

Speech at the Forum of Education for Today and Tomorrow

Education for the Future--towards the community of common destiny for all humankind

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Your Eminence Cardinal Parolin,

Dear Madam Bokova, Director General of UNESCO,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

70 years ago , with the pain caused by the wars in their body and the hope for a peaceful future in their heart, representatives from 44 countries gathered in London, to establish a specialized organization with the mandate of building lasting peace on the basis of moral and

intellectual solidarity as inscribed in its Constitution. This organization is UNESCO.

In the past 70 years , UNESCO has dedicated to promoting international collaboration through education, sciences, culture and communication. Its unremitting endeavor in the postwar reconstruction of schools, in promoting universal access to education, in protecting heritage and cultural diversity, and in support to sustainable development is widely recognized as a major contribution to international understanding and to the defense of peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world that we live in today is a global village where people are closely connected with each other. We need to rethink the development of human beings and our future in this new context.

History has shown that human beings have created various civilizations in its long history. Each civilization has its own characteristics and strengths. It is important for all people to respect each other and to get along with kindness and friendship, so that the diversity of human civilizations can be appreciated as a beautiful

painting.

I remember visiting an alley in a small city of Malaysia, several years ago. There I saw Mosque, Church, Buddhist Temple and Hinduist Temple all along the same alley. I also saw people of different faiths walking in the same street. I was deeply touched by the beauty of the harmonious coexistence of cultures.

History tells us that different civilizations are enriched by learning from each other. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell once wrote: Contacts between different civilizations have often in the past proved to be landmarks in human progress. Greece learnt from Egypt, Rome from Greece, the Arabs from the Roman Empire, medieval Europe from the Arabs, and Renaissance Europe from the Byzantines. The evolution of civilizations is in itself a history of exchanges and mutual learning, a history of common development while preserving difference among different civilizations.

However, the evolution of civilizations reminds us that, today, in this inter-connected world, challenges are common to all, such as climate change, natural disasters, terrorism, and wars. And we have to be especially vigilant to the increasing misunderstanding, intolerance and even armed conflicts among

people of different beliefs and cultures. Violent extremism towards civilians and students is challenging our conscience. People keep asking, "What's happening to this world? Will the world change for better?"

It is high time to think about this question.

We have only one planet, and it is home to all countries. For a brighter future of the world, we must stay united and make joint efforts. And this can only be achieved by constructing the community of common destiny for all humankind.

The essence of "the community of common destiny for all humankind" lies in mutual respect, equal dialogue and harmonious co-existence among civilizations. President Xi Jinping said during his visit to UNESCO last March, "Civilizations have come in different colors, and such diversity has made exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations relevant and valuable."

In this March, I had the honor of meeting His Holiness Pope Francis, together with Madame Bokova and Mr. Amr. During the meeting, His Holiness emphasized dialogue and exchanges as ways to build inclusive and equitable society and to foster the culture of peace,

which greatly impressed me.

At this important occasion today, a fundamental question facing all educators is, what kind of education will bring us to our goal?

This reminds me of a saying by Napoleon, "There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit." So, education today and tomorrow should nurture power in thoughts rather than in the sword. It is our responsibility to foster an education for the future and of the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to make the following points.

First, education for the future should place in its center the ultimate goal of achieving peace. We should reaffirm that education today is for building and defending peace for tomorrow.

When we look back at the two world wars and the thirty-year cold war in the last century, we should realize that education should not be a pragmatic tool, only to serve economic, scientific or political

purposes.

We should teach students to respect diversity and differences, to enable them to exchange and work together, and to solve problems through dialogue and in non-violent ways, and to make students physically and mentally healthy.

We hope that, with such education, peace can be passed on from generation to generation like genes, and it can be spread from one place to another like olive branches, and blossom of roses.

Secondly, education for the future should promote history education. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Commemorating activities are taking place in many countries and cities. Today's Forum is one of them.

UNESCO values history education. In 1990s, UNESCO launched the Slave Route Project, to break silence on the history of this tragedy, and to promote reconciliation and cooperation among peoples for the future.

In the same spirit, UNESCO also compiled and published the *General History of Africa*, to safeguard the natural and cultural

heritages of the African continent.

Last year, the Silk Road which once connected the East and the West was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Last month, a Maritime Silk Road Dance drama from China came to the stage of UNESCO. It is about a story of a Persian Prince who came to China along the Maritime Silk Road 500 years ago, and returned home with a great fortune and friendship with Chinese sailors.

Thirdly, education for the future should be developed with a humanist approach, such as education of empathy and passion, and with the focus on students' happiness, leading to the freedom of personal development. Civilizations are different, but they share many ethics and principles.

For instance, Confucius says that ‘Those who love others will be always be loved’. Lao-tze says that the way of heaven is to benefit others, and not to injure. The way of the sage is to act but not to compete. The Bible says that you shall love your neighbor as yourselves. Buddhism says that good karma comes from good deeds. Islamic Prophet Mohammed says: Those who love others like they love themselves are true believers. Mahatma Gandhi says, an eye for an eye ends up only making the whole world blind. These wise

ideas are the most important values of human society, and they have important impact not only at the individual level, but also on social and national levels. They should be the core of our education.

Fourthly, education for the future should become more open by expanding the international mobility of students.

Students are the hope and future of the world. The mutual understanding, appreciation and recognition which they gain during exchanges will pave the way for peace in future. In recent years, the international mobility of students has greatly increased. UNESCO estimates that by the year 2020, the number of international students will reach 5.8 million, and by 2025 more than 7.2 million students will study abroad. I would like to give a more optimistic prediction: maybe 10 million?

Fifthly, education for the future should provide quality educational opportunities for all children.

Education has been recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The EFA, coordinated by UNESCO from the very beginning of this century, has achieved remarkable progress in expanding educational opportunities worldwide.

However, in 2015, 58 million children in less developed countries and regions are still left behind in the global EFA goals. At the 2015 World Education Forum two weeks ago in Incheon, the Republic of Korea, ministers and leaders from over 150 countries met to renew our commitment to education and to put forward the targets and action plans in post-2015 agenda, to achieve equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Lastly, education for the future should integrate the concept of preservation of resources and protection of environment, supported by the use of ICT.

In this century, the deterioration of environment has brought major challenges to the safety of the planet and sustainable development. Preserving the planet is our concern and top priority.

Recently, when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Fabius visited China, I accompanied him during his speech at Nankai University. As the President of COP 21, he elaborated the four targets of the UN Climate Change Conference which will be held in Paris this December. In his speech, he delivered a very important message: education is vital to achieving our goals in environment protection and sustainability. I can't agree more.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education has always been one of the principal activities of UNESCO to achieve the aims in global citizenship, intercultural dialogue, and lasting peace. With this shared vision, we should spare no effort to promote education for the future, to contribute to peace and prosperity, and to build a solid foundation for the community of common destiny of all humankind.

Before I end my speech, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Your Eminence Cardinal Parolin, and express my gratitude to His Holiness for his generous support. I hope that His Holiness will visit UNESCO soon, and we are looking forward to it.

Thank you!