



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

## 197th session of the Executive Board

### Closing Remarks

**H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Amr**

**Chair of the Executive Board of UNESCO**

**Permanent Delegate of the Arab Republic of Egypt to UNESCO**

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

22 October 2015

Mr President of the General Conference,  
Madam Director-General,  
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,  
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

We have now arrived safely and successfully at the end of our joint work, as we reach the end of the 197th session of the Executive Board. We have travelled a long road together as a single team over the past two years.

Allow me to say, in all frankness, that I have relied on each and every one of you, who have been excellent partners and provided good support. I have always been confident of your joint commitment, your devotion and your expertise, which have helped us to bring added value to our Organization.

The results of our work over the past two years are the fruit of the collective effort of each and every one of you. I should therefore like to address special greetings to you all, and my sincere thanks to the members of the Bureau for their support and effective participation in both the official and unofficial meetings we have held ever since we were elected as members of the Bureau right down to this week. I may say that you have shouldered the work of the secretariat together with me with great sincerity: our success is attributable to each and every one of you.

Ladies and gentlemen, Members of the Board,

In a few days' time, we will be holding the General Conference, at which we shall present our report, and hopefully thereby help to advance the work of this venerable Organization. What a wonderful opportunity that this should coincide with the celebration of the Organization's seventieth anniversary.

Allow me, as our work comes to an end today, to share with you my vision and what I believe in for a better tomorrow for this Organization, which is striving to achieve a number of noble goals focused on advancing humanitarian thought and the shaping of individuals. I promise you that I shall not take too long in presenting my vision, but having occupied this post for the past two years, I nevertheless feel bound to apprise you of what I feel may help to open up new horizons for the future of the Organization.

I am certain you will agree that today's world is different in both form and content from the world we lived in when UNESCO was founded. I became convinced of this from the moment you honoured me by electing me to this office. I remember saying that the basic principles contained in UNESCO's Constitution were undoubtedly still effective, given that they were aimed at striving to inculcate the foundations of peace and at achieving mutual understanding for a better world, and that our Organization was an appropriate forum for intellectual cooperation – the watchword of the Organization in its main fields of work.

Despite the fact that our world today is very different from that of 70 years ago, the difference does not lie in the circumstances or the mechanisms, but rather in the nature and number of our problems, which have become more complex and unexpected; indeed, we feel that the complications increase whenever we endeavour to find simple solutions for these problems.

We are cooperating together, under the roof of this Organization, with its five great fields of competence: education, the natural sciences, the social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information. And I am certain that we also agree that we strive to achieve the best possible results in all these sectors not only from an individual point of view, but also from an integrated point of view, whereby these various sectors endeavour to ensure that they all make contributions to each of the programmes that we agree on.

Some may feel that these five fields constitute an increasing burden on the Organization, and prevent it from performing its mission given the difficult circumstances affecting our world today, especially in light of the low level of financial resources that we allocate to the work of the Organization. It should be noted that however hard we try, from time to time, to agree on a list of priorities for the work of the Organization, we at the same time seek to increase its role, to intensify its work and to increase its activity in the service of humankind.

We may note that some believe that we find ourselves in a situation and a crisis which are difficult to resolve. However, I strongly believe that any crisis carries within itself both a challenge and an opportunity for us to demonstrate to the world the importance of our work and our ability to work together successfully. This is what events show: this Organization is listened to and looked to far and wide, with hopes being pinned on it more than ever before. This situation reminds me of the words of that great activist African president, Nelson Mandela: “Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNESCO wakes up each morning to face a new test, which poses the question of our relevance, our existence, and our role. Today, following the adoption by the United Nations last month of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, we are facing a new test by which we may demonstrate once again to the world our leading position within the United Nations system. I am confident that we shall pass this test successfully over the next 15 years, and that we shall succeed by achieving the development goals for the benefit of the sons and daughters of our peoples all over the planet.

Most importantly, we need to adopt a dynamic approach and review, from time to time, our strategy and our work plans. I believe that the secret to our success will not only lie in multiplying our energies or increasing our financial resources, but also in the kinds of partnerships we can achieve with our fellow organizations within the United Nations system, and our alliance with non-governmental partners, including from the private sector, academic circles and the media.

We also need to reaffirm to ourselves and to the world at large that diversity among cultures and civilizations, which is one of the characteristics of humankind, is a source of enrichment and a positive element for the achievement of our legitimate aspirations, and that diversity needs to be exploited and harnessed so that we may help to achieve the sustainable development goals. We have no alternative but to seek to learn from one another and understand one another, and to be inspired by a spirit of constructiveness, of joint cooperation in facing hard-line trends and groups which target us with harshness and violence. We must pool our efforts together to ensure that the language of terror does not get the upper hand and to create for the world a climate which is conducive to innovation and invention, ensuring that a spirit of tolerance reigns, and to proclaim loudly that there is no room among ourselves for those who seek destruction, intimidation, terror and extremism.

We shall not be able to attain these goals unless we forsake the language of slogans and transform our energies and thoughts into serious and clear programmes of work, and present to the world innovative ideas for meeting our joint challenges in a world in which we are constantly growing closer together, going beyond the boundaries of time and space. We need to devote attention to issues of young people, who will soon take over the banner of leadership of this world. We need to help the young generation to communicate, and to pave the way for them by strengthening the role of this Organization, which must continue to perform its noble role and maintain its unique standing and value.

Dear colleagues,

UNESCO must be in a position to utilize its specific skills and to mobilize capacities to implement its programme, not only on a global scale, but also at the national and regional levels, and to do so using a multidisciplinary approach.

Climate change, the promotion of knowledge societies and the need to preserve cultural diversity and heritage require interdisciplinary action. This is the value added by UNESCO.

With regard to climate change, let me reiterate the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-moon: we only have one planet – there is no “planet B”.

The least developed countries and small island developing States know this all too well, as they are suffering the most. Their very existence is under threat. Every country and every citizen across the world is adversely affected by climate change.

The “S” in UNESCO legitimizes our Organization in the field of global climate scientific research. Unfortunately, we are not yet strong enough, and our voice is not heard as much as we would like. But once again, we cannot work alone. Why not establish new scientific networks, under our leadership, to carry out this work and to advise political leaders on what must be done. Too often, our scientific reports are too hard to read and communicate. We must find a way to help both the public and leaders to better understand scientific discoveries and their implications.

In this respect, I am very pleased with our active contribution to the preparations for COP 21 which will take place at the end of the year, and is being organized by our host country, France.

We have an important role to play in rising to this issue on a number of different levels: scientific, educational, socio-transformational and cultural as well as in terms of communication and the dissemination of information. Our role is complementary, if not essential, and in no way redundant with the actions which Member States must take.

For example, UNESCO's multidisciplinary fields of competence could be better integrated in order to advise the world on the best ways to integrate migrants. For instance, this could come from our cultural expertise (gastronomy) and our scientific knowledge (philosophers and inventors).

Regional and international cooperation form the basis on which the five fields of competence, as well as cross-cutting themes, can be reinforced, such as sustainable development in Africa, the empowerment of girls and women, the role of young people and the integration of migrants into societies.

To this end, we must also reach out to all possible partners in order to find simple, effective and easily implemented solutions.

With regards to education for sustainable development, I recall the words of the sociologist Edgar Morin: *“we should teach strategic principles for dealing with chance, the unexpected and uncertain and ways to modify these strategies [...] We do not eliminate uncertainty, we negotiate with it”*.

This will only be possible if we provide, from the very earliest age, a quality education which goes hand in hand with human values, behaviour and consumption habits which protect our environment and gradually reduce our carbon footprint.

Education also has an important role to play in another field. The creation of a culture of peace is not possible without global citizenship education and an education which promotes dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding. In this respect, we could also improve education tools to make them more adaptive and to ensure that they take into account the context of different learning spaces.

Education, the cornerstone of our Organization, can, through information and communication technology (ICT), revolutionize learning. The introduction of massive open online courses (MOOC), as well as other forms of distance learning, promises to stretch the limits of what is possible in our current education systems.

UNESCO must be at the forefront of this revolution, whilst ensuring that quality education is provided. We must also be aware that the use of ICTs allows us to access the previously inaccessible, which reinforces inclusivity. However, we must ensure that ICTs are being used to promote a more human education before we even begin to consider its economic potential.

There are other areas of learning which will also see the impacts of new technology. For example, the teaching of maths could perhaps be reoriented towards problem solving, as could the teaching of science, technology and engineering (STEM).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Linking education and science, we need to encourage the development and broad-based introduction of innovative and renewable energies and services, by developing partnerships between the private and public sectors.

In this context, the Sciences must be at the service of society and humanity. They provide us the tools to partly anticipate the consequences of our actions. They should provide efficient solutions to achieve peaceful and sustainable societies that improve our relationships with the land and the ocean and the atmosphere, thereby truly protecting our planet for future generations. Technological advances must also take into consideration ethical dimensions and consequences.

In past years, UNESCO has accompanied social transformations, which is a long-term task. Our actions in this regard must be flexible enough to provide policy solutions to meet the needs of Member States, especially as regards the rapid rise in mass migrations and the eventual needs of displaced populations because of the effects of global environmental change or conflicts and wars.

In the field of Culture, we must take great care to deal with the global rise of extremism in all its forms.

During the past year, we have experienced violence, extremism and terrorism that threaten culture and cultural identities in an unprecedented way. UNESCO must reflect what it can do in the face of incidents that mock our time-tested world heritage system.

Tomorrow's UNESCO must lead in fostering and strengthening cultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and shared responsibility, among all concerned stakeholders.

Turning to our work in the field of Communication and Information I believe that the spread of information and communications technology (ICTs) has great potential to accelerate human development and to bridge divides between diverse societies and cultures.

In this regard, let me again recognise UNESCO's Information for All Programme for its timely initiative to organize together with other major partners the first-ever World Conference on Fighting Youth Extremism and Radicalization on the Internet.

The use of enabling technology should also serve to promote the empowerment of women and girls. However, regarding the rapid spread of information, we need to be sure that every individual is adequately equipped to be critical to any information with which he or she is confronted.

In this context, let me underline the need of enhancing women and youth employment, which is a major challenge for our countries, but especially for those in Africa and the Arab regions.

Every young person should be prepared through education to use ICTs to best help navigate the current job market, thus increasing opportunities to gain quality employment. We must build capacities and launch awareness raising campaigns for beneficial workplace internships as well as job placement training.

We should also think about how to improve the visibility of our work sharing with everyone the untold success stories that prove UNESCO's added value.

Our publications, for example must be better referenced – especially by applying universal standards for open data sources for publications, recourse to our networks must be reinforced – notably through the use of social media and other networking applications.

And here, we have the added capacity of our National Commissions – who must be equipped to communicate the good work done in our countries, regionally and internationally.

Moreover, we should improve our links with the academic and professional communities through regular and joint endeavours maximizing our strengths to achieve mutually beneficial objectives for the benefit of our Member States.

Finally, in order for UNESCO to maintain its position as global leader in its fields of competence, we also need to look carefully at our governance structures.

This was confirmed by the External Auditor and, during the past months an effort has been made to make this a reality through the work of the Informal Taskforce on Governance.

Here I am reminded of the wisdom of Thomas Jefferson, who said:

“Institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times, or else might we require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy”.

One of the observations made during the meetings of the Informal Taskforce was that we have learned so much by doing and that we must benefit from these experiences gained. It was also said that those new to the Board must take advantage of the experiences acquired by those with greater Board experience. This will help improve the solidarity of our Members, while also producing greater efficiencies in our working habits.

Most of you underlined that we have been speaking about governance at UNESCO for too long. It's time for action – decisive action – to ensure that the diplomatic representatives sent by their capitals are informed and are invested in their task to not only represent their interests, but to be watchful over the best interest of UNESCO.

I welcome the decision taken at this session of the Board, which represents real progress. Perhaps not as much as some of us may have wanted, but nonetheless progress has been made.

We have proven that we can agree on incremental change. Steady progress is being made regarding our own methods of work especially through lessons learnt by doing – that demonstrate we are not unwilling to change our working methods.

I am encouraged that the Board will meet more often on a trial basis in the coming biennium.

While these meetings will remain informal, I am certain they will prove useful in making us a more active, engaged and responsible governing body.

It remains my hope that a more continuous governance mechanism will allow the members of the Executive Board to take advantage of the time between each of its sessions to better follow up, monitor and prepare decisions, better involve non-members of the Board and improve the working relations with the Secretariat.

Thus, I am hopeful during the coming two years that the coming Board will be able to take advantage of progress we have made here now with a view to improving our governance mechanism.

UNESCO is not the first organization to examine its governance structure. We have benefited from the experience provided by Martin O'Malley of The Global Fund, but there are many others.

With improved governance mechanisms we will not only be a better and more efficient organization, we will also be a more attractive organization to external partners and potential donors.

I believe that it is our duty as an Executive Board, to make sure we are dedicated. To make sure we are engaged. To make our work and interventions of high quality. And to make sure that we genuinely have UNESCO's best interests at heart when we make decisions to support the Director-General in her noble task of implementing and executing the Programme that the General Conference has adopted, and which the General Conference has charged us to oversee.

This is why, I think, we need an Executive Board that meets more often, that concentrates on current challenges, and which provides useful assistance and most importantly competent guidance to the Director-General and her teams.

We need a governing body that is truly executive in its outlook, and not "micro-managing" the Organization. For this, there needs to be a renewed true sense of trust and harmony between the Board and the Secretariat.

At the end of the last biennium, my predecessor – Ms Alissandra Cummins – was wondering whether the resources we are committing to the Organization are sufficient to accomplish its mandate.

I think that the work we did for the renovation of Room 10 is an example, on a small scale and in a very short time – just under three months – of what we can do with a pro-active vision of any project. As we realized, very often we have to face unexpected problems that remind us of the unpredictability of processes. But every problem has a solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I will leave this Chair, with fond memories of the people I have met, of the times we have spent together.

I am proud of the work we have accomplished – sometimes with difficulty, but always with the greater cause of UNESCO's mission in mind.

It is my sincere wish that we all together – Member States and the Secretariat – strive for a UNESCO we aspire to, that we continue to fight tirelessly for a better world tomorrow by acting responsibly and effectively today.

Allow me, Dear Colleagues, to leave you with this one last thought, as expressed by Victor Hugo: There is nothing like a dream to create the future."

Together let us continue to dream to build the better future we want.

Dear friends, these were the messages that I wanted to leave you with based on our experiences together over the past two years.

Before leaving this chair, allow me to share with you a message of friendship.

As you know, two years ago I thanked you for electing me as a chairperson and for having confidence in me in this very high office.

I must admit it is an honour for anyone to play such a role especially when he or she feels that they have done their utmost in every manner to serve this organization and protect its interest I am today much happier than the first day when I was elected. And this is because I leave this room carrying with me all the memories of a successful mission that we have achieved together.

I did not want to end my speech using formal diplomatic language. I wanted to say a special word of thanks from the bottom of my heart to all those who stood by me you every one of you here, and to the former members of the Board and Bureau with whom I have worked during these past two years who have now moved on to other important posts, or who are no longer with us.

First and foremost let me thank UNESCO an Organization that we all hold so dearly in our hearts and minds. It is because of UNESCO that we are all here. And it is FOR UNESCO that we all WORK. In fact, we do not live in UNESCO but UNESCO lives in us. What an amazing feeling, which I am certain you all share with me!

Let me now turn to the President of the General Conference **Mr HAO Ping**. Sir, you have become a true friend. I have learned a great deal from you. I am proud to have learned Chinese wisdom and patience through you.

**Madame Director-General Ms Irina Bokova**, I am the third Chairperson with whom you have had to work during your mandate here at UNESCO. I am certain that I have left you with some very special memories! Let me wish you all the best in the coming years with my successor. I would also like to truly wish you every success in your future endeavours.

**Mister DDG Mr Getachew Engida** you sometimes appear discrete, but you have always been effective in resolving issues during long debates in Commissions and when replacing the DG in Plenary. Thank you very much!

To the Director of the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs, our **Legal Advisor, Ms Anna Segall**, you will understand too well that it is difficult for one lawyer to say good things to another lawyer. It is a well-known fact that if you put two lawyers together in the same room, you almost always come away with three opinions! Madam, thank you for your support and for the opinions you provided to help solve complex legal issues. For this I am most grateful, and through you, I wish to convey a special word of thanks to you and your team and I hope that your team will be reinforced in the future, so that it may provide the service that our governing bodies truly deserve.

Let me also say a special word of thanks to each of the **ADGs** and, in fact, to all members of the **Secretariat**. Believe me when I say that UNESCO could not succeed without you. The assistance and advice that you have provided to me have been very helpful. I do not wish to name you, because you know who you are, but I do wish to thank you and to say that you have become my true friends.

I also want to say a very special word of thanks to each and every member of the **Permanent Delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt to UNESCO**. They have accepted to be burdened with extra work in order to enable me to handle my responsibilities as Chairperson. My due thanks goes beyond here to my own country who allowed me the privilege to represent it here in UNESCO and to the Executive Board. My due thanks goes to all Ministers and members of the Government, who I worked with and who understood my duties as a Chair and provided me with all the necessary support



And finally let me move on to my **team in GBS**.

To **Jacques Rao** and **Susana Sam-Vargas** – the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Board. Let me express my profound gratitude to you both for your professionalism and devoted service. The wheels of the Board run smoothly because of you, which I have appreciated very much.

Through you, let me please say a special word of thanks to the **entire GBS team** – and here I mean Jack and Susana’s full-time team who we don’t always see, and also the entire security team, who do their utmost to protect us in these premises. My thanks also go to our my driver **Rhatna** and our room clerks who assist each of us efficiently as well as to the translators who produced our documents and the interpreters who ensured that our discussions were well understood by all.

I wish also to say a special word of thanks to the **technicians** who have worked tirelessly to make sure that this particular session of the Board in our newly renovated Room works. I may have caused you some sleepless nights. But please know that you efforts are most appreciated.

Now let me say a special word of thanks to the two people with whom I have worked the closest during my term, namely **Victoria Moorhead** and **Frederick Russell-Rivoallan**.

Dear **Vicky**: It really isn’t saying too much to say that I wouldn’t have made it this far without you. You have put up with many challenges, most of them caused by me but you always did it with a smile. I have grown to count on you as a loyal and efficient Assistant who has shown an extraordinary level of patience and trustworthy support.

Dear **Russ**: You too have provided much appreciated support and advice. In this short time you have managed to understand me and help me express my thoughts in a logical manner. I too appreciate your professionalism and dedication. Let’s face it, we all know that the renovation of Room 10 was no easy task – but you did it!

**Vicky and Russ** - your combined sense of humour has helped us to survive these two years. Let me say openly that I now consider you both as more than just colleagues. You have indeed become true friends.

My dear friends, please remain seated, because I would like to pass by and thank you individually, to express my sincere gratitude to all of you.

With these words ladies and gentlemen, I hereby declare the 197th session of the Executive Board closed.