

**National Statement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**  
*202nd Session of the Executive Board of UNESCO*

By Ambassador Lionel Veer

For everything there is always a last time and this is the last EXB we have Irina Bokova as our Director General in room X.

How often did we hear Irina Bokova say ‘we are in the hands of the member states’, as a last resort to convince us that we should do as the secretariat suggested. But when some member states stopped paying their contribution because they were unhappy with decisions or possible decisions of the organization the DG was really in the hands of member states.

Dear Irina, I wish you could have spent more time on your vision for a new humanism than on the endless budget debates. Nevertheless I admire the way you managed to keep UNESCO on the road and on track. Thank you for that and thank you for the personal cooperation these last four years.

It is also the last time for the Netherlands to be on the EXB. It was a great honor and pleasure for me, for my team and for all the colleagues from the Netherlands. In a way we are sad that our term

has come to an end, but we also believe strongly that rotation is good for the organization. We think pseudo permanent membership of the EXB is not a good practice.

The agenda of this EXB session is, like all previous ones, overloaded. I wish UNESCO could adopt the famous motto from the minimalist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe 'less is more'. The architects that have build UNESCO's headquarters, especially Marcel Breuer, were influenced by people like him, but the minimalist aesthetics of this building did not inspire us to focus on what is essential.

One example of 'less is more'. The Declaration of the Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change, a declaration that is especially important for the SIDS. UNESCO has a chance to clearly define our moral responsibilities in these matters and reflect the importance of moral solidarity. With this UNESCO can add another dimension to what has already been written into the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. By including more, non ethical, elements in this the declaration we lose focus and risk losing the whole declaration.

UNESCO is a very fertile breeding ground for ideas and many important initiatives are launched with enthusiasm and creativity. This is a good thing and one of the most inspiring qualities of UNESCO, but unfortunately often enthusiasm alone is not enough.

One item on our agenda is an example of a good initiative that has run into trouble. I refer to the Memory of the World programme. The original idea of the Memory of the World programme, when it was presented at the 1993 General Conference, was 'to promote the safeguarding of libraries and archives and particularly endangered and unique collections and holdings in order to preserve the "Memory of the World" and to facilitate democratization of access to them'. The underlying assumption was that this will 'contribute to rebalancing perceptions and understanding of world history '.

Next to safeguarding and access came a third element, namely awareness raising of the importance of documentary heritage. Following the example of the World Heritage list the Memory of the World Programme started a Memory of the World register hoping that this would help raise awareness and indirectly promote better preservation and access.

In 2015 the General Conference underlined that 'the importance of documentary heritage is to promote the sharing of knowledge for

greater understanding and dialogue, in order to promote peace and respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and dignity’.

The Memory of the World Register became the center piece of the programme and registration of documentary heritage became almost a goal in itself and overshadowed preservation and access and , more importantly, overshadowed the positive message of understanding and reconciliation.

I bring this to your attention, because I believe we need to keep this positive message of dialogue and promotion of peace, the foundations of UNESCO itself, in mind when we discuss the memory of the world programme.

Thank you for your attention.