



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
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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 Parallel Session on *People to People Exchange*

Beijing, 14 May 2017

Excellency Mr Song Tao, Minister, International Department, CPC Central Committee,

Excellency Mr Guo Yezhou, Vice Minister, International Department, CPC Central Committee,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address this session on people-to-people exchange.

I wish to congratulate President Xi Jinping and the Government of China for this collaborative initiative.

Over millennia, the wondrous story of the Silk Road has been one of encounters – between people, cultures, religions and knowledge.

These encounters have shaped civilizations over the ages... catalyzing inventions... fertilizing intellectual scholarship.

They gave birth to literary and scientific treasures, to traditions and artistic practices that have been passed across generations.

These find echo in the hundreds of World Heritage Sites that lie along the Silk Roads, from Xian to Venice, passing through Samarkand, Balk and Baghdad.

The Silk Roads tell a story of human progress driven by mutual learning – and they remind us no culture has ever flourished in isolation.

Civilizations influence and enrich each other, growing stronger as they are more inclusive.

The *Belt & Road Initiative* taps into this heritage, to open up new opportunities for development and prosperity.

It is already harnessing the revolution in technology and communications to enable high-speed exchanges.

It seeks to build trust, confidence and understanding between peoples and countries along this route.

This is a key to making development equitable, inclusive and sustainable for all.

In a historic speech at UNESCO in 2014, President Xi Jinping affirmed, and I quote, that “*we live in a world with different cultures, ethnic groups, skin colors, religions and social systems, and the people of various countries have become members of an intimate community of shared destiny.*”

This interdependence is our reality -- and every day we see that new skills and competences are needed to live together in a world of diversity, complexity and rapid change.

This does not happen overnight.

30 years ago, UNESCO launched a groundbreaking initiative that pioneered the concept of routes of dialogue.

Spanning more than a decade, the *Integral Study of Silk Roads* led major scientific expeditions that explored the making of plural identities and common heritage along these historic routes.

I see the *Belt and Road Initiative* as another “soft power infrastructure” -- to provide younger generations the knowledge, values and openness of mind to shape more inclusive and peaceful societies, to master the language of diversity.

This starts with quality education for all, everywhere – an education that bridges inequalities and equips youth with 21st century skills.

... skills to secure jobs in increasingly inter-dependent and knowledge-rich societies.

... skills to navigate across cultures and languages, to find joint solutions to challenges that affect every society.

... skills for global citizenship.

This was the spirit of the *International Youth Forum: Creativity and Heritage along the along the Silk Roads*, organized in Changsha and Quanzhou last month, that gathered youth from 65 countries. You will find a wonderful collection of interviews with these youth representatives compiled in a book presented today at this Forum, offering a kaleidoscope of hope.

The same spirit guides our *Silk Roads Online Platform* as well as the recently relaunched *UNESCO Courier*, a beacon to promote shared values – both supported by China.

This is the thrust of the joint inscription of “the Silk Roads: Routes Network of Chang’an Tianshan Corridor” as a World Heritage Site in 2014, bringing together China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan around a shared heritage.

When violent extremists seek to destroy our common heritage and divide people along cultural and religious lines, we need precisely such striking examples to respond and highlight the power of culture as a force for dialogue, growth and social cohesion.

This is how we unite4heritage, and I take this occasion to thank China for its support to the historic Security Council Resolution 2347 adopted last 24 March, on the protection of cultural heritage in conflict.

I am convinced we can do more, harnessing science and innovation, capitalizing on UNESCO's network of Biosphere Reserves, to strengthen the *Belt & Road Initiative*, to nurture the next generation of Silk Road citizens.

To quote a Chinese proverb, "*a single tree does not make a forest, a single string cannot make music.*"

Together, indeed, we can grow healthy forests and create new symphonies, to foster ever greater human talent and creativity, for more dialogue, inclusion and peace.

Thank you.