



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by

**Mr Getachew Engida,
Deputy Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Opening of the
“Courtyard of the Gentiles”**

UNESCO, 24 March 2011, 3 p.m.

Your Eminence Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture,
His Excellency Mr Giuliano Amato, President of the Italian Encyclopaedia Institute,
Monsignor Follo, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to UNESCO,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you to UNESCO.

The Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bokova, regrets that she cannot be with us today. She is currently on an official visit to the Philippines.

It is with great pleasure, therefore, that I welcome you on her behalf.

UNESCO is honoured to support this initiative on the “Courtyard of the Gentiles” and to participate in the next two days of high-level meetings.

UNESCO was created in 1945 as a house of dialogue between States, between peoples and between cultures.

Today, this is your house.

Promoting a dialogue between faiths and between believers and non-believers lies at the heart of the rapprochement of cultures and peoples that we work every day to advance.

This dialogue builds the understanding that is necessary for lasting peace.

The stakes have perhaps never been so high.

Globalization is bringing societies closer. It is accelerating the movement of peoples and deepening the intermingling of identities.

It is also eroding traditional bearings for individuals and societies, and placing us all in closer contact with the great diversity of humanity.

Events every day remind us that no country, however powerful, and no culture, however rich, can pretend to hold all of the solutions to the problems we face and share today.

The impact of climate change, the rising consequences of natural disasters, tragically and most recently in Japan –these are reminders that we must build new capacities for collective action, we must anticipate future hazards more effectively and we must share knowledge in order to design common responses.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is becoming more clear every day that it is not enough to tolerate or to understand the other drawing only on the resources of reason and intelligence.

As His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the *Caritas in Veritate* Encyclical, “Reason can help us grasp the equality of men but it cannot foster true fraternity.”

In the same spirit, the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, is committed to exploring what she has called a “new humanism.”

This is a humanism that goes beyond the passive tolerance of differences. It is a humanism that seeks to empower men and women with new ways to live and work together in all their diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Such cooperation is urgently required today, and it must start with dialogue.

UNESCO has pursued this mission for sixty five years.

From our experience, two features emerge as being important for developing a dialogue that goes the mere exchange of views.

First, dialogue cannot be virtual.

To take root, it needs real places, concrete tools and tailored initiatives.

The “Courtyard of the Gentiles” illustrates the power of dialogue under the right conditions.

The greatest challenge is not to call on people to engage in dialogue but to provide them with practical means to do so.

UNESCO’s World Heritage sites are places where such a dialogue may be initiated, where the rapprochement of cultures can be nurtured.

The religious monuments listed on the World Heritage List are natural meeting places for meaningful dialogue.

The experience of UNESCO is also that dialogue must be underpinned by respect for human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights must remain our compass as we move forward. The text and its spirit are clear: cultural diversity and religious differences can never provide justification for the non-observance of human rights.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are our starting points. They allow us to manage the diversity of world and to recognize the equality and dignity of all individuals and communities.

This involves the freedom of expression and the freedom of information, without which no dialogue is possible.

This involves also the right to quality education, thanks to which every child, boy or girl, acquires the skills and tools to express themselves and speak out.

I am sure that the next two days of discussion and exchange will strengthen our attachment to these shared values.

Thank you once again for this initiative. Thank you for the passion that you all bring to the cause of dialogue.

As Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, I am grateful also for this new opportunity to deepen cooperation with the Holy See and with all partners present today.

Thank you for listening.