account of ethics and the interests of humanity as a whole, is probably the most pressing challenge facing the international community.

Against this backdrop, UNESCO’s traditional role – to create, safeguard, disseminate and share knowledge – takes on new relevance, since it means securing the participation of the largest number in the direction taken and the progress made by what are known as “knowledge” societies, where knowledge is the driving force of development. It is essential to ensure that every individual and every society has equitable access to information and the skills required by knowledge-based development.

That is the mission which, in my opinion, is an imperative for UNESCO at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Ordered around the three strategic thrusts of *promoting universality*, *protecting diversity* and *sharing knowledge*, its overriding objective is the eradication of poverty. Globalization, which has created unprecedented wealth and well-being for some, is nevertheless synonymous with increased marginalization, exclusion and deprivation for many others, who represent in fact most of humankind. The persistence of poverty, and above all extreme poverty, is a fundamental denial of justice and an affront to human dignity. Its eradication is the first step along the road to globalization with a human face. For UNESCO, it means integrating its own objectives, those of education, science, culture and communication, into the strategies to combat poverty implemented at the national and international levels, with a view to giving each group and each individual, including the most marginalized, the opportunity to make their own choices and take part in the construction of changing societies.

To achieve this end, the new information and communication technologies represent unprecedented potential. If the widening of the digital divide must be avoided at all costs, the new technologies may constitute an extremely powerful lever for promoting, on an unprecedented scale, the exchange and dissemination of knowledge, education and training, promotion of creativity, and intercultural dialogue. In the years to come, UNESCO should become the pioneer of this “new deal” brought to us by the new information and communication technologies. It should do so by exploring their potential for furthering progress towards a more equitable world and societies that are more participatory and caring – in short, towards globalization with a human face.

UNESCO is not alone in this project. It is merely one instrument among many. Neither can it be *everything to everyone*. We should therefore focus even more closely on that which is our comparative advantage, by making ourselves a hub for identifying and disseminating the best global expertise, a platform for policy dialogue and interdisciplinary exchange, and a catalyst for international cooperation in our fields of competence.

This is what has led me in my proposals for the next two years to concentrate efforts and resources on five fields of action that are considered to be absolute priorities: basic education; water resources and ecosystems; the ethics of science and technology; diversity,

pluralism and intercultural dialogue, and access to information for all, in particular in the public domain.

Mr President,

This vision of the UNESCO of the initial years of the twenty-first century was already in gestation when I spoke to you, for the first time, two years ago.

It has, of course, filled out considerably during these two years, thanks to the debates which have taken place in the Executive Board and its Task Force for Reflection on UNESCO in the Twenty-First Century, thanks also to the various consultations which have been launched with the Member States and their National Commissions, and thanks to the hard work done by the Secretariat.

This vision, which is set out in the Medium-Term Strategy, began to take shape and come alive through the action undertaken over the last two years. And the unifying theme of this General Conference – **living together in our diversity** – is splendidly illustrated by the exhibition which we opened last night.

That is why I am very happy indeed that UNESCO is able, today, to propose the first text of international scope to deal with **cultural diversity** and its manifold aspects.

The text is the end-product of exemplary cooperation between the Secretariat, the Executive Board and the Member States as a whole. The draft Declaration which was transmitted to you by the Executive Board enjoyed a broad and strong consensus. We can all, therefore, take collective pride at this result.

It shows that UNESCO was able, in good time, to take up an issue which is now at the heart of international concerns. Its elaboration has been a long process, because points of view which were initially very different had to be reconciled. The draft Declaration itself bears witness to an approach to diversity which makes it an inclusive, and not a divisive, factor. To understand, respect and stimulate diversity at the same time as “wanting to live together”, is, succinctly put, the body of the Declaration, which should provide us with a compass for navigating in the choppy seas of globalization. It is a major intellectual achievement, and is also a political commitment of the greatest importance. I should like to express the wish that, over and above the ethical frame of reference that it provides, it will come to obtain the same degree of importance as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its relevance is all the more obvious, coming shortly after the tragic events of 11 September and their consequences.

UNESCO’s action to promote the **heritage** should be understood in the light of the Declaration. Our conception of the heritage is, indeed, anything but memorialist. It is because the heritage was the crucible that contained a great many influences and sources of inspiration at a given time in history, that it can today be the symbol of an identity which is both common and plural, and from which the vital forces of creativity can spring.

In the context of cultural diversity, and its function of ensuring continuity between generations, the intangible heritage is of fundamental importance, despite the fact that it no doubt constitutes the most vulnerable aspect of the cultural identity of peoples. In many places in the world, and the developing countries in particular, this heritage is at risk. Compared with the effective measures that we have put in place for the tangible heritage, the intangible heritage is still the “poor relation” in our action. I therefore thought it necessary and urgent to propose the principle of the preparation of an international instrument for the

safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, and to take immediate action, in order to complement this standard-setting action which will necessarily be a long-term undertaking.

You all have in mind the first *Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* which took place here, at Headquarters, last May, and which constituted an initial response to the emergency. You will, indeed, have the opportunity to see some of them during the three special evening events to which you are invited, the first tonight, and the others during the coming weeks. The second Proclamation will take place in May 2003. I hope that many of you will apply and that we will be able to proclaim a much larger number of masterpieces this time. I believe that all this work, carried out in stages, will help to illuminate the discussions of the General Conference on the new standard-setting instrument for the safeguarding of the intangible heritage, which, in time, will form the complement to the 1972 World Heritage Convention. It goes without saying that UNESCO will avoid any duplication of the work carried out by other agencies, in particular WIPO, while continuing to coordinate closely with the latter.

Another domain which requires our urgent action, because it is at risk from looting, is the underwater heritage. In the *convention concerning the protection of the underwater heritage*, the text of which is at your disposal after a long process of preparation spread over more than four years, we have a full arsenal of standard-setting instruments aimed at protecting the tangible heritage. That is why I attach the greatest importance to the convention being adopted during the present session.

If, time and again, I come back to the matter of our heritage, it is because it is such an outstanding illustration of the underlying oneness of humankind, notwithstanding the countless ways by which it finds expression. It portrays all the cross-fertilizations, the two-way borrowings and the interactions that have necessarily occurred among our cultures.

The Buddhas of Bamiyan embodied the unity of the Afghan people, the continuum of its origins and the diversity of its roots. And so they were destroyed, and with them, part of the collective memory of humankind. The quotation of the great Muslim poet Sa'di of Shiraz, which I recited two years ago in this very same hall, has a cruel ring to it today: "all humans form a single being; he who touches one of its limbs, touches me – and if he wounds it, he wounds me".

In these dark days of our shared history, with the shadow of fear, fire and blood hanging over us, it is a propitious moment for a significant act on the part of the international community that might betoken its sense of unity and desire to pull together in a major endeavour of cooperation, concord and peace.

I am convinced that the time is ripe for the launching of an international effort in favour of the safeguarding of the heritage of the *Old City of Jerusalem*. This city of unique and universal value, of art, of spirituality and of history, is not solely a matter for those around the world who are ever concerned about the kind of status or future it may have. It is a matter for humankind in its entirety. I therefore issue an appeal for the preparation, under UNESCO's auspices, and in the spirit of the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, of an overall plan for the safeguarding of this exceptional heritage which, alas, is still on the Heritage in Danger List. I accordingly intend, if this initiative receives broad endorsement, to seek the means necessary for the funding of this operation, which I shall conduct strictly on a professional and technical footing, removed from all political considerations. I seek from the international community what I see as a duty of self-respect; in this period of bewilderment and mindlessness, let us perform a highly symbolic act which sets forth our faith in the future of the human family, at peace with itself anew.

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Respect for diversity, mutual understanding and tolerance find their most vivid expression in regard to cultural issues. But the enhancement of international peace, human welfare and human security is also a vital concern pervading all fields of UNESCO's competence.

It is obvious, especially within the overall context of accelerating globalization, that individuals and communities without a satisfactory level of basic education risk becoming marginalized not only within their own society but from global society too.

The meeting of the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 proved to be a turning point not only for the EFA movement but also for UNESCO. The Dakar conference was an occasion where Member States and the international community renewed their collective commitment to achieving basic education for all of sound quality. The Dakar Framework for Action adopted by the Forum specified quantitative and qualitative goals to be achieved by 2015. Importantly, a clear link was made between the improvement of basic education and poverty eradication. The education/poverty nexus, in fact, is the point where ignorance, discrimination and exclusion interact with destitution and want, to produce a systematic denial of rights and opportunities.

The Dakar conference brought a most welcome recognition of the centrality of UNESCO to the EFA struggle. UNESCO's role extends not only to coordination and facilitation of the overall EFA process, especially through the promotion of effective forms of partnership, but also to furnish the drive behind EFA at the international and regional levels. At the national level, of course, the national authorities and their partners from civil society and the private sector must provide the main impetus needed by EFA.

It is my feeling that, in the light of recent events, the qualitative goals and targets agreed in Dakar need to be strengthened. In particular, more attention must be given to improving the quality of basic education through the cultivation of values, attitudes and behaviour conducive to peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for others. The International Conference on Education organized by the IBE in Geneva in early September successfully placed the whole question of "learning to live together" more squarely on the EFA agenda. This emphasis will certainly figure within the deliberations of the forthcoming meeting of the High-Level Group along with the review of the first post-Dakar monitoring report, the mobilization of international financial support for EFA, and the further consolidation of the political will and commitment necessary to achieve EFA in the years ahead.

Informing the EFA endeavour will be the technical capacity and output of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, which already has transferred to Montreal, Canada, in readiness for its official opening in late November. The role of the EFA Observatory within the UIS will be crucial for the generation and dissemination of key educational data in coming years. The provision and analysis of sound, accurate statistics will be especially important for informing national and international policy-making processes.

Ensuring that educational policies are knowledge-based is vital, of course, but it is equally important that UNESCO's policy advice and guidance are also values-based, especially regarding the shared values enshrined in international conventions and other normative instruments. Again, knowledge is not enough by itself. In order to live together in

our diversity, we must cultivate appropriate attitudes and values through all our policies and programmes.

The importance of combining knowledge and values could not be clearer when one considers the HIV/AIDS pandemic. That is why I have insisted on the educational dimension of the HIV/AIDS crisis being placed at the top of UNESCO's agenda, especially in terms of preventive education but also in regard to the recovery and sound functioning of education systems crippled by the loss of key educational personnel. The HIV/AIDS crisis is particularly serious in sub-Saharan Africa, where UNESCO's efforts are to be concentrated.

The question of human security arises also in regard to scientific discoveries and technological advances, as is clearly illustrated by developments in the life sciences and biotechnology in recent years. The domain of bioethics is expanding in response to emerging risks and new dilemmas, especially in the area of genetics. It is now imperative that Member States involve themselves in these issues not only in terms of reflection but also through the preparation of national and international law in which the fundamental principles of bioethics should be enshrined.

There is both urgency and high importance associated with these matters. I am therefore pleased that there will be a Round Table of Ministers of Science during the General Conference, which will be the first occasion when the world's Ministers of Science will meet to address the many pressing issues of bioethics and discuss the all-important prospect of a universal standard embodying the international community's common position in this regard. This Round Table will draw upon the most valuable work undertaken by the International Bioethics Committee and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee, which have helped to bring UNESCO widespread recognition as the key agency for bioethics within the United Nations system.

It is vital that close international cooperation and coordination are maintained in relation to these burning issues. In this perspective, I have taken the initiative to propose the creation of an Inter-agency Committee on Bioethics; indeed, the first consultative meeting took place on 17 September 2001. I recently wrote to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to express UNESCO's readiness to undertake the preparatory scientific work concerning the elaboration of a convention forbidding human cloning, as proposed by France and Germany in the present session of the General Assembly.

Thus, in these several ways, UNESCO is seeking to ensure that humankind's capacity to generate knowledge does not outstrip its capacity to exercise sound ethical judgement. Bringing together its expertise and experience in the natural, social and human sciences, UNESCO is well placed to address the key issues arising from the genetic revolution. These include the elaboration of an international instrument on genetic data, which will address issues of confidentiality and discrimination based on genetic considerations. In ways that parallel its concerns over cultural diversity, UNESCO's work in the domain of bioethics is aimed at preserving the human heritage of genetic diversity, which is the very foundation of human security as a species.

The question of diversity also arises in relation to the ecosystems of the natural world. It is inconceivable to address the task of humanizing the globalization process without taking environmental security, interdependence and biodiversity into serious account. In this regard, freshwater resources are a central concern in the period ahead.

Science and technology must be harnessed in order to address the looming crisis of freshwater resources. But not in isolation. In recognition of its comparative advantage and

interdisciplinary focus, UNESCO has been entrusted with the responsibility for hosting the new United Nations Global Programme on Water Resources Assessment, in relation to which 23 United Nations agencies have been mobilized. Through effective inter-agency cooperation and coordination, this Global Programme is actively working to assess and monitor the evolution of freshwater resources. It is also developing instruments that facilitate the peaceful resolution of freshwater-related conflicts. UNESCO is well equipped to play a leading role in this area, drawing upon its experience and capacity as a trusted interface between policy-makers and the scientific community.

As with the field of education, UNESCO's efforts in regard to communication and information must be increasingly directed towards encouraging people to live together in peace and dignity. For years, the Organization has been seeking to strike a balance between the principles of, on the one hand, the free flow of information and, on the other, the fostering of creativity through the protection of the rights of creative artists and authors. The debate has taken on new significance as we come to terms with the new information age, and this is why our discussions here – not only on the equitable use of cyberspace, but also in all matters related to the building of knowledge societies that respect cultural diversity – are a further demonstration of the Organization's relevance.

With regard to the new information and communication technologies, we are adopting a two-pronged strategy. First, we must widen and facilitate free access to information for all and, second, we must promote and protect cultural diversity. UNESCO must do its utmost to promote access to the public domain and ensure that cultural diversity has a secure place within the circuits of the new channels of communication. The UNESCO portal is designed to achieve these purposes. In addition, UNESCO must fashion a normative instrument appropriate to the new conditions of information exchange. In regard to access to cyberspace and the promotion of multilingualism, the text prepared by a group of experts has raised difficulties for some Member States. It has been revisited and a revised version has been circulated that can form the basis for a broader consensus.

All these issues are of capital importance as we prepare for the World Summit on the Information Society that will be convened under the auspices of the United Nations and held in 2003. UNESCO's message must be heard: learning to live together in the global village involves the right to speak, the duty to heed and the desire to understand.

Mr President,

When I was given the honour of becoming UNESCO's Director-General two years ago, Member States set me two main goals: to enhance the Organization's relevance, and to strengthen its effectiveness.

I have worked very hard on both fronts. I have just outlined what has been done in terms of enhancing relevance in our programmes. Let me now discuss the strengthening of UNESCO's effectiveness through the reform of its management and administration.

We have made great strides: the staff, myself, and the Executive Board have worked together in a spirit of cooperation and collective endeavour from which we can rightly draw great satisfaction. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Executive Board and its Chairperson, over the course of its last four sessions, in addressing so many of the serious administrative and management difficulties that needed to be overcome in a progressive and forward-looking spirit of trust and teamwork.

We have struggled with many conflicting requirements, the foremost of which has been balancing financial stringency with rapid modernization. And yet we have succeeded in the space of two years in bringing into being a series of reforms whose depth and scale are, I believe, unparalleled within the United Nations. This was largely due to the very firm political support I have received, and continue to receive, from you, the Member States.

But I do feel bound to note that in many other parts of the United Nations, similar reform efforts have been blessed with a degree of additional funding that recognizes that reform bears an added cost. But we have done it despite not having additional funding. I believe, therefore, that I can legitimately expect that one day soon there will be a reform dividend for us. UNESCO deserves it.

The Secretariat is different from that which you left two years ago. It has been radically restructured both at Headquarters and in the field. Our aims have been to make it simpler and more rational, to eliminate confusion and duplication, to re-establish clear lines of authority, to ensure that the structure serves programme needs (and not the other way round), and to introduce a modern new system of internal oversight as the first step in our move towards better accountability at all levels.

I shall not enter into the details of the reform. But please recall that, on my appointment, there were almost 200 posts in total at the level of Director and above at Headquarters and in the field. Now there are just 50 or so Directors at Headquarters and some 45 in the field. Moreover, there are now just 10 ADGs instead of 21. This reduction from nearly 200 to slightly over 100 in the space of two years is, by any measure, a considerable achievement, as I am sure you will agree.

Another sensitive area which I had to handle personally was the matter of the reform of our decentralized field network. The result is again positive and I believe we can, as a community, collectively congratulate ourselves on this achievement. The field network has been simplified and a more coherent system has been created. The rationalization entails, overall, a reduction in the number of field units by about one third from the previous total of over 70. Indeed, by the end of 2001, 18 will have closed, 14 of which have already done so. Another three will close next year.

The new cluster offices are already being strengthened; all of them will in due course have specialist staff drawn from each of the sectors so that a comprehensive service can be provided to Member States within the cluster office area. The new policy of staff rotation will enhance this process. Meanwhile, national offices in the E-9 countries have been retained, as have others serving countries in exceptional circumstances, subject of course to review.

I must stress that I could not have put into practice the principles agreed by the General Conference two years ago if it had not been for the support, commitment and cooperation of you, the Member States. I am particularly appreciative of the understanding shown by those countries which have accepted the disappointment of an office closure as a gesture for the common good. To those countries, allow me once again to express a very sincere “thank you” and to pledge my every effort to ensure that the Organization’s action in your countries will not suffer.

Introducing modern management tools has been another objective of the management reform, aimed at making UNESCO more responsive to the needs of its Member States. This has meant taking full advantage of modern computerization facilities. The first two projects – relating to programme and budget and to finance and administration – are on schedule, and it

remains for us to introduce the third component – for human resource management – which we could not take forward more quickly for want of financial resources.

The same shortage of funding has for too long affected the maintenance and renovation of buildings here at Headquarters. Some essential repairs have recently been undertaken but the real work will begin in the next biennium with the implementation in earnest of the first phase of the Belmont Plan. However, we must anticipate the requirements of Phase 2 and for this, the support and cooperation of Member States will be needed. Over and above our responsibility to maintain the essential fabric of the buildings, this work is vital for creating an environment in which our staff can work with enhanced efficiency and motivation.

Which brings me to the most important part of this Secretariat: the staff. As you know, from the very beginning I decided to drive forward my reform programme from within, recognizing the formidable resources of energy, idealism and conviction inside UNESCO. These last two years have confirmed me in that initial assessment.

In return, the staff deserve the very best. Much has already been achieved in terms of reforming our staff policies so that the working environment enjoys an atmosphere of responsibility, transparency, fairness and harmony. We still have a long way to go. Recruitment, better geographical distribution, training, rejuvenation, career development, rotation and mobility, assessment and reporting, and conflict-resolution are all subjects currently under in-depth review. A number of the proposals for improvement will be implemented during the next biennium. With regard to one of these aspects – geographical distribution – I wish to reiterate my determination to improve the situation. Progress is already to be observed.

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I close, I would like you to observe the vivid and colourful display of national flags behind me, standing out against that backdrop. And now look around you at the show of rich diversity within our assembly.

This hall and the lobbies outside are never more engaging than at this very moment, alive as they are with languages and beliefs, creeds and customs, differences and similarities. Yet above all, we are here. Together.

At this time of anxiety, let us draw strength from that togetherness, and turn all our energies to taking forward the debates on some of the most crucial issues of our times. Then we shall have achieved what we have set out to do: to show to the world how UNESCO serves as a haven for measured reflection and dialogue, focused on the values we share.

The leitmotif of my presentation today – learning to live together in a world of cultural diversity – provides an animating vision and a rich agenda for us all. Through our circuits of international cooperation and through the themes enlivening our programmes and actions, the promotion of learning to live together is revealed to be UNESCO's principal contribution to the wider process of humanizing globalization. The way forward is clear.