



UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE

Paris, 6-23 October 2009

The General Conference of UNESCO was particularly exciting this year as a new Director General was elected after the ten year mandate of Mr. Koïtchiro Matsuura. Ms. Irina Bokova, former Ambassador to France and to UNESCO, was elected on 15 October 2009 and was officially introduced during a plenary session on 23 October. She received a very strong ovation, repeated several times during her speech, particularly when she recalled that she is the first woman to hold this position.

Her introductory speech, which lasted more than one hour, was given in five different languages. She gave the assembly an overview of her vision for the Organisation, defending her values and responsibilities in a world conditioned by an economic, social and environmental crisis.

She stressed that she does not believe in the clash of civilisations and will favour multicultural dialogue and tolerance. The main points of her speech reflected the overall discussions and propositions made during the Conference inside Commissions and Round Tables.

The General Conference was attended by more than 3000 people, including 139 ministers and vice ministers. We should remember that UNESCO's Member States and associate members approach 200. It certainly has one of the largest representations among international organisations.

The **Partners' Forum** was an integral part of Conference. The key speaker was Philippe Douste-Blazy, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Chair of the Executive Board of UNITAID (the International Drug Purchase Facility hosted by the World Health Organization), a former French Minister. The rapporteur was M. Bernard Loing, Chair of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee. The Forum highlighted the importance of issues such as education, culture, and women's rights in the search for sustainable development. It also looked at successful examples of cooperation such as the International Coalition of Cities Against Racism, and partnerships with 330 NGOs spread throughout the world, "bringing together millions of people, most of whom activists and volunteers".

A **Ministerial Forum** followed by a round table on a future-oriented thinking on education systems reaffirmed previous conferences on education organised during the biennium. The President of Turkey expressed the view of all participants when he said that, "never in history has it been more pressing to invest in education".

The **Commissions** emphasised points which will be on the agenda of the Organisation for the next biennium:

- The reinforcement of the role of UNESCO as coordinator for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) and the implementation of the Bonn Declaration.
- The increased importance of interdisciplinary platforms which ensure better cooperation among sections of UNESCO and a better approach considering decentralisation and actions in the framework of "Delivering as One".

International Federation of University Women

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- The designation of the Organisation as lead agency for the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010), taking into account its commitments in favour of strengthening the dialogue among civilizations in the context of its cooperation with the Alliance of Civilizations, its gender analysis through programmes by all sectors, and the use of gender mainstreaming methodologies as part of the policy and planning processes. The two main priorities for the Organisation are: Africa and Women's Empowerment.
- UNESCO agreed in the past to be partner in the process of the United Nations "Delivering as One". The Organisation is present in eight pilot countries. In order to strengthen its position, UNESCO decided to reinforce decentralisation, to get the national commissions involved and also to count on NGOs which can bring expertise, knowledge on the ground and precious added value.
- Finance will be a difficult challenge for middle term objectives. This is why the Director General is very anxious to implement new methods of management oriented towards results and a sectoral approach.

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