

Address by

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UNESCO Multi Sectoral Regional Office for Southern Africa

on the occasion of the

**4th Pan-African Cultural Congress
Unity in Diversity for Africa's Development**

**Subtheme:
“Culture for Peace and Cultural Diversity”**

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As many of you already know, in the very heart of UNESCO's Constitution lies the belief that "since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defenses of peace must be built".

In line with its mandate, UNESCO has been at the origin of the notion of "Culture of Peace". It is also in the heart of Africa that UNESCO first developed the concept of a Culture of Peace on a global scale during the International Congress on "Peace in the Minds of Men", held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire in 1989.

According to the definition adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, a Culture of Peace consists "of values, attitudes and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society".

Culture is what makes us who we are. It gives us strength; it is a wellspring of innovation and creativity; and it provides answers to many of the challenges we faced by contemporary societies. Investment in culture and creativity has proven an excellent means for revitalize the economy by using cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to stimulate urban development, and attract

visitors as well as investments. In addition to its economic benefits, culture-led development also includes a range of non-monetized benefits, such as greater social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship for individuals and communities, and the use of local resources, skills, and knowledge.

Given the potential of cultural diversity in terms of both social-economic but also human development, the international community must do far more to place culture at the heart of the global sustainability agenda at the global level and on the ground across the world.

However, when diversity is not part of dialogue and is not promoted as a positive force, tolerance for 'the other' no longer exists and this vision of a restrictive cultural identity has in many places become a threat to stability. This is why it is necessary to include culture and diversity in order to achieve a lasting peace.

In Africa, the concept of a culture of peace delineates the integration of values, belief systems and forms of spirituality, endogenous knowledge and technologies, traditions and forms of cultural and artistic expression that contribute to the respect of human rights, cultural diversity, solidarity and the rejection of violence with a view to build democratic societies.

Relentless in its determination to achieve this goal, the African Union Assembly, at its twenty-first ordinary session in May 2013, commemorating 50 years of the Organization of African Unity/African Union, adopted a declaration in which it again pledged to end all wars by 2020 and achieve a conflict-free Africa. The current conflict situations on the continent diminish optimism that Africa will indeed end all wars and be conflict-free in the next six-and-half years. Nevertheless, it is in the collective interest of the international community to work with African Governments, institutions and people, at all levels, in achieving this goal.

Africa and Gender Equality are the two Global priorities for the UNESCO strategy between 2014 and 2021, and the Culture of Peace concept is our key pillar which supports the development of initiatives to prevent conflicts and promote peace and non-violence in Africa, especially in the most vulnerable communities. In our Operational Strategy for Africa, the Flagship Programme “Promoting a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence” gathers all UNESCO activities in this area, which also contribute to the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022).

Among the actions to promote a Culture of Peace in Africa, UNESCO organizes fora of reflection on a sub-regional and regional basis; supports the creation of networks gathering civil society organizations; helps to launch the “Make Peace Happen” campaign in partnership with the African Union and national governments, as well as develops specific activities and projects.

In the last 3 years, UNESCO has organized a series of fora to develop and promote a Culture of Peace in Africa. These Fora are unique opportunities to gather in one place and create synergies among different stakeholders engaged in peace initiatives in Africa, notably UN Agencies, the African Union, Regional Economic Commissions (RECs), national governments, the private sector, national and international civil society organizations, as well as community leaders.

A key milestone, was the Pan-African Forum “Sources and Resources for a Culture of Peace”, held in Luanda, Angola in March 2013, jointly organized by UNESCO, the African Union and the Angolan Government, with the participation of the African Development Bank, which served as a framework to define and adopt an “Action Plan for a Culture of Peace in Africa.” This Forum launched a continental and sustainable movement for a Culture of Peace in Africa in order to mobilize campaigns at the national level under the AU “Make Peace Happen” continental campaign, to raise public awareness –in particular youth awareness – of the role each individual can play to build and consolidate peace and non-violence in everyday life.

As a result of this event, several networks have begun to develop: The first, the “Network of Foundations and Research Institutions for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace in Africa” was created in Addis Ababa in September 2013 and brings together approximately 30

organizations, including universities (UNESCO Chairs) and public/private foundations. This Network last met in Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire), in September 2014, for the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Culture of Peace concept and adoption of the Yamoussoukro +25" declaration.

The second, the "Youth Network for a Culture of Peace in Africa", was launched during the Pan-African Forum "African youth and the Challenge of Promoting a Culture of Peace", in Libreville (Gabon) in December 2014 and reunites more than 50 National Youth Councils and Youth-centered NGOs from Africa and the Diaspora.

The idea for a third Network on "Women for a Culture of Peace in Africa" was launched in Brussels (Belgium), in March 2014, at the initiative of NGOs for African women. We have already planned to officially launch this Network in the Republic of Congo in June 2015.

All of these networks, at the local, national and international levels, contribute to the promotion of a Pan-African Movement for a Culture of Peace.

Another major initiative which we are about to launch in 2015, with the support of the African Union and the Government of Angola, is the "Biennale of Luanda", a bi-annual Pan-African Forum for a Culture of Peace in Africa.

The original idea to launch a biennale for a Culture of Peace draws its inspiration from the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, which

asserts that culture is the most effective means for Africa to increase its share of worldwide scientific production and overcome the challenges of globalization. It is designed as a platform to promote cultural diversity and African unity. As a space to promote inter and intra African cultural exchanges, the biennale for a culture of peace in Africa is a powerful opportunity to gather a variety of actors representing governments, civil society, the arts, the scientific community, and international organizations with the goal to prevent and resolve conflicts and support regional integration.

Looking carefully in the structure of UNESCO's action in Africa, we will clearly see that the activities are aligned to the 10-years Action Plan main areas of actions of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022):

- i. promoting mutual understanding and reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity as well as supporting reconciliation efforts;
- ii. building a framework for commonly shared values which fosters social cohesion;
- iii. disseminating the principles and tools of intercultural dialogue through quality education and the media and
- iv. fostering dialogue for sustainable development and its ethical, social and cultural dimensions.

The Aspiration 5 of the AU Agenda 2063 clearly states that “by 2063 our diversity in culture, heritage, languages and religion shall be a cause of strength”.

To achieve this, we need to promote an effective intellectual and moral solidarity whereby humanity can achieve lasting peace and shared prosperity. From that perspective, the culture of peace recommends itself as the main strategic focus of UNESCO, along with sustainable development, both of which form two sides of the same coin. Everyday peace and sustainable development create a virtuous cycle in which peace and economic development strengthen and widen each other's credibility, viability and sustainability. Every day peace and inclusive economic growth have a dynamic and reciprocal relationship which is far more than a matter of being compatible enabling conditions.

We will require ever more active investments, enlightened leadership, powerful educational values and a progressive media world. Everyone and each of these constitutes a requirement relevant to the mission of UNESCO. The Organization's longstanding commitments to the development of education and sciences, the enrichment of cultural creativity, heritage and cultural futures, including a vibrant and peace-oriented global media structure, can in fact be seen as UNESCO's contribution to world peace as active, flourishing and sustainable.

Allow me to finish by quoting the UNESCO Director-General, Mme. Irina Bokova:

"Peace cannot be decreed through treaties – it must be nurtured through the dignity, rights and capacities of every man and woman. It

is a way of being, a way of interacting with others, a way of living on this planet. ... The roots of violence today lie less between States and more within them. In ever more diverse societies, passive coexistence is not enough. We need stronger public policies and dialogue to make diversity a positive force for respect and creativity. We need new skills, new forms of what we call 'cultural literacy.'"

Thank you for your attention.

2015

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