

Speech by  
Minister of State Prof. Maria Böhmer  
at the  
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[français]

Madame Zohour Alaoui,  
Présidente de la Conférence générale,

Monsieur Michael Worbs,  
Président du Conseil exécutif,

Madame la Directrice générale de  
l'UNESCO, chère Irina Bokova,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres,

Excellences!

Une nouvelle page s'ouvre pour  
l'UNESCO.

Aussi, je tiens à remercier  
Madame Irina Bokova pour l'excellente  
et confiante coopération  
au cours de ces dernières années.  
Je remercie également l'ambassadeur  
Monsieur Michael Worbs  
pour son admirable travail accompli  
pendant deux ans à la tête du  
Conseil exécutif.

Quant à vous, chère Madame Azoulay,  
j'ai le plaisir de vous transmettre  
les félicitations de la Chancelière  
fédérale et du Ministre fédéral des  
Affaires étrangères à l'occasion  
de votre nomination en tant que  
Directrice générale de l'UNESCO.

Tous nos vœux d'énergie et de courage  
vous accompagnent pour initier  
les démarches nécessaires  
à la réforme de cette institution!

72 years after its founding, UNESCO is facing one of its greatest challenges: It must reorganise and initiate substantial reforms. It must reinvigorate the culture of peace.

72 years after the founding of UNESCO, globalisation, the digital revolution and climate change are reshaping our world in fundamental ways.

We are seeing an increase in the number of crises, confrontations and armed conflicts. Entire regions are being destabilised. Millions of people have fled their homes. We are experiencing a new form of terrorism that is trying to eradicate peoples' cultural identities.

One of the answers to the challenges of our time is a strong UNESCO that is capable of action. Only by joining forces will we be able to travel the ambitious path that lies ahead.

The task before us is so great and important that we particularly now need the United States and Israel at our side. I therefore most deeply regret that both countries have announced they intend to withdraw from UNESCO.

UNESCO is undergoing radical change. So now is the time to talk *with* one another – not *about* one another. Above all, we must support each other, and act as one!

I see five areas where action is needed: First, we must decisively oppose the increasing politicisation of UNESCO. We all know the problem. Now, we have to start solving it!

Second, to help UNESCO perform its tasks effectively, we must make sure the organisation is better funded. This year, Germany already in January paid its contribution in full, in order to stabilise the precarious financial situation.

I therefore call on all members to meet their financial obligations.

Third, UNESCO must act now to implement urgently needed reforms. We need true reform of the organisation's structure and substance, not mere lip service! We are prepared to support UNESCO as it proceeds down this path.

Fourth, the National Commissions must be closely involved in the reform process.

We should use their expertise and put it to good use. In this way, the National Commissions can more effectively contribute to UNESCO's work.

Fifth, UNESCO's core tasks are today more important than ever. This is about peace, and it is about sustainability. Together, we must make our contribution towards stability and peace in the world.

We must also implement the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

With the 2030 Agenda, we have a roadmap and a clear plan of action. Sustainability means not only good stewardship of our natural resources. It should also be the benchmark for our economic and social policies and actions. Ultimately, we must aspire to help all people live good and independent lives.

This means that education for humanity, as well as promoting education, culture and values are key.

This is a task we need to tackle together, in UNESCO. Sustainable education is and deserves to be at the heart of what UNESCO does.

Because it is sustainable education that gives each individual better opportunities and broadens his or her horizons.

That is what in the end will determine whether or not we reach our common goal: a just and peaceful world.

Germany is prepared to shoulder responsibility. Therefore, we want to remain actively engaged as a member of the Executive Board for an additional term. I would be very pleased if you could give us your support – and your vote!

Allow me to conclude my speech by reminding you of the following excerpt from António Guterres' appeal for peace on his first day in office as Secretary-General of the United Nations:

“All that we strive for as a human family – dignity and hope, progress and prosperity – depends on peace. But peace depends on us.”

Thank you very much.

Pour terminer, permettez-moi de rappeler les mots prononcés par le Secrétaire général des Nations Unies António Guterres lors de son discours de prise de fonctions:

«Tout ce que nous valorisons en tant que famille humaine – la dignité et l'espoir, le progrès et la prospérité – dépend de la paix. Mais la paix dépend de nous.»

Merci de votre attention.