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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Speech of Ms Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the *Yaroslavl Global Policy Forum***

**“Supporting Cultural Diversity in a Globalised World”**

**PLENARY**

**8 September 2011 Yaroslavl**

His Excellency, Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation,  
His Excellency, Mr. Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a world changing profoundly, we need more opportunities to discuss global challenges and act together.

This is why the Yaroslavl Global Policy Forum is so important.

This meeting has become a key moment on the international calendar. This reflects the millenary traditions of the city of Yaroslavl, reflected in the beauty of its historic centre, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This draws also on the leadership of the Russian Federation on the international stage.

I thank President Medvedev and the City of Yaroslavl for upholding this age-old Russian tradition.

The theme of this Global Policy Forum – the contemporary state in an age of social diversity – raises some of the central questions of governance today. It is also the proper setting to consider this question, given Russia's rich diversity itself.

In this respect, we have much to learn from Russia, a country with enormous wealth in its diversity.

Managing diversity is one of the core tasks of the 21st century.

Diversity raises questions about the role of the State and about public policy. It raises questions about the foundations for peace and security, about social stability, cohesion and justice.

The stakes are high.

The number of inter-state wars is decreasing, but internal conflicts are on the rise.

Humanity is migrating more than ever.

People are more interconnected than ever, but new inequalities are arising.

These are also turbulent times.

Climate change is continuing an unpredictable march. The global economic crisis has shown the vulnerabilities all countries share. We have all realized this year the fragility of our societies in the face of natural disasters.

The global development agenda and the Millennium Development Goals are all becoming more important.

More than one billion people live in extreme poverty. Over eight million children die every year before the age of five. Illiteracy affects close to 800 million adults – representing 16 percent of the world population, two thirds of which are women.

People and cultures do not weigh the same in the scales of globalization.

Identities are being called into play.

In complex societies, in cities that are ever more diverse, we know what happens when dialogue and understanding break down.

The fabric of society is quickly torn and long to mend.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What are the foundations for healthy societies in this age of complexity? What principles should underpin public policy in the face of rising diversity?

UNESCO works to support societies and humanity in seeking answers to these questions.

Our Constitution declares that if wars start in the minds of men and women, then it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be built.

Ignorance of each other's ways and prejudice against the 'fruitful diversity of cultures' are causes of mistrust, poverty, tension and conflict.

This humanist vision underpins our commitment to build peace through cooperation in education, science, culture, communication and information.

Ten years ago, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that sets out the principles for understanding and managing diversity – in this case, cultural diversity. It sets out a vision for a new approach to living together, a new approach to development that makes the most of the wealth of humanity's great diversity, something that calls for a new humanism.

The Universal Declaration defines cultural diversity as an 'ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human rights,' which are universal, indivisible and interdependent.

We must be clear here.

Cultures are different across the world -- but humanity remains a single community, united around human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Second, diversity must be recognized as strength and not weakness.

The Universal Declaration states that 'cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.' This diversity is declared 'the common heritage of humanity' -- to be developed for the benefit of present and future generations.

Diversity is one of the driving motors of development – in terms of economic growth, and for intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual development.

Just as societies are not static, culture must be understood as a dynamic, ever-evolving process -- where identities are increasingly multiple and overlapping.

This is the message of UNESCO's 2009 benchmark report, entitled Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue.

The dynamism at the heart of cultural diversity can help us renew our approaches to sustainable development, to protecting biodiversity. UNESCO will make this case as we prepare for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 – also unknown as Rio+20.

Cultural diversity is a reality for our societies – but it must also be a policy, one that unfolds within a framework of democracy and pluralism, to lay the foundations for greater tolerance, dialogue and cooperation.

Making the most of diversity calls for new policies of inclusion and participation. It requires renewed support to cultural pluralism and to new forms of exchange.

Cultural literacy is a lifeline today -- this must lead public policy in education, it should guide the evolution of media, it can inspire cultural policies and support to the arts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Managing the diversity of States has always been a central question of international relations.

Today, managing diversity within States is becoming a core issue of global governance.

Passive coexistence and tolerance are not enough.

Every day tells us the story that it is not enough to communicate, we must connect. It is not enough to exchange, we must share.

This requires inclusive social, institutional and legal processes.

This calls for dialogue on the basis of respect and rights.

These guide all of UNESCO's activities.

They underpin the international standards we set for safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage and cultural diversity through our six international conventions.

They lie at the heart of our 1972 World Heritage Convention, whose 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary we will celebrate next year, with the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Saint Petersburg.

They inspire our leadership of the International Coalition of Cities against Racism.

They lead our work to eliminate racial prejudices and stereotypes.

They led me to create a High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures, composed of prominent thinkers, artists and officials, to explore how to build new channels for intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

We must challenge the notion that culture is something static. Culture is a dynamic force that renews humanity and enlarges opportunities, provided it is not instrumentalised against human rights.

We must promote the dynamic plurality at the heart of modern identity.

These goals guide all of UNESCO's work to strengthen the resilience of our societies and the health of our states, to place a new humanism at the centre of development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Anton Chekhov once wrote that 'you must trust and believe in people or life becomes impossible.'

This trust and this belief are essential foundations; only they can foster the solidarity to bring our societies together.

These are the stakes of diversity today.

Thank you.