

DG/2001/128
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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on the occasion of the Seminar on
UNESCO and Cultural Diversity
organized by the Finnish National Commission to UNESCO

Helsinki, Finland, 10 December 2001

Mr. Chairperson of the Finnish National Commission,
Mrs. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Representatives of the Media,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to address you today in this Seminar on “UNESCO and Cultural Diversity”. The Organization welcomes this Seminar, organised by the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO. Not only are such initiatives of great importance to sustain the invaluable ties between the Organization and its National Commissions world-wide, but they are also vital to the continued mutual enrichment of our joint action and to the fostering of greater exchange on ways and means to improve and update our cooperation.

I am particularly glad today to open a seminar on UNESCO and cultural diversity so soon after the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity by the General Conference at its 31st session last November. By organizing this seminar, the Finnish National Commission not only exhibits its capacity for timely response but also reaffirms Finland’s long and strong commitment to cultural diversity.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity – which, I am proud to say, is the result of a unanimous consensus and which involved practically all of the States of the world in its elaboration – provides us with a well-defined and unique standard-setting instrument to address the main challenges of the new millennium. One of the functions recognized by all States as being incumbent on UNESCO is indeed that of identifying universal and generally accepted principles in a number of areas. This Declaration does just that in regard to cultural diversity.

It will enable us in particular to move forward in defining the principles, norms and practices that make for the protection and promotion of cultural diversity. It is also intended as an advocacy tool against exploitation of cultural differences to justify human rights violations. It gains special significance in an era of rapid globalization in which the need is becoming ever more pressing to find ways for our common human values and our cultural and scientific interests to share centre stage with our individual differences and to take precedence over our divisions.

Globalization in trade has undeniable consequences for cultural diversity, pluralism and intercultural dialogue. If there is to be genuine dialogue, there must first be a harmonious and equitable multi-directional flow of cultural goods

and services of many different origins. The larger part of humankind cannot be confined to simply consuming imported cultural products. The rules of international trade must allow spaces to be created in which all the planet's inhabitants can create and express themselves through cultural goods and services, make real choices about what they wish to acquire, and do so in conditions of justice and fairness. Cultural diversity means being able to produce and disseminate a wide range of high-quality cultural goods. It also heightens the sense of identity as the source of creativity and living culture.

These dimensions cannot be reduced to market forces alone. The right to cultural life as stipulated in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948, must be strengthened.

Globalization can contribute powerfully to bringing peoples closer together. But in doing so it must not lead to world-wide cultural uniformity or to the hegemony of one or a few cultures over all the others. Nor should it encourage fragmentation or a ghetto mentality. On the contrary, it must encourage pluralism with a view to dialogue and mutual enrichment.

There are other rights as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the right to education, the right to information and to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom in conducting scientific research. These rights must be defended as universal and must be enjoyed world-wide.

As privatization expands within scientific, social and cultural life, we must seek at the same time to protect and reinforce those dimensions of education, culture and science that should be considered as "public goods". The special status of these fields must be recognized and the right balance found in regard to commercialization so that the conditions necessary to ensure access for all are guaranteed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that recognition of the world's cultural diversity, so long as it is based on genuine dialogue between peoples, will not only help people to absorb and be more responsive to the culture of the Other, but also highlight the history of their contacts and what they have borrowed from or given to each other. This sense of belonging to a shared yet plural heritage will also help us to combat mutual ignorance and lack of understanding, often a source of conflict, and strengthen the fundamental values of democracy, peace and pluralism.

Even though the Organization is regarded as a pioneer in the field of preserving and promoting the diversity of the tangible cultural heritage through

various international conventions, notably through the 1972 Convention on World Heritage, cultural diversity cannot be maintained solely by the preservation of monuments and buildings of the past. It also requires the preservation and promotion of what is called the “intangible cultural heritage”, which is the crucible of creativity and the driving force behind living cultures. For instance, preserving and revitalizing local languages and associated cultural practices help to enhance cultural diversity. The development of practical means of identification and selection - so that these oral and living cultural treasures, sometimes in imminent danger of being lost for ever, may be preserved and transmitted from generation to generation- is an urgent need to which I attach the highest importance.

I am convinced that without setting-up a new mechanism for preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, the international system of preserving cultural diversity would be incomplete.

The protection of cultural diversity also calls upon the need to acknowledge and sustain creativity, which is one of the major building blocks of freedom. Without creativity, cultural diversity would be like a museum instead of thriving on the nourishment of constantly renewed creations. Cultural diversity is therefore in itself a pre-condition for attaining mutual understanding and harmony in a multicultural world. Art in all its forms is, and must remain, the ideal vector for grasping and understanding cultural diversity.

Respect for cultural diversity should be also regarded as a fundamental component of education for all throughout life adapted to the real needs of all sections of the populations. To this end, special efforts should be encouraged to develop diversified, innovative methods of action, including those that make relevant use of the new information and communication technologies. I believe it vital to foster the development of an integrated conception of education, one that enables individuals to adapt to a rapidly changing social, economic and multicultural environment.

Since it is no longer enough to learn to read, to write and to count correctly, learners must also learn to live together – as the Delors Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century stressed nearly five years ago. That is why UNESCO also intends to give resolute encouragement to the promotion of linguistic diversity and the development of multilingual education from early childhood. Multilingual education must allow all children to become real citizens not only of their respective homelands, but also of the world.

Dialogue is behind the very idea of “*learning to live together*”. It must be at the heart of our efforts to tackle the challenges facing societies, so many of which require global commitments, concerted approaches, and internationally-recognized norms and codes of conduct. The United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) emphasized the recognition of “the diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity”. Given the increased scope of inter-cultural exchange in a globalized world as well as certain tendencies towards local exclusiveness and inward-looking prejudices, these values of respect for other cultures are more vital than ever.

The unfortunate and tragic events of recent times have taught us many lessons. Today, in an effort to move beyond the simple recognition and celebration of diversity, UNESCO seeks to promote a constructive vision of pluralism, because we are convinced that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace in the longer term.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity stresses the importance of interaction between diversity, human rights and sustainable development. Accompanied by an Action plan for implementation, the Declaration constitutes an essential contribution on the part of UNESCO towards ‘humanizing globalization’ and represents one of the founding texts of a new ethical frame of reference for the twenty-first century.

The mission of UNESCO for tomorrow is thus more relevant than ever. All its fields of activity really **are** fields with a future. In the new context of globalization extending well beyond economic issues and changing lifestyles, behaviour patterns, methods of decision-making and governance, and forms of artistic expression, UNESCO is particularly well equipped.

Practical actions as well as the elaboration of theoretical guidelines are crucial to bringing about this positive change, as we work towards the promotion of cultural diversity and the construction of pluralism. I am confident that this Seminar will be of great help in the implementation of UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.