



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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Address by

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Chair of the Executive Board

**on the occasion of the Opening ceremony
of the 35th session of the General Conference**

UNESCO, Paris
6 October 2009

Mr President of the General Conference,
 Mr Director-General,
 Ministers,
 Delegates,
 Your Excellencies,
 Dear colleagues and friends,
 Ladies and gentlemen,

It is both a mark of honour and a true pleasure to welcome you – humbly but warmly – to the 35th session of our Organization's General Conference. To strengthen the emotional dimension which is inseparable from a large family reunion held only once every two years, please allow me to welcome you in three languages of Africa, my continent and the cradle of humankind, in addition to the six official languages of UNESCO.

In Kiswahili: Karibuni
 In Yoruba: E Kaaboo
 In Akan: Akwaba

I should like especially to greet and thank the eminent figures who, not content to implement the ideals and programmes of UNESCO in our various Member States, have sacrificed some of their precious time to come and share their experience with us here at Headquarters during the General Conference.

Distinguished delegates,

At the close of the 34th session of the General Conference, you entrusted us with the task of preparing this Conference, and preparing it well. I hope we have not let you down.

I was charged with the weighty task of chairing the Executive Board of our Organization in 2008-2009. We knew that this biennium brought with it numerous challenges arising from the activities and the development of our sixty-year-old Organization. Circumstance added further challenges which were unforeseen and perhaps unforeseeable. We have met these challenges both old and new with courage and determination, always mindful of the trust that you have placed in us by electing us. I can say, without false modesty, that we were able to meet most of these challenges. We were able to do so because the Executive Board remained united during this period, maintaining and even reinforcing the tradition of consensus which it inherited. We owe our success to you, Mr President, your solicitude has not been lacking. It is also thanks to the unfailing cooperation between our Board, the Director General and the Secretariat of the Organization. I can say that relations between the three organs during this biennium were characterized by mutual respect, complementarity, a strong sense of the mission assigned by the General Conference at its 34th session and criticism which was explicit but always good-natured. I should like to thank, before this eminent assembly, the Director-General, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, and you yourself, Mr President.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I said earlier that the last two years have been marked by unexpected circumstances. I was referring, as you may well imagine, to the deep global crisis which has rocked our world since last October and which continues today. As we opened the 2008-2009 biennium, no one had foreseen the possibility, much less the imminence, of a crisis on such a scale. Truth to be told, in saying this we must confess our negligence, failure and helplessness, since the role of an organization such as UNESCO – whose essential functions include vigilance and foresight – is to predict and, if possible, to prevent such crises.

We must therefore recognize that if we had been true to the ideals and goals which our founding fathers and founding mothers had laid out for UNESCO, if we had given our Organization

proper intellectual and financial means, that is to say, means equal to its ambitions, we could have, we should have seen the crisis coming and sounded the alarm. This is our *raison d'être* in the United Nations system.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

To be honest, we must acknowledge that, from this point of view, we have failed in our duties. We must have the courage to face the truth, to admit our guilt and to criticize our conduct. How, you might ask? By acknowledging, not by paying lip service but in real terms, the relevance of our Organization. Which means to say that we must give UNESCO the resources for reflection and action as H.E. The Right Honourable Governor General of Canada, Ms Michaëlle Jean, said with conviction here yesterday.

Permit me, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, to expand a little on the relevance of UNESCO in these times of crisis we are experiencing. The crisis, we agree – at least at UNESCO – is global, which is to say that is also, perhaps more than anything, a crisis of meaning. But the responses brought to the table at high-level meetings have so far been essentially financial or economic formulas. At these meetings there has been little talk of education, of intercultural dialogue or ethics as a way of dealing with the crisis. Although UNESCO celebrated its 60th birthday before the crisis, it is as though the Organization had never existed.

Thus, in our endeavours to get out of a crisis which all recognize as severe and without precedent, we have forgotten the most often quoted and most important phrase of our Preamble: "... wars begin in the minds of men ...". But what is war if not the crystallization of a crisis? Perhaps we should now point out that UNESCO was born of an awareness, explicitly stated by its founders, that economic accords cannot provide the basis for a lasting peace.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In a recent article, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, spoke of the need for "**a concrete multilateralism that delivers for people**". As this 35th session of the General Conference unfolds over three weeks, I hope that our Organization may once again become what one of its founders, The Right Honourable Ellen Wilkinson, had wanted it to be: "**what has never existed before – a worldwide brain-workers' parliament**". We would thus contribute to the emergence of a concrete multilateralism and, I would add, an "**innovative and socially conscious**" multilateralism that delivers for people.

On behalf of all the Members of the Executive Board and personally as well, I wish you every success in your work and thank you for your patience and kind attention.