



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

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the ceremony to designate

Professor Nasser David Khalili as a

UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

UNESCO, 16 October 2012

Professor Khalili,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to UNESCO for this ceremony to designate Professor Nasser David Khalili as *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador*.

Professor Khalili is a scholar, an entrepreneur, a collector, and a philanthropist.

More than anything, he is a humanist.

I believe he is what 17th century France would have called an "*honest man*" -- a man of passionate interests and great culture, a man of balance and reason.

I use this term wilfully in the company that joins us today – the company of UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, Artists for Peace, and Special Envoys.

Each of you is an "*honest man*" or an "*honest woman*," dedicated to the values guiding UNESCO.

I thank each of you for your commitment.

This has been a special day for UNESCO.

This morning, we launched the 2012 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* on "Youth and Skills."

The world is getting younger every day – but far too many young people lack the skills they need to make the most of what the world has to offer.

We must meet our promise to educate every girl and boy, every woman and man.

I cannot think of a more important pillar for a more equitable, just and stable century.

The launch was followed by a Policy Forum on education for social transformation and the *Annual Meeting of UNESCO Honorary and Goodwill Ambassadors*, where we discussed how to strengthen our joint action.

We are gathered now to welcome Professor Nasser Khalili as the newest member of the UNESCO family.

Professor Khalili is world-known for his unique collections of Japanese art, Swedish textiles, Spanish metalwork, enamels of the world and, especially, the arts of the Islamic world.

These treasures of humanity are constantly on the road, being shown in museums across the world.

Professor Khalili has always sought to share his passion for the arts.

In 1989, he endowed the *Nasser D. Khalili Chair of Islamic Art and Archaeology* at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London -- this was the first chair devoted to the arts of Islam to be founded at any university.

He is today a Visiting Professor of the School and Member of its Governing Body.

He is also Honorary Fellow of Wolfson College and a member of the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors at the University of Oxford.

In 2005, also at Oxford, he opened the *Khalili Research Centre for the Art and Material Culture of the Middle East*.

In early 2011, the Trust at Queens College, New York, endowed the *Nasser D. Khalili Chair of Islamic Studies*.

In 2003, he received an Honorary Doctorate from Boston University – this was followed in 2005 by an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the Arts London.

In 2007, he was given the *High Sheriff of London Award* in recognition of his cultural contributions to London.

Professor Khalili's connections to UNESCO are deep.

Let me thank you again for the brilliant illustrations that adorn the 3rd volume of the UNESCO Series on The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture.

The *Guide to the Pilgrimage to Mecca* from 1582 and the *Portrait of the Young Mughal Emperor Jahangir* – to give two examples -- provide unique insight to the spread of Islam across the world.

Most recently, Professor Khalili took part in *High-Level Debate on a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence* that UNESCO organized at the United Nations in New York, to mark the 2012 *International Day of Peace*.

This debate saw the participation of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly, Vuk Jeremic.

The debate was a powerful opportunity to call for a renewed commitment by all to respect, tolerance and mutual understanding.

Professor Khalili spoke eloquently then of the need to strengthen respect and understanding through the arts, by building bridges of dialogue, and by giving all women and men the capacity to fulfil their aspirations.

Professor Khalili has carried this message throughout his life.

This is a message of trust in the values that humanity shares and of conviction in the need to strengthen the ties binding us together.

This is the inspiration of the *Maimonides Foundation* created by Professor Khalili in 1995 – to foster peace among people of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths.

I wish to mention in particular the project called *Interfaith Explorers*, which is being taken forward in primary schools in England and Wales.

In your own words, this project is an invitation to a “*voyage of exploration into understanding each other.*”

This goal is especially vital today -- in a world changing quickly, where societies are increasingly connected and increasingly fragile.

Differences are a strength, not a weakness.

Diversity does not divide societies -- it multiplies their resilience and their creativity.

This is also UNESCO's mission, to lay the foundations for lasting peace and sustainable development through dialogue, by promoting and tolerance.

Dear Professor Khalili,

You have always been an ambassador for the values that inspire UNESCO's action.

Today, in recognition of your dedication and achievements in the fields of intercultural dialogue and promoting peace through education and culture, it is a great pleasure to designate you formally as a *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador*.

Let me wish you every success in your new mission, and thank you again for your commitment.