



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 reception hosted by Ambassador Ronald Lauder,
President of the World Jewish Congress**

New York, 17 September 2017

Mr President of the *World Jewish Congress*, Ambassador Ronald Lauder,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, dear Ron.

Let me express my admiration for your work and your moral stature, as President of the *World Jewish Congress*, and as a friend.

Over the past years, we have built a special relationship between the *World Jewish Congress* and UNESCO, and this would not have been possible without your support, trust and respect for the work of UNESCO, and to me personally.

I am deeply grateful.

I remember your decisive participation in UNESCO's special event on the prevention of violent extremism at the Metropolitan Museum of Art last year, where you gave a moving tribute to the great Elie Wiesel.

I cherish still your invitation to participate in the *World Jewish Congress* General Assembly earlier this year, which was a unique occasion to share UNESCO's work against xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.

UNESCO's role, our core function within the United Nations, is unique -- we act to strengthen peace in the minds of men and women, through education, culture and knowledge.

I underline this approach, because I believe the fight against anti-Semitism today must be founded on an intellectual effort to understand the roots of hatred and to defuse the discourses that exploit ignorance.

This is why UNESCO is leading a dedicated global programme to teach the history of the Holocaust as a lever against anti-Semitism today.

We are the only United Nations agency to do so, and it has been my personal commitment to strengthen this programme throughout my two terms, including in turbulent times.

I am convinced that education, culture and knowledge have become key security issues at a time when violent extremism is spreading, fuelled by distortions of faith and history, and perverted narratives about cultures.

This cannot be defeated by the power of weapons only.

This is a battle for hearts and mind, to be fought with education and knowledge.

Anti-Semitism has been on the rise over the past two decades, adopting new masks, including in the form of a demonization of Israel, through its hateful and systematic criticism, seeking to de-legitimize its very existence.

Violence is encouraged further by perverse rhetoric stigmatizing minorities, refugees, foreigners, and also by distorting Jewish history.

That is why the teaching of the history of the Holocaust, the teaching of Jewish culture, the protection of World Heritage Sites, like Jerusalem, as a sacred city of all three religions, as a place for dialogue and mutual understanding, is so essential.

We need to equip young people not only with values, but also with facts, with documents and stories, with historical references to respond to hatred.

On all these fronts, UNESCO is playing its part, and I believe without the determination and authority of UNESCO none of the international projects we lead to train teachers in Africa, in Latin America, to publish world-class reports on the situation of Holocaust education worldwide -- none of this would have been possible.

This is not an easy task, but there is really no other way, and we need the support of all our partners, I am convinced we can move mountains, and so we will.

Thank you.