



## The Director-General

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

Mr Yair Lapid  
Member of the Knesset  
Chairperson of Yesh Atid  
Jerusalem 9195015  
Israel

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18 April 2016

Dear Mr Lapid,

I thank you for your letter of 16 April concerning the decisions adopted by the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 199<sup>th</sup> session which concluded its work on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April last.

Allow me, from the outset, to recall that these decisions were taken by the Governing Bodies of UNESCO and not by the Director-General of the Organization. Both the General Conference and the Executive Board are Governing Bodies.

In the spirit that has always been mine during my tenure and that continues to guide my vision, and in my capacity as Director-General of UNESCO, I issued a statement, on 17 April 2016, immediately following the session of the Executive Board, recalling that "Jerusalem is a Holy Land of the three monotheistic religions, and a place of dialogue for all Jewish, Christian and Muslim people". In my statement, I also underscored that "Member States have a responsibility to UNESCO's mandate to move forward in ways that promote dialogue and peace". You will find my statement herewith attached in its entirety.

I would also like to share with you, as I have said many times already, that this Organization should not be politicized. As the Director-General of UNESCO, I took a firm stand with regards to situations that may further enflame the volatile situation in the Middle East in and around the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, a property inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

You may also remember that, last year and following the discussions held during the 197<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board in October 2015, I made a statement to stress that "the protection of cultural heritage should not be taken hostage, as this undermines UNESCO's mandate and efforts" (copy attached).

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Allow me to add that albeit UNESCO is criticized, my efforts were previously recognized by the Speaker of the Knesset, Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, as well as several heads of Jewish Organizations around the World, including the Presidents of the World Jewish Congress and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, among others. In this respect, you may recall the joint UNESCO/Simon Wiesenthal Centre exhibition on “People, Book, Land: The 3,500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land”, which was inaugurated at the Knesset on 30 November 2015.

I am determined to continue working towards this end and to increase efforts to build trust on the basis of respect and mutual understanding, which are the guiding principles of this Organization.

It is in this spirit that I inaugurated last week at UNESCO Headquarters a photo exhibition showcasing the Israeli “Education Without Borders” initiative – a project aimed at providing education to hospitalized children - together with the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel to UNESCO, the CEO of the World Jewish Congress, the founders of the SASA Setton Kav Or initiative, the CEO of Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus and the Director of the Medical Center of the Galilee.

It is also to advance this objective that I signed a Memorandum of Understanding between UNESCO and the Peres Centre for Peace during a historic visit of former President of Israel, H.E. M. Shimon Peres at UNESCO Headquarters last month. The agreement sets the ground for cooperation between UNESCO and the Peres Center for Peace in promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and peace between peoples in the Middle East, notably through the training of trainers to drive work on peace education and intercultural understanding, as well as promoting regional and international cooperation.

In ending, I want to assure you of my continued personal efforts in countering anti-Semitism and violent extremism by embedding these deeply into the core of UNESCO’s work and programmes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Irina Bokova". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Irina" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bokova".

Irina Bokova

Enc.