



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the Honorary Graduate Degree from

King's College London

London, United Kingdom, 25 October 2017

Professor Edward Byrne, President and Principal, King's College London,

Sir Christopher Geidt, Chairman of the College,

Dear Professors,

Dear Students,

On behalf of my fellow graduates, Professor Dame Carol Black and Professor Peter Sarnak, I am honoured to give the Honorary Graduate's Response on this occasion.

First, allow me to say how humbled I feel to receive this distinction, to join the ranks of so many distinguished graduates of this great university.

King's College is an academic superpower... committed to first-rate teaching... devoted to cutting-edge research.

This College is a place for discovery and exploration, for ideas and debate, but it has never been an Ivory Tower.

King's College is rooted in the city that is its home, it is embedded in the society and politics of the United Kingdom, Europe and, today, the world at large... creating and sharing knowledge for the greater good.

I see this as the ethical mission of all higher education today, and King's College London carries this flag high across the globe.

In similar spirit... seventy-two years ago... not far from here, at the Institute for Civil Engineering, UNESCO's constituent conference was held, presided by Ms Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education.

The idea of creating an organisation devoted to education as a way to build peace emerged in 1942, when the United Kingdom organised regular *Conferences of Allied Ministers of Education*.

... I find this truly inspiring.

These Conferences gathered ministers from governments-in-exile and countries under occupation... the war was far from won... London was under attack... and still, despite everything, in the darkest days of conflict, the United Kingdom promoted cooperation in education as a force for lasting peace.

UNESCO's Constitution opens with these memorable lines, which Prime Minister Clement Atlee had a hand in writing:

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."

Crafted in the last century, in the wake of a terrible war... I believe, in new times, in a new century, this vision has never rung so true.

'Hard power' is not enough for peace – we need 'soft power' also... we need scientific cooperation, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue...

Most of all, we need education.

I know I am preaching to the converted here, but defending education is a fight that, unfortunately, we must never stop leading.

Education is basic human right -- it is also a transformational force for sustainable development, for stronger, more inclusive societies, for more resilient, lasting peace.

Education provides women and men with skills and knowledge to withstand the pressures of change and make the most of its opportunities.

But it does more than this.

Education, fundamentally, is about imparting wisdom and values.

It is about building a shared community with those in our society and in others.

It is about strengthening a sense of solidarity with women and men everywhere, as a single family.

UNESCO promotes education not for its own sake, however vital it is, but also for these reasons, because education, fundamentally, is a force for peace.

Hannah Arendt once wrote:

“We are of the world and not merely in it.”

I see in these words the essential power of education.

These words are an appeal for empathy and responsibility, towards others, the world, our place in it.

They remind us we are part of the same family, that each of us is woven into the fabric of the world.

No one stands alone.

We stand together, with our families, with our communities.

We are linked together by the bind of empathy.

We are connected to the world by the bind of responsibility.

Being *of* the world requires us to take care with our words and deeds.

Being *of* the world calls on us to develop our imaginations and knowledge, to understand others and care for our environment.

Only education can open minds in these ways.

This is why education is a human right, this is why education is a public good.

...this reminds me of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, because this is perhaps also what Gloucester meant when speaking to the King on the heath.

When King Lear asked him, "*How do you see the world?*" – Gloucester answered, "*I see it feelingly.*"

Education allows us to see the world not just as it is, separate and distant, but as part of each of us ...

... and I know King's College London is a place where the world is, indeed, seen feelingly at a time when this has never been so important.

In this spirit, I thank you again for this Honorary Degree.