



Audrey Azoulay

Address by Ms Audrey Azoulay, on the occasion of her installation as Director-General of UNESCO

(Paris – November 13, 2017)
Madam President of the General Conference, Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board, Honourable Ministers, Chairpersons of the regional groups, Distinguished Heads of Delegation, Madam Director-General, dear Irina, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends, I would like to thank you for having expressed, this afternoon, your confidence, your hopes, your questions sometimes, and your lucidity with regards to our situation. I would like to salute

the other eight candidates who came from all over the world to present their visions and projects to you during the election process and in public hearings. I am proud of the work we shared for a while, on behalf of France in my case and UNESCO in yours, to protect heritage in conflict areas. When mausoleums were being destroyed in Timbuktu and its manuscripts threatened, when the ancient sites of Palmyra and Nimrod were under attack, you took action and called upon the international community to shoulder its responsibilities. Each of the ten

Director-Generals who preceded me sought to contribute to the sustainability of the world and the efficiency of this Organization, among others, and they did not stand alone, but with the expert teams that I am proud to join and of whose unflinching commitment and even devotion to the missions of UNESCO I am fully aware. Allow me, here, as subtly invited to do by the President of the General Conference, to turn briefly to personal matters. My country, France, holds as an ideal the univer-

sal, and defends a humanist vision of the world. France, in the words of Léon Blum, wished to host UNESCO in Paris, the city of light and enlightenment, cinema, jazz and cafés. It is a country that was wounded, like so many others, to the bone, in these cafés, in a concert hall, two years ago exactly, on 13 November 2015. It was no coincidence – and we all know this – that these attacks happened in a place of music and of sharing, in places where young people meet in a context of diversity and

stitution of UNESCO. Remaining on a personal note, I would like to evoke a memory from my visit as Minister of Culture to an exceptional prehistoric site, the Cave of Pont-d'Arc, known as Grotte Chauvet-Pont d'Arc, in the Ardèche department of France. The cave painters used the hollow wall of the rock to emphasize the shapes of the animals, using emptiness to give form, and techniques that we consider to be modern and that therefore connect us immediately through the centuries.

Entering this prehistoric cave is like entering an artist's studio left behind by our ancestors more than 35,000 years ago. It conveys a message that we must hear: that of our unity, beyond chronological, geographical or cultural divides – a unity that expresses itself so well in our relationship with the arts. Ladies and gentlemen, the period in which we live is one of multiple and global challenges that are obviously not those of 1945: massive environmental degradation, obscurantism, terrorism, questioning of the contribution of science, deliberate attacks on cul-

tural diversity, oppression – over and over again – of women, and massive displacement of populations. Our collective inability to prevent these tragedies may be explained by a common blindness: the lack of value generated from knowledge, the denial of universal values and the absence of a global and humanistic response. In the face of these challenges that we share, and which know no borders or walls, a world without collective intelligence would be powerless. Without unity in our

joy. I grew up in France, but with the good fortune of coming from another country, like millions of French people. France and Morocco, Europe and Africa, the North and the South. Morocco has the tremendous advantage in the world today of having diverse roots, which it upholds even in its Constitution. It is no coincidence that my professional commitments have all been marked by a taste for cultural diversity, this "fruitful diversity of the cultures" that holds a prominent place in the Con-



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



ph. Niviere/Sipa/Rex/Shutterstock

© Concept & design: GianAngelo Pistoia • Photos: Niviere/Sipa/Rex/Shutterstock - UN Photo/Evan Schneider - Jan Langsdon - Carlo Albino Turra - Jakub Hatun - Daniel Schwen - GianAngelo Pistoia/A.P.



overall assessment of the situation, we would be reduced to recognizing the interweaving of the mechanisms at work, prisoners of old frameworks of analysis. Without unity in our action, we would be reduced to taking isolated initiatives, with fragmented governance. Without the unity of our countries, we would go astray in selfish attitudes, forgetting our basic duties. In the face of today's challenges I believe in the need for concerted strategies within the framework of multilateralism – this is what we have collectively managed to achieve with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. UNESCO's promise and what we owe to the world is to work in this multilateral framework by acting on the root causes of our collective destiny, transmitting universal values of peace through education, sciences and freedoms. This is indeed why each of these dimensions is the preferred target of terrorists who fear their power much more than the power of weapons. By virtue of its missions, its voice and its action, UNESCO is in direct contact with the future of humanity in the long term. Education – provided that

it is of quality and guaranteed to all, both girls and boys and throughout life – is a powerful factor of individual emancipation and collective development. We know to what extent the educational emergency is the challenge of our century and how far we are from the goal set by the 2030 Agenda. The sciences, supported by sound ethical principles, are the foundation upon which the sustainable wellbeing of populations can be ensured, upon which we can drive social transformation and sustainably manage our impact on the environment. We must listen to the voices of scientists who are bravely and lucidly sounding the alarm. It is the responsibility of UNESCO to fight, particularly in the context of its scientific competences, but also with the power of education, for an urgent and ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement. And climate change does not spare world heritage sites, as recalled today by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Freedom of expression and communication, strengthened by the protection of journalists, is a basic criterion for universal access to the truth. It is our responsibility to fight for this right.

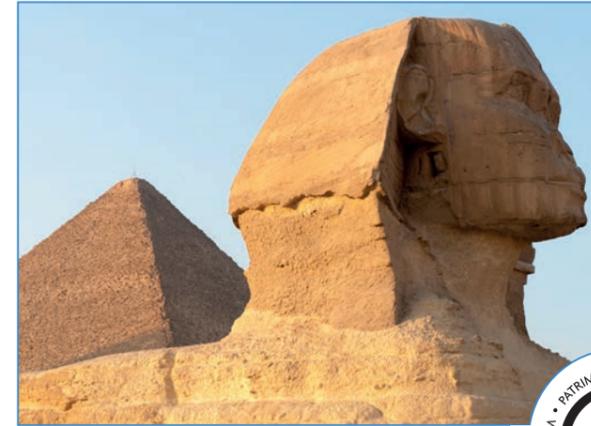
Culture is the best antidote to ideologies that glorify death and is a powerful pillar of development. It allows each of us to open up to others in their diversity without denying our own identity, quite the opposite. Freedom of creation is a fundamental issue and part of our fight for freedom. Without creativity, there is no living heritage. That is why we must reconnect with creators, especially the younger generations. This mandate is exercised with a key priority given to Africa and women. To Africa, in the conviction that it is the continent that crystallizes the challenges and solutions of our common future. Constant attention must be paid to ensuring the operational implementation of this priority. To women and girls, to restore their rightful place as agents of their own destiny and a force of progress in our societies. Everywhere, the voices of women are being heard, louder and louder, telling us how far we still have to go to ensure true equality. They are the ones who convey the transformation of the world and we must support them in each of our actions. In the face of the challenges of today's world UNESCO acts precisely where the only credible and sustainable

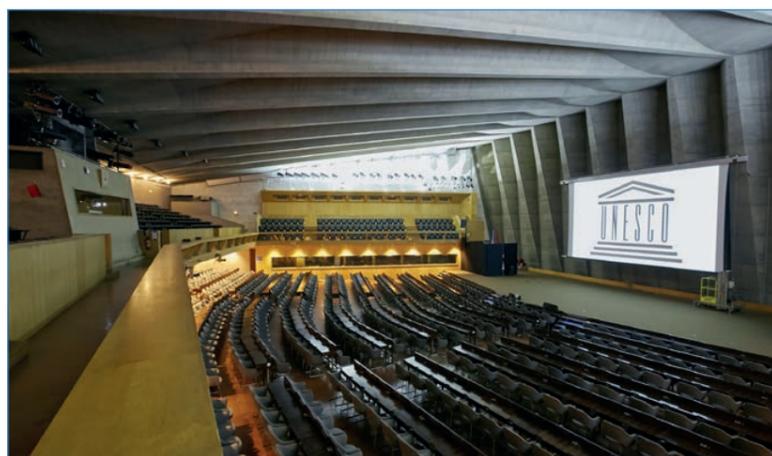
answer lies. We must convey these ambitions with determination, as well as clarity. Because the implementation of UNESCO's mission is challenged by the difficulties we face together, both financial and political. We face financial difficulties owing to the lack of resources and the non-payment of contributions. Some are withdrawing from the community of nations at a time when our problems are common. As a result, the universality of our action is diminished, and their capacity to contribute to the common good is reduced. We must always maintain dialogue, keep our door open, but also act with civil societies around the world who wish to maintain this common work. When arrears accumulate, when assessed contributions are taken hostage, some programmes are jeopardized and part of our action paralyzed. I call on the responsibility of Member States which cannot tailor their involvement to suit themselves alone, but must prove themselves steadfast partners by their unwavering commitment to the common good. I would also like to thank those who have made commitments beyond their assessed contributions. At this time of crisis, I am convinced

that more than ever we must engage in UNESCO, support, strengthen and improve it, not weaken it. We face political difficulties, also, when some of our Members tear each other apart, bringing divisions to UNESCO's table that cannot be resolved in this forum. We know full well that the world suffers from competing and sometimes violently opposed visions. We know full well that heritage is a complex matter and a particularly sensitive one when conflicts are still raw or there has been no work on history and shared memory. Our role is to seek to create spaces for dialogue and rapprochement in our fields of competence. I will always try to bring together as much energy as possible to attain this objective and to be available at your side, alongside the Member States, which are ultimately the decision-makers on these sensitive issues. So here we are at a moment of truth for the credibility of UNESCO, because it is absolutely critical today that UNESCO's vocation and relevance are not called into question, quite the opposite. UNESCO's mission is more crucial than ever. It is this strategic relevance that is essential and that should enable us to

stand together in the service of its mandate. There can be no solution without this renewed unity and confidence; this is what I shall strive for, because I am convinced that these objectives are within reach of a UNESCO at peace with itself and revitalized. That is why my first goal will be to create the conditions for unity within our institution. This requires a renewed, profound dialogue with the Member States and among the governance bodies. Rest assured that I will be particularly attentive and open to what you have to say, since my own mandate involves seeking points of equilibrium in the service of the Member States. Ladies and gentlemen, the unity that we must rebuild can only be achieved if it is based on universal values and in the long term. UNESCO's unique role, especially in these times of uncertainty, is to be the institution that knows how to understand the long term. This supposes that we continue thinking, nurturing the crucial link with intellectual circles, especially in all scientific areas, that continuously probe the complexities of the current era. UNESCO has always deliberated over its primary role, whether as an intellectual forum or an operation-







al organization. Clearly, it must be both of these, and if it aims to carry weight in the course of events, it must reconcile these two functions. The conceptual debate must not be overly academic and the operational action should be guided by clear rules. If I had to define UNESCO in four words, I would say that it is 'collective intelligence in action'. UNESCO is expected to be a productive force of norms and an orchestrator of international cooperation, bringing together the normative and operative as effectively as possible. Ladies and gentlemen, our Organization has clear skills to provide for the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change within the United Nations system. It requires from us more effort to build alliances with other stakeholders: United Nations agencies of course, States, regional organizations, the network of National Commissions, cities and civil societies. And to tackle the financial problems facing us, we must be able to identify and raise financing for labelled projects or those identified as strategic. This means knowing how to build partnerships, whether public or private, global or local, while fully maintaining our values and ambitions. I believe in reinforcing efforts when seeking financing, and I believe in coherent and harmonized management of relations with the various donors. We must also of course be able to keep improving our Organization and operations. A wide array of programmes can be seen as a sign of vitality, but also as a problem with setting and ranking priorities. Choosing priorities means being able to take action on the key issues, it means focusing one's efforts on the areas offering the greatest chance of achieving tangible results. This strategic assessment must also be a shared assessment, which is essential for genuine compatibility between our political project and our work on the ground. It is an essential platform for increased transparency and a better understanding of our work. It is also the only assessment that would allow us to continue playing a strategic role in a world with limited resources. To achieve this objective, we need more accountability, and a stronger culture of accountability requires effective evaluation mechanisms. We also need to build consensus around decentralization and flexibility, to focus more on delivery

on the field. Our action must be adapted to each country, each reality, especially taking into account the extreme vulnerability of some of our Member States. Naturally, a lot has already been done to this end, particularly in recent years; but we must maintain and step up these efforts. They are essential in order to restore trust and credibility. And I think we must also communicate better on what we do, in ways that everybody understands. Ladies and gentlemen, We must finally address a crucial issue that cuts across each of the pillars of our mandate: the reconciliation between the unprecedented digital and scientific revolution that we are living and the humanist values that we uphold. No institution is better placed for this than UNESCO and it is a major enterprise of our century. Madam President, I should like to conclude with a message of trust and even faith in our Organization. In spite of all the limitations and constraints, UNESCO has demonstrated, throughout its history, a genuine ability to provide creative responses to the challenges of our time. There are many examples in the fields of cultural heritage, environmental protection, bioethics, gender equality, quality education, knowledge of the oceans and hydro-hazards. In each of these areas, to name but a few, the standards and practices put in place by UNESCO are now essential references and we should be proud of them. My goal is that we all come together to draw the face of UNESCO as we head towards 2030: a modern UNESCO, so that our Organization may participate fully in redefining the parameters that will shape the world of tomorrow with or without us. My ambition is that UNESCO plays a major role in giving a human face to globalization. We are at a moment of truth in which our collective responsibility is engaged and at a time when UNESCO has never been so necessary. It is up to us, collectively, to make the right decisions to shape the Organization and bring it into the twenty-first century, to act responsibly, each one of us according to our place. The dream of the founders of UNESCO has not been fulfilled and we owe it to the younger generations to pursue this ambition with them and for them. Thank you very much.



Audrey Azoulay

A graduate of France's Ecole Nationale d'Administration and of the Paris Institut d'Etudes Politiques, she holds a diploma in Business Administration from the University of Lancaster (UK). Having worked in the sector of culture since the start of her professional career, Audrey Azoulay has notably focused on the funding of French public broadcasting and on the reform and modernization of France's film support system. She has also served the European Commission providing her expertise on issues concerning culture and communication. In 2014, as an advisor on culture to the President of the French Republic, she notably initiated the development of a protection plan for heritage in danger, which she was able to implement in 2016 as Minister of Culture and Communication. She has also prioritized improving children's access to culture with the launch of artistic and cultural education school programmes "Création en cours" and created innovative cultural outreach programmes for people in remote and vulnerable areas "Microfolies". With a longstanding commitment in favour of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue to advance education for all and the dissemination of scientific and cultural knowledge, she is determined to maintain this commitment as the head of UNESCO. She will spare no effort in ensuring that UNESCO fulfils its universal mandate fully in promoting values of humanism and openness and serving as a driving force in the United Nations system. The Organization is to achieve this by serving as an intellectual forum for the world of tomorrow, and as a standard-setter that will help society advance, as well as serving as an expert agency contributing to the dissemination of knowledge to the greatest number of people worldwide. According to Audrey Azoulay, *"none of the major challenges facing the world today can be met by any one country on its own without relying on the fundamental pillars of science, education and culture. Thus, UNESCO can and must fully participate in a world order based on multilateralism and humanist values."*