Address by Irina Bokova,
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to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives

UNESCO’s Soft Power Agenda: Partnerships for Sustainable Development and Peace

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Mr Yasuchika Hasegawa, Chairman of Keizai Doyukai,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this invitation – and for coming so numerous on a Friday evening.

I am deeply honoured by this opportunity to speak to Keizai Doyukai.

This is my fourth time in Japan, and each time I see our network of supporters widening. I just met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and have come for the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Aichi-Nagoya.

The Japan Association of Corporate Executives was founded almost 70 years ago – the same age as UNESCO that is celebrating its 70th anniversary – as a private, non-profit and nonpartisan organization of committed business leaders.

Since then, Keizai Doyukai has assumed a leading position in supporting efforts to strengthen the economy and well-being of Japanese society.

From 83 members in 1946, Keizai Doyukai now counts some 1,300 top executives, all committed to shaping cooperative paths for inclusive and sustainable growth.
The title of my lecture today is UNESCO’s *Soft Power Agenda: Partnerships for Sustainable Development and Peace* – and, in many ways, I see Keizai Doyukai as a form of ‘soft power.’

I refer here to the concept as explored by Joseph Nye at Harvard University.

‘Soft power’ extends beyond purely government action, to build more effective ways to advance public goods – it refers to the power to broker ideas, define problems, set agendas, by bringing all relevant actors together for joint goals.

It is the power to draw on the wealth of civil society and the engagement of local communities, and NGOs.

It is the power to craft partnerships with the private sector to foster more effective collective action.

I am convinced we need precisely such forms of ‘soft power’ to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

Globalization is accelerating, and so is the impact of climate change and natural disasters.

The Great East Japan Tsunami and Earthquake that struck Japan on 11 March 2011 reminded the world of the vulnerabilities all societies share.

There has been tremendous growth across the world, but inequalities are increasing.

Technologies are changing the way we communicate, learn and behave – societies are more connected than ever, but they are also more vulnerable.

Information has never been so available, but the knowledge gap is widening.

The world is younger than ever – human rights aspirations are high, but so are thwarted expectations.
The opportunities for peace are strong, but conflict has moved within countries and culture is on the front line.

Throughout the world, we see tremendous progress: millions are being lifted out of poverty thanks to the great humanist agenda of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. Now the UN is crafting a new agenda for sustainability beyond 2015.

But the challenges remain steep – of exclusion, poverty and disease – and new ones are emerging.

These are raising difficult new questions we must address, about the meaning of ‘progress,’ about how we can build the future we want for all…

I take this notion from the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, whose Outcome Document was entitled “The Future We Want.”

For decades, ‘development’ was measured, first and foremost, with economic factors.

‘Human development’ then began to be assessed with wider indicators -- including life expectancy, educational attainment and security. I know my colleague UNDP Administrator Helen Clark launched the Human Development here with the Prime Minister.

Today, I am convinced we need new thinking again.

This is especially important as countries accelerate to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and as Governments shape a new global sustainable development agenda to follow.

This calls for new policy mixes, new ways of working.

States cannot tackle challenges alone.

Nor can international organisations.
To craft solutions that are inclusive, sustainable and just, we need to draw on all sources of knowledge, all sources of experience, all sources of innovation and commitment.

We need to cross policy boundaries and connect the dots across the board.

This is essential to generate essential public goods every society needs today – quality education for all, access to the power of the sciences, respect for cultural heritage and diversity, flourishing freedom of expression.

Sustainability has deeper roots than economic assets.

It must start with enhancing the rights and dignity of every woman and man.

This is UNESCO’s message, and it has been at the heart of our mandate since 1945.

Our Constitution opens with words I never tire in repeating:

*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.*

For me, this is the essence of a ‘soft power’ agenda.

Written after the devastation of World War Two, the Constitution reflected a conviction that peace had to be built in new ways.

In its words:

*Peace must be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.*

In the turmoil of reconstruction, these words pointed to humanity’s potential to rebuild on new foundations, through the strength of solidarity.

These ideas have deep roots in Japan.
The world’s first UNESCO Club was created here in Sendai, in July 1947. I visited it after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

This paved the way for Japan to join UNESCO in 1951, five years before its formal admission to the United Nations, and since then Japan has always been a great champion for UNESCO, and its action in education, culture, the sciences and communication.

These are global goals, affecting rich and poor countries alike – essential for Governments, civil society and the business sector.

I know this idea has strong echoes in Japan.

This September, in his speech to the 69th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Prime Minister Abe underlined the importance of the private sector in Japanese policy, for advancing collective goods, such as gender equality.

In his words:

*Japan has now begun to work towards resolving the numerous issues we face together with private industries to increase women’s participation in society as soon as possible.*

I believe the Japanese private sector understands intimately the notion of corporate social responsibility, grasping the clear social, economic and business benefits that arise from such engagement.

This is why UNESCO’s cooperation with Japanese private sector companies is so trend-setting and innovative.

Let me give you a few examples.

On 5 November, I flew to Japan on the first All Nippon Airways (ANA) flight that carried a UNESCO logo. It was a very moving experience to be on an airplane that flies with the words “ANA Supports UNESCO.” It boosts morale of course, but more
importantly, it is a message to the world that what we do matters for Japan, and for the rest of the world.

This builds on an agreement in September 2013 between UNESCO, ANA and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan, for a period of three years, through which support be provided to UNESCO’s action -- including, for instance, safeguarding World Heritage in Myanmar, a country in transition that needs our support and engagement.

UNESCO has longstanding cooperation with Panasonic – with a focus on promoting World Heritage and sustainable development, through a global communication campaign and by supporting educational activities around World Heritage.

We work together to raise awareness about sustainable development across the world -- with a focus on young girls and boys through an Eco Learning Programme, acting through television and press to reach the wider public.

This includes, for instance, Panasonic’s sponsorship of The World Heritage Special, aired on the National Geographic Channel in 183 countries, with a huge impact around the world.


In this context, Panasonic and UNESCO are partnering to provide solar electrification to rural schools in Bénin, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger and Togo – to improve the quality teaching and learning in sustainable ways.

Our partnerships include also NHK, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation -- with which we are working to develop documentaries about World Heritage sites across the world, as educational resources and outreach material, to strengthen action to safeguard humanity’s shared heritage.

There are other examples of partnerships for innovation beyond Japan.
In 2011, I launched the *Global Partnership for Girls’ and Women’s Education*, with then United States Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, to target the weak links of girls’ secondary education and women’s literacy, by joining forces with major private sector companies.

The stakes are high – only 38 percent of countries have reached gender parity at secondary level, while the poorest girls are not expected to complete primary education before 2086.

With Procter & Gamble, we are supporting girls’ and women’s literacy in Senegal, and launching a new programme to reach 60,000 illiterate girls and women in Nigeria. And we know how important this is when girls in the northern region of the country are seen as targets.

With the Packard Foundation, we are targeting girls’ drop-out rates in secondary schools in Ethiopia and Tanzania.

With Nokia, we are strengthening learning through the use of mobile technologies.

With GEMS Education Foundation working in Dubai, we are working in Lesotho and Kenya to enhance teacher training and gender equality, with a focus on science, mathematics and technology education.

We are working with GEMS also to strengthen the quality of school principals in Ghana and Kenya, as key actors in the learning process.

Last March, UNESCO launched the *Business Backs Education* Global Campaign with GEMS Education, to challenge the private sector to double its corporate social responsibility spending on education by March 2015 – to reach $1 billion – this was the goal of the *Business Backs Education Summit*, held in London last month.

Each of these initiatives seeks to multiply the power of gender equality.

Recognition is another multiplier -- we must keep girls in school and we must inspire them to lead, by showing them what can be done.
Take science, where women represent only 29 percent of researchers globally.

For over fifteen years, UNESCO has partnered with L’Oréal to promote women in science, to support thousands of young women researchers across the world. Professor Kuroda of Japan won this Prize two years ago.

The winners of the 2008 UNESCO-L’Oreal Women in Science Award received the Nobel Prize one year later -- the Israeli scientist Ada Yonath for chemistry and the American scientist Elizabeth Blackburn for medicine.

Allow me to give you one last example.

On 23 September, we launched Myanmar’s first Centre for Excellence for Business Skills Development, to improve the skills and employability of young women and men.

This is the result of cooperation between UNESCO, PepsiCo and the Myanmar Ministry of Education – the first private-public partnership of its kind in the country.

On the basis of this experience, I wish to highlight four points to build stronger private-public partnerships.

The first concerns the importance of common values and objectives as the foundation for partnership – namely, universal human rights, and the principles of the United Nations Global Compact.

We need to build on a solid framework of shared principles and goals.

Second, I believe partnerships work best when they are real partnerships.

UNESCO’s work needs financial support – but, as importantly, we need ideas and expertise, we need innovation and creativity.

This is where the private sector can be a wellspring of great importance.

This is not just about money -- it is about experience.
Partnership should mean just that -- joint work to define projects, identify targets and monitor results.

Third, partnership must be practical, driven by concrete results on the ground -- at the same time, I am convinced we must engage at the global level, to help shape a more inclusive and sustainable global development agenda.

My last point is about creativity.

Partnerships should be creative in form, and there are no models applicable to all issues – but they should also be creative in substance.

We can do more, for instance, with new technologies to train teachers, to enhance learning outcomes, and to reach marginalised groups.

The Broadband Commission for Digital Development UNESCO launched in 2010 with the International Telecommunication Union is a great example.

The Commission is co-chaired by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Carlos Slim Helú, along with UNESCO and ITU. Commissioners include high-level officials from Governments and international organisations, along with private sector leaders, who have joined together to support global broadband roll-out for sustainable development.

I see this as a laboratory for innovation, and a model to consider for other areas -- in culture, healthcare, the sciences...

In the field of education, these lessons have been included by UNESCO, with UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown, in A Framework for Business Engagement in Education we launched in 2013.

My message today is clear.

Private-public partnership are essential parts of the ‘soft power’ toolbox we need to shape a more inclusive, sustainable and just future for all.
Connecting the private sector’s strengths and the public sector’s challenges makes sense for all societies – it also makes good business sense.

This requires closer links between the public sector and business -- it calls for new platforms for cooperation and new alliances for innovation.

In these ways, together, we can take forward the ‘soft power’ we need for the century ahead.

Thank you for your attention.