



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

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

**Speech by Ms Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of the information meeting  
for Member States and the UNESCO Secretariat**

**UNESCO, 13 July 2010**

Your Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

Three months ago to the day, I informed the Members of the Organization's Executive Board of the composition of our new management team, which would take office on 1 July. Today, at this information meeting with the Permanent Delegations to UNESCO and Headquarters staff, I should like to introduce to you less formally those who will henceforth be mapping out, with me and with you, the highways of our future. To map them out, however, will not be enough! We shall also have to push through new routes, check that the roadbed is sound, lay the tarmac and, in short, build. (I can see them rolling up their sleeves already!)

The Deputy Director-General and all the Assistant Directors-General have been in post since the date announced, with the exception of one slowcoach, Eric Falt, who will be joining us on 1 September, and two early-birds: Wendy Watson-Wright, who came six months early, and Hans d'Orville, who has already been here as Assistant Director-General for 33 months.

You will have noticed that the new college of ADGs includes exactly five women and five men. Since the Deputy Director-General is a man and the Director General is a woman, we have complete gender parity. They represent the five regions of the World on the United Nations map: Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Being still under the influence of the World Cup, I feel like saying that I should like UNESCO to be like Spain; that I want to be at the head of a winning team; and that I have every reason to be optimistic in view of their experience and “my eleven players”.

Let's begin with the first.

They call him the “perfect boss” and I hardly need to introduce him, as most of you have already had dealings with the UNESCO Bureau of the Comptroller. I am, of course, referring to our new Deputy Director-General, Getachew Engida.

Above and beyond the very specialized auditing and finance management duties he has carried out for over 30 years, I have discovered a man of multiple interests and, in his spare time, a passionate reader. When I say “spare time”, this is just a manner of speaking, because, for bedtime reading, he has none other than *The Leadership Challenge*, which makes me think that even when he is resting, Getachew is still ticking over.

I was also warned that it would be wrong to imagine that he could be late for a meeting, no matter how early. “You won't catch him out,” I was told, “no matter what the time is, he will be there, waiting for you with a nice cup of coffee.” In Getachew we seem to have a prototype of intangible heritage, bringing the traditional coffee ceremony of his native country, Ethiopia, onto the international stage.

He applies great dedication to all of his numerous international duties, such as chairing the Audit Committee of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, saying it is because he considers himself a child of international cooperation. In Ethiopia in the 1960s, he learned, body and soul, what international cooperation and solidarity mean – he drank the milk of the World Food Programme, he ate snacks at school provided by food distribution programmes, he was educated in public-funded schools, and was awarded a grant from the United Kingdom to go to university.

And, there is also a family tradition – his father was one of the first Blue Berets to be sent to Korea by the United Nations in the early 1950s. Getachew had not yet been born. But by the time he was old enough to go to school, his father had made him aware of the importance of world peace, telling him fascinating stories about his own life. Even today, at 88 years of age, he continues to tell his stories, and

Getachew is passing this precious inheritance on to his own three children, presently on holiday in the country of their forebears. The family vocation seems preordained: his eldest daughter, who has just finished a law degree at McGill University in Canada, is preparing to specialize in human rights.

Before coming to Paris in 2004, our colleague was living in Rome, where he worked for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as Assistant Comptroller. He had already earned respect for his skills in finance management at Reuters, in Nairobi and London, a city he knew as a student at the City University Business School.

Over the past six years he has proven his organizational and management skills, while always remaining respectful and friendly to his colleagues at UNESCO. I am convinced that he will take up his new functions with the same success and wish him good luck and, exactly 16 days early, happy 54th birthday!

Generous and amusing, courageous and affectionate – these are some of the personality traits of those born under the sign of the Tiger in Chinese astrology. And I recognize these in our colleague, Qian Tang, who celebrates his 60th birthday in this year of the Tiger, 4647, and with whom I very recently had the pleasure of working, during the “1GOAL: Education” summit organized by the South African President, Jacob Zuma.

The summit was held in Pretoria, on the same day as the World Cup final, a great sporting event that illustrates not only the energy, but also the hopes of all of Africa. We took advantage of the occasion to attract the world’s attention to other arenas, where the future of African children is being played out, and where the playing fields are by no means level. As you know, if aid agencies do not find more money, we will never meet our commitments for Education for All by 2015, as agreed in Dakar.

I put great store in Qian’s tenacity, having seen the key role he has played so far in mobilizing the resources of donor agencies. And I know just how keen he is to keep improving his work. As a young biologist cleaning test tubes, he had to rinse them at least five times. It’s a habit he has never lost, even when he is doing the washing up at home – to the bemused exasperation of his wife.

Our Chinese colleague has, in fact, trained in two disciplines. He received his PhD in biology at Windsor University, in Canada, after finishing a degree in education at Shanxi University. Once again, it was his tenacity and rigour, even a sense of perfectionism in the way he tackles a task, which earned him a place among the first Chinese of his generation to be sent abroad to study.

It was in 1985 that Qian embarked on a career in the diplomatic corps and in educational policy, which led him to UNESCO, in 1993. He has played a central role here, especially in helping to set up UNEVOC, UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Bonn, Germany.

Qian has worked with us for 17 years now, promoting peace and human development through education. I am convinced that, in his new role as Assistant Director-General for Education, he will fulfil his promise to make our Organization the "first port of call" in education-related matters, globally.

I know he likes to listen to Rod Stewart, and especially his version of "I am Sailing", so it only remains for me to wish him "*bon voyage*"!

I was sure that Gretchen Kalonji would bring a breath of fresh air to our Natural Sciences Sector, and I now have every reason to think that I was not wrong. Her overflowing and communicative energy has already rallied the troops. Her lively, spontaneous and direct style has enabled her, in two weeks, to gather her colleagues around her – never forgetting to leave her office door open – just as she has done for three decades, with her students all over the world.

From her native country, the United States of America, to France, via Germany, Japan and China – to mention just a few – Gretchen's enthusiasm has already infected a great many budding scientists and engineers. I am convinced that she will have the same effect on the team at UNESCO, which she joined on 1 July. It was a Thursday. The next day she already knew the name and nationality of many of the people she had met, and took home with her documents from the Executive Board to study over the weekend in her still empty Paris apartment (let us hope that her belongings will arrive soon from the United States of America making her feel cosy, surrounded by the art works she loves, like her Chinese calligraphy collection).

Her capacity for work, mixed with her natural authority and a gift for listening, will make her, I am convinced, an excellent Assistant Director-General. As for the rest she has already gone through her paces as director of International Systemwide Research Development, at the University of California, a post she recently left, in order to devote herself to international cooperation with us.

It seems to me that Gretchen was destined for an international career. Both her parents were journalists, who travelled a great deal, so she spent much of her childhood and teenage years in Hong Kong, Kenya, India and Thailand. Today, her three children, their spouses and their nine children (is Gretchen partly responsible for the planet's population crisis?) live in Seattle, Kinshasa, Soweto, Chengdu... and even France.

Just like her private life, her professional career has spanned the United States of America, Asia and Africa. An academic, but also a woman with hands-on experience, she has applied her skills in science and engineering to economic and social development, working especially on innovatory models in the fields of education, job creation and poverty eradication. She is also recognized on the international stage for her efforts in promoting equality and access to scientific careers for women and minorities. So many of her preoccupations are shared by us here, at UNESCO.

To this very young 57 year-old, a woman for whom passion rhymes with profession, I would like to say: *tunakaribisha sana huko UNESCO!* A few of you in this room – including Gretchen – will have understood my words of welcome in Kiswahili.

When a person has, for years, been able to live up to the expectations of over 100 million television viewers, she should be able to deal with the expectations of “only” 200 Member States of UNESCO! Other cameras have been turned on Maria del Pilar Álvarez Laso since 1 July, and I am convinced that she will stand up for herself with as much intelligence as she did as an anchor and reporter, but also at the Latin American Institute for Educational Communication, where she has held a number of high level positions since 1998.

I think she did the right thing to leave this international organization for ours. Besides education, information and communication, UNESCO offers our Mexican

colleague another battlefield, for which she is well equipped – social and human sciences.

Can you guess what her children said when they heard the news of her appointment at UNESCO? “That’s fantastic, mum, you’ll be like the rappers, fighting racism, poverty, exclusion...” Which is quite a new way of looking at our Organization! And, what’s more, “rap” is an abbreviation of “rhythm and poetry”, and that means culture. With all of this, only the natural sciences are missing for Maria del Pilar, at the prime of life – if we don’t want to say 50 – to embody all five sectors of the Organization on her own!

But, joking apart, at a time when global problems are increasingly interrelated, and when traditional disciplinary boundaries are being questioned, it seems timely that a multitalented woman like Maria del Pilar should direct this sector. And even more so given that social science expertise is in such high demand not only by policy-makers, but also by the media and the public at large.

Her research in the social sciences, notably on contemporary international migration, and her work on democracy and human rights in Latin America, together with her responsibilities in communication and the media, have made Maria del Pilar a leader able to take on more than one challenge.

Do we need to list some of these challenges? Environmental change, great inequality, poverty, the financial crisis, the ageing population, exclusion, urban overpopulation, the brain drain... while the lack of research funding is holding back the development of the social sciences precisely when social problems are at their most critical.

With her reputation for innovatory projects, such as setting up the first satellite education television channel, Maria del Pilar will know how to put her creative and determined mind to the benefit of UNESCO.

Culture is not a luxury or entertainment, it is capital for development. That is my belief, and it is what our new Assistant Director-General for Culture, Francesco Bandarin, believes too. I know because I read about it in the press! If you haven’t yet read the June issue of *The Art Newspaper*, read it: you will see that he intends to develop new projects in contemporary art, architecture, digital books... I was

going to say that it's what you'd expect because these are subjects about which he is passionate – but I think I've heard him say that he has no passions – just dreams.

For example, he dreams of sailing. That's no surprise for a Venetian. He has made all the preparations: he has trained, he has researched it, he's even passed the inland waters captain's licence. There's only one thing missing: the boat! He does have a bicycle, but it's not the same. Be that as it may, every time I see him park it at the UNESCO entrance, I think: here comes our “zero emissions Assistant Director-General”. At 60, he's in great shape!

He also dreams of travelling and of playing the piano... so let's leave him to those sweet solitary dreams, which help people to overcome the worst obstacles in this world, which sometimes resembles the murky, savage universe of Francesco's favourite author, Georges Simenon. Let us cluster around him in a dream of UNESCO's cultural mission since, as you know, “dreaming together is the start of action”.

Francesco will indeed have to take a great deal of action, and to deploy as much energy on the intangible heritage, the underwater heritage and the movable heritage sectors – which are developing at a blistering pace in UNESCO – as on the World Heritage Centre, which he has led since he joined UNESCO in 2000.

And as for developing projects relating to creativity, I know that our architect will support them wholeheartedly! Francesco has already stated his intention of setting up training courses, networks and other platforms designed to help artists.

I shall, you may be assured, support him in his initiatives in support of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, which are not always sufficiently factored into international relations. Conversely, I expect him to extend the network of public and private partnerships that he has developed at the Centre to the entire Culture Sector.

In a word, I wish UNESCO to write culture into the priorities of the international agenda for sustainable development. To achieve that, we must make use of the opportunities offered by this International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

Look out, Francesco, you have only five months left!

Now I would like to welcome my Latvian colleague, Jānis Kārklīņš, who has arrived here through the channels of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy (and I know a thing or two about that!), to devote himself to a matter that is close to his heart – the creation of a more just and equal information society.

Before he took up his new position on 1 July, he was Latvian ambassador to France, Monaco and Andorra, and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO. But it was particularly his interest in the conservation of mankind's digital heritage, as well as the key role he has played in talks on Internet governance, which persuaded me that he was the right person to become Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information (I will never admit that his love of opera may also have had something to do with it).

In 2005, Jānis was President of the Preparatory Committee of the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). He knows how much work that meant. He also knows what is waiting for him over the next five years, with preparations for UNESCO's participation in the next summit. And he knows that I am very demanding. But at 48, we don't shy away from much. Especially when we are used to wearing several hats at once! In the 1990s, he succeeded in his various posts as a young engineering graduate-cum-diplomat, when, in 2000, his different roles started to overlap: he was Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations in Geneva, Chairman of the Council of the International Organization for Migration, Vice-Chairman of a working group on statutory reforms at the World Intellectual Property Organization, he presided over the Group of Governmental Experts on Cluster Munitions within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons...

Furthermore, in 2007, he was elected Chairman of the Governmental Advisory Committee of the Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). This organization assigns online addresses to Internet users and coordinates the internationalized system of Internet domain names.

I was particularly appreciative of Jānis' professional skills last December, when we signed an agreement with ICANN to facilitate universal Internet access, especially through greater linguistic diversity. That day, we were to accomplish something that UNESCO has been calling for, for a long time.

I think I know Jānis quite well by now, but one thing still escapes me. If he has one love, after his family, it is the mountains. He can spend hours there. I don't understand how does he find the time? He likes to say that it takes him 8 hours and 15 minutes to cover 76 kilometres on cross-country skis – while a tortoise can cover the same distance in 8 hours. Difficult to believe, isn't it?

As you know, the Sector for External Relations and Cooperation (ERC) is our chief liaison office with the United Nations system. That is why I decided to “poach” one of our parent organization's most dynamic staff members: Eric Falt. He is here today purely for the pleasure of being with us. He will start work as of 6 September, which doesn't mean that he won't get twice the pleasure from it!

I say this because I know he is a real workhorse. When he left his posting as Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Nairobi, after five years in Kenya, his colleagues, knowing where he was going, wrote a song for him based on the words and music of *New York, New York*, “the city that doesn't sleep”. All they had to do was swap “city” for “director” and the job was done.

In New York, the 260-odd people in the division he headed in the United Nations Department of Public Information will remember him as a strategist and visionary who has good ideas and knows how to implement them; as an international servant dedicated to humanistic values, particularly to gender equality, and to collaboration among United Nations agencies; and as a very well organized man. I've heard it said that his office was always impeccably tidy, but marvellously decorated. I can't wait to see the furniture and art works he has collected on his United Nations postings to Cambodia, Haiti, Iraq, Pakistan or Afghanistan – all countries with fascinating cultures, most of which he got to know at difficult points in their history.

“I don't know how he does it, but somehow he does” was the most usual thing said about him. He always found not just good solutions for problems, but also time for a joke with a colleague. And just think, he even took the time to marry a Canadian woman and to found a family. I have compared the dates of his tours of duty and the birth of their sons. They match perfectly. The oldest, who's 20, was born in New York; the second, who's 15, in Port-au-Prince; and the last, a 10 year-old, in Islamabad. Between the right to citizenship by ancestry (*jus sanguinis*) or by birthplace (*jus soli*), each of them has at least two, sometimes three different

passports, one of them Haitian. A real little United Nations family, headed by a daddy in the prime of life: 48.

As someone who likes the new and the challenging, Eric will be at home in our Organization. He already knows that here we've banned the saying "No one is obliged to do the impossible", and he will stick to another saying to which he is particularly attached because of his nationality: "Impossible isn't French".

In her professional life Khadija Ribes Zammouri has had no need to take narrow, badly-lit alleys or wander into dead-ends: on 1 July, our youngest Assistant Director-General arrived at Place de Fontenoy, at the age of 46, straight from the Place de la Kasbah!

This exemplary itinerary, linking Tunisia's senior civil service with the senior international civil service, is flagged with diplomas in management, public service consulting, leadership, electronic administration, and studies in finance, operations research, planning, and so on.

When you read her biography – which can only be a source of pride for her – you wonder whether Khadija took the time to make the most of her youth. But when she starts to talk about her travels, it's rather reassuring: Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Thailand, China... She clearly has a liking for Asia.

But back to Tunisia.

Khadija's professional itinerary is also lined with posts that call for great competence. She began her career in 1992 as a Head of Service at the Administrative Reform Directorate, where she served, from 1997 to 2005, as Deputy Director and then as Director, before being appointed Director-General for the Development of Administration and Public Services, reporting directly to Tunisia's Prime Minister.

I chose Khadija not just because I think that a woman who succeeded in helping the Tunisian Prime Minister could not fail in her duty to the Director-General of UNESCO. I chose her because the key hallmark of her career is "reform". And especially because she has worked to simplify administrative procedures.

Do I need to give any more reasons?

Well, there is at least one more. Our administration has already profited greatly from the new information and communication technologies. You only need to consult our online archives or do searches on UNESDOC to realize that. But I am convinced that Khadija's expertise in electronic governance will further modernize the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIT) and our entire administration.

According to the 2010 edition of the *United Nations E-Government Survey 2010* – which assesses the extent to which countries apply ICTs in their public administration – Tunisia is the Maghreb and African leader in e-government. In just one year, it jumped from 124th place to 66th in the world table!

Could our new Assistant Director-General have had anything to do with that phenomenal progress? We shall soon see. When will “paperless administration” reach UNESCO, Khadija?

I now wish to introduce to you Africa's figurehead in UNESCO: Lalla Aïcha Ben Barka. Many of us knew her as the Director of our Dakar Office, which she ran with an iron fist, like a good Malian teacher, from 2004 to 2007.

Lalla Aïcha sees herself as a “guardian of culture”, thus accepting the traditional role of her foremothers. This role is doubtless what gives her a very acute sense of responsibility, which I prize in our Songhai colleague.

What we admire most in her is her Afro-optimism. Not one of those gloomy, miserabilist assessments we all too often have occasion to hear about the continent will ever come from her. But she is just as lucid and critical when she says: “In Africa we debate many things without getting to the heart of things”.

Well, UNESCO's Africa Department, which she began to lead on 1 July, will give her an opportunity to do that. She will now have to ensure that Africa remains at the heart of our priorities in all the Organization's fields of competence, and especially in the field that she chose as her vocation when studying in France and the United States of America: education.

Having contributed to the development of education systems in a dozen West African countries, and held for three years the post of Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Lalla Aïcha will be our fully qualified spokesperson with NEPAD and joint United Nations programmes in Africa.

As I recently recalled, in the 2010 edition of the *World Social Science Report*, every year since 1990 around 20,000 highly qualified professionals have left higher education in Africa to take up jobs in the more developed countries. Almost one in three African economists holding a Ph.D. works in the United States of America!

Lalla Aïcha will fight this brain drain, which causes enormous damage to her continent. I know, because she's already started within her own family: her three children have gone back to Africa after studying in North America. I know that she will pursue her mission further, because she has that far-sightedness so typical of the Sahelian peoples.

Lalla Aïcha often says: "We nomads, we do not clamber across the branches and roots of virgin forests: we stride across dunes to the far horizons".

Visionary and convincing, she will win her battles on all fronts.

Wendy Watson-Wright has already had the time to show us what she can do, having taken over the direction of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) at the very beginning of the year. She is, we might say, our longest-standing new Assistant Director-General. This means she had exactly 155 days to prepare, among other things, the 50th anniversary of IOC on 8 June, which amply deserves our unmitigated congratulations.

We can now understand why the members of her team feel rather uncomfortable early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when they see that she is already in her office as they arrive and still there when they leave. Not one to chat, she has nevertheless taken the time to get to know her colleagues well, convinced that personal contacts make the pleasant moments of work even more enjoyable, and help make the more difficult moments easier to get through.

Wendy acquired her capacity for sustained hard work, her physical and emotional resilience and her stamina when she was young. This expert in oceanography with a Ph.D. in physiology is also a highly accomplished ice skater, and has been a figure-skating coach for 30 years, while pursuing a brilliant career in science policy.

Having maintained her sporting mentality, she is now happy with fitness walking in the enchanting streets of Paris, discovering the charms of the Old Continent at the same time. But it is here, within these walls – which are also multiple windows onto the world – that she expends most of her energy. We partly have her husband to thank for this, as he decided some time ago to take time off from his professional life to devote himself to their family (I have heard that he is an excellent cook), but above all Wendy's determination and her single passion in life: the oceans.

And the oceans need her. And that is why, instead of being here with us today, she is in Perth, Australia, for a meeting of the Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observing System. The oceans are in a critical state, and identifying and protecting marine biodiversity, monitoring climate change and coordinating the tsunami warning systems, are some of the IOC missions that seem to me to be crucial for the future of the planet.

I have said it before and I say it again today: never has IOC been so necessary as it is today. And I am counting on Wendy's courage and efficacy.

Lastly, I'd like to turn to the man who now needs no introduction in UNESCO, or even beyond it, because his name is in the contact books of numerous personalities in international cooperation: Hans d'Orville, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Strategic Planning, or in other words, Mr BSP.

A veteran of the United Nations – where he started out 35 years ago, at the age of 26 and at grade P-1, and where he met his wife! – he is also the doyen of our new team of Assistant Directors-General, having been in office since October 2007. So you will understand why I view him both as our “institutional memory” and as our “trailblazer of the future”, and why I count on him in the pursuit of our Organization's mission and in building its future, especially in the context of reform of the United Nations.

Hans has to his credit the summits of Heads of State of South-East Europe, the Dialogue among Civilizations, the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, the High-Level Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures, the UNESCO Future Forums, Mondialogo (an exemplary partnership with the private sector!), UNESCO's participation in the Aichi and Shanghai World Expos, and I won't list the rest – except, all the same, for a major innovation which he introduced last October: the Plenary Ministerial Forum.

He is as multidisciplinary and intersectoral as UNESCO's new projects! That's why his colleagues view him as a force of nature. They do in fact find it a little hard to explain to him that not everyone can work seven days out of seven, 20 hours out of 24, and do several jobs at the same time, as he can! But apparently, after 10 years in UNESCO, he's finally getting used to the idea.

To test his limits, I recently decided to entrust him with the management of extrabudgetary resources and partnership. But because I'm not cruel, I relieved him of the Division for Gender Equality, which I took under my own wing with the idea of lending a completely feminine hand to this initiative that he launched. That will free him up to deal with our Programme and Budget while preparing for next September's summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To date Hans has been the architect of five C/5s – and he's lived to tell the tale!

Believe me, our German colleague copes with everything and no overload of work can stop him going round the museums and galleries, being tempted by some contemporary art work to add to his superb collection, taking his wife to concerts to prove to her that, appearances notwithstanding, he loves her more than UNESCO (although I rather think he's also a music lover).

For the past five months, Hans has acted as interim Deputy Director General while still leading BSP. He has been as effective and loyal as ever. I wish to thank him.