

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Annual Meeting of UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors

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Welcome address by

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**President of the UNESCO General Conference
and Permanent Delegate of Nigeria to UNESCO**

Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Director-General,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today, on behalf of all Members States, to the House of UNESCO. I should like to join the Director-General in warmly thanking you all for having spared some of your precious time in order to attend this Annual Meeting of Goodwill Ambassadors of the Organization.

UNESCO is currently undergoing a regenerating phase. Under the wise lead of the Director-General, the Organization is accomplishing a major reform both of its programmes and its administration, in order to adjust itself to the needs of the international community and to face with fresh impetus in a relevant and efficient manner the challenges put before it. And this effort is already flourishing: as you all know, we had the honour and the pleasure to see, during the 32nd session of the General Conference, the renewal of membership of the United States of America as well as the accession of a newly independent Member State, Timor-Leste. UNESCO has therefore almost reached universality of membership. Let us hope that those few States which are still not members of the Organization will very soon join our common venture.

The 32nd session of the General Conference also represented a landmark in many other ways, particularly for the importance of the subjects brought before it and for the nature of the decisions taken thereby. The Conference adopted major international instruments like the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*, the *Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage*, the *International Declaration on Human Genetic Data* and the *Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage*. The Conference also invited the Director-General to pursue the elaboration of normative instruments on such important matters as cultural diversity and bioethics, and adopted important substantive resolutions relating to the dialogue among civilizations, the sustainable development of small island developing states of higher education and globalization, to pick up only a few among them. All this was done in a distended climate of dialogue and mutual cooperation, thus putting into practice the purpose of this Organization, which is nothing less than to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture.

Some of these subjects will undoubtedly be food for thought for your meeting, and I am particularly pleased to see that a part of it will be devoted to the Intangible Cultural Heritage. I cannot but stress the importance of the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and I hope that we shall all join our forces to persuade our Member States on the need to ratify this instrument as soon as possible. This is an enormous move towards universal protection of the heritage of humankind in its different expressions, and I believe that, in the near future, the safeguarding of intangible heritage made possible through this convention will be one in importance, respect and universality of reach as that of the tangible heritage – cultural and natural - is today, thanks to the 1972 Convention.

Dear friends, in line with the enhanced dynamism and reinforced universality of the Organization, the family of our Goodwill Ambassadors is also steadily growing and widening its spectrum, amounting today to an impressive number outstanding personalities who have graciously accepted to support the work of UNESCO. Let me take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to our most recently appointed Goodwill Ambassadors: Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover, Ms Christina Owen-Jones, His Excellency Mr Valdas Adamkus and Mr Ara Abramian.

Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Dear friends,

I am very glad indeed for having this opportunity to thank you personally for your commitment towards the ideals of our Organization. In accepting to put your talent, status and celebrity in the service of these noble ideals, you demonstrate intelligence, generosity and faith upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind, as expressed in the Preamble of our Constitution. We are thankful and proud to count on your support.

Let me end by wishing you a very successful meeting. I am sure that UNESCO will greatly benefit from your insight and experience and hope that these two days will also serve to expand your knowledge and understanding of the activities of the Organization as well as to reinforce your links with this House.

I thank you for your attention.