

Address by H. E. Ambassador Katalin Bogyay on the occasion of her election as President of the General Conference at its 36th Session (Paris, 25 October)

The Art of Cultural Diplomacy

Prelude

Throughout my entire life I have always attempted to find the key to the person standing in front of me, to make them trust me, believe in me, and to open up to me. But for this really to happen, I first need to be able to look into the other person's eyes and communicate to them: „*I am interested in what you are saying. I would like to learn from you. I am listening and when you have finished speaking, I would like to share with you what I think or feel myself.*”

Now here I am standing in front of you all, representatives from 193 member countries, and observers many of you very dear to my heart, and I feel your openness and willingness to trust me, to listen to me and to believe in me.

I say in all humility that I will cherish this moment forever. I can also promise you – as many of you have requested from me during our encounters lately – that I will always be available to listen to you with an open heart, to work through all the arguments and issues, to mediate when necessary and to serve as a midwife in bringing about solutions which are acceptable to all. I will also be looking towards you as I share my own doubts, concerns and hopes as well as any successes that I can help achieve.

Confucius said: *Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.* Let's keep things simple; let us talk, let us listen, let us never forget to empathize and honour each other's dignity. All members of the UNESCO family are equally important and that is what makes us special. This speciality is a core message to the world.

Before anything else, please allow me to dedicate this special moment of my life to my husband Tamás who believed in me before I believed in myself. He has given me freedom and supported me during my incredible journey over the past 30 years with his shining intellect, vision and humour. I also dedicate this moment to my son Tamás László who gives me constant sunshine as well as an understanding of never-ending responsibility and

unconditional love. Last but not least, somewhere I feel also that my dear parents are watching and smiling down at me. Thank you for sharing this moment with me.

Your Excellency Mr Pal Schmitt, President of the Republic of Hungary,
Mr President of the 35th session of the General Conference,
Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies, Fellow Ambassadors, Distinguished Delegates,
Honourable representatives of intergovernmental organizations,
Distinguished representatives of non-governmental organizations, civil society and members
of the international press,
Dear friends and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen!

My election as President of the 36th session of UNESCO's General Conference has granted me a position of great privilege. May I at the very outset express my sincere gratitude for your confidence in my capacity to lead this body and my ability to facilitate its important work.

I should like to thank the Electoral Group II for its unanimous decision to propose me for this position, as well as all the other Electoral Groups and the European Union for its full support. I thank the Executive Board and all of you today for electing me. The fact that I have your full support only enhances my deep sense of responsibility.

It is a great honour for me to welcome the President of Hungary. *Mr President, Your Excellency, Mr Pál Schmitt*, I am deeply touched by your presence.

I am also most grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, which under the guidance of Foreign Minister *Dr. János Martonyi* and Under-Secretary *Dr. János Hóvári* and their very hard-working team, spearheaded a strong external campaign to convince Member States to support my candidature. Finally, I am deeply grateful for my lovely colleagues here at the Hungarian UNESCO mission.

I know that your trust is placed not only in me but also in my country, Hungary, which has been an active and creative member of UNESCO since 1948, channeling all its expertise and knowledge into the work of many UNESCO commissions and committees. We also have

already had the honor of giving a previous President to the General Conference in 1974, as well as a Chairperson of the Executive Board, in 1997.

For Hungarians, UNESCO's mandates are very much at the core of our hearts. I come from a land where our internationally acclaimed thinkers, educators, artists, and explorers, not to mention our freedom fighters and Nobel Prize winners, have paved the way for the betterment not only of my country but of Europe and the wider world.

Our great composer *Béla Bartók* said: *My guiding philosophy has always been the idea of different nations uniting into brotherhood, in spite of all the wars and hostility. I have tried to serve the aims of this idea, as best as I can in my music! So for that reason I do not shrink away from any influences.*

We Hungarians have always tried to preserve our own culture, yet were forced to absorb other cultural influences because of our history and geographical position in Europe. In the end, I feel this cross-fertilization with others has proved to be our strength. It has enabled us to be bold and creative like another of our great musicians, Ferenc Liszt who, whilst considering himself a Magyar from cradle to grave, recognized that he had developed his creativity through his contact with the world at large and that his music was at the service of all humankind. Throughout his career he travelled more widely than any musician of his time and in his final years wrote: *'My only remaining ambition as a musician is to hurl my lance into the boundless realm of the future'*. This is what we at UNESCO are aiming to do: placing our collective skills at the service of humanity and working towards a more meaningful and sustainable future!

I am very happy to welcome to our family two new Associate Members, Curacao and Sint Maarten.

Excellencies,

Ladies And Gentlemen,

I wish to address my heartfelt thanks to His Excellency Davidson Hepburn, the President of the 35th session of the General Conference and Ambassador from the Bahamas, who has shown me the path of fairness, equilibrium, friendship and wisdom. He also reminded me to be "terribly well" at all times! I highly value his sense of commitment, his excellent

accomplishments, the beauty of his personality and his constant support since my arrival to UNESCO which coincided with his taking on the presidency two years ago.

To Madam Chair of the Executive Board, dear Ambassador Eleonora Mitrofanova, I want to express my profound gratitude and appreciation, both as a friend and as a colleague in Electoral Group II, for the sensitivity, skills and professionalism you have demonstrated as leader of the Executive Board and for being instrumental in proposing me for this job. I have always been inspired by your combined skills of diplomacy, frankness and strength which are so often required in our line of work.

To Madam Director General, dear Irina Bokova, let me tell you how much I like and enjoy the swing you have created in this house! I love how you can be full of imagination, determination, energy, and strong leadership and, at the same time, how you can also be humble, ready to embrace, and unashamed of the female touch. I was so proud to welcome the first female Director General to this house who also happens to come from the same part of the world as me.

I would like to remind everyone about the message of Madam Director General at our last Executive Board meeting. Namely, that the aim of the ongoing reform is to allow the Organisation “to keep up the pace of history and to shape its course, to ensure that UNESCO plays its rightful role, that we are visible, that we respond to the needs of Member States”.

I can assure you, Madam, that I fully support your vision. I feel inspired and motivated by the infectious excitement that is shared by all members of the Board. I will do my utmost to be a real bridge between the governing organs, the Member States, yourself and the Secretariat. With the help of clear communication, we must work to maintain the trust between the Secretariat and the Member States.

I would like further develop the General Conference’s role in strategy and policy formulation as well as streamline its activities. I will also push towards greater participation of all Member States in our work. Only by working together can we achieve our goals. Through lively and innovative communication, we will ensure that UNESCO becomes more visible throughout the world.

Honorable Guests,
Fellow Ambassadors,

Each of my predecessors must have felt thrilled to assume this honorable position, and rightly so. Each session of the General Conference since UNESCO's birth nearly 70 years ago has been marked by tremendous changes occurring in the world. The Organization has coped successively with the profound effects of war, the dawn of the nuclear age, the advent of the Iron Curtain, post-war reconstruction and integration, national self-determination movements and decolonization.

So change is nothing new for UNESCO. Nevertheless, in terms of the enormity of the global challenges that confront us, as well as the current opportunity to address those challenges, we live in truly historic times. There are reasons for both hope and despair.

I personally feel that since the end of the cold war the times we are living in now are the most challenging. We are seeing a major shifting in the world economy, the causes and results of the Arab Spring, a global aspiration towards a free, open, correct life, the sensitivity and boldness of the young people of our times, new chances for democracy in the world. But we also can sense rising tension, radicalism, ruthless power to enforce special interests.

A young man set himself in fire, but the fire has not gone out yet!

Clear communication, helping everyone to develop sustainable human development, human capabilities, as Nobel Prize Laureate Amartya Sen from India would say - are key tasks for all of us. The availability of education is a basic ground for human functioning, through which we have a choice for understanding and international co-operations.

As American statesman J. William Fulbright said: *"In the long course of history, having people understand your thought is much greater security than another submarine"*.

We have other pressing challenges to meet, namely to achieve internationally agreed-upon development goals, especially those that fall squarely within the mandate of this Organization. This will be difficult given the economies of many Member States. The clock is ticking – only four years remain until the deadline of 2015 for achieving the Millennium Development

Goals, as well as UNESCO's own Dakar goals of universal education and reduced levels of extreme poverty, hunger and disease.

Davidson Hepburn, in his 2009 acceptance speech, reminded us of UNESCO's role as lead organisation for the United Nation's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. He expressed interest in the outcome of the forthcoming UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen, and in the importance of strong international co-operation and solidarity in this field.

Two years later, with the forthcoming UN Conferences at Durban and Rio (+20), it seems to me that we are now starting to have to come to terms with:

- the effects of the unbridled pursuit of maximum economic growth bringing ever-increasing and irreversible strains on the planet in all areas;
- and the need to add new goals such as "sustainability, well-being, solidarity and respect for cultural diversity" to traditional goals such as "liberty, equality and fraternity" as part of a global mission statement.

The *2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report* alerts us to another global challenge which is rarely mentioned that demands an international response, namely the state of education in conflict-affected states. The statistics are startling. Countries where there is armed conflict are among the farthest from reaching the "Education for All" goals set in Dakar for 2015. Armed conflict is robbing 28 million children of an education by exposing them to widespread sexual violence, targeted attacks on schools and other abuses. We at UNESCO need to give serious consideration to this problem.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Especially close to my heart is the unrelenting fight for gender equality on all fronts. Women continue to be systematically disadvantaged according to the human development indicators. Despite their tremendous potential to foster peace, nurture reconciliation and contribute to sustainable development, women everywhere in the world continue to be denied equal access to basic goods and services, to education, employment and healthcare. Women are particularly vulnerable, in their role as primary nurturers in the face of natural disasters and as victims of rape in the event of armed conflict. The empowerment of women and girls is both

a great moral imperative of our times as well as an absolute precondition for meeting internationally agreed-upon development goals.

Fortunately, women around the world have increasingly been assuming high-level political and decision-making positions. Certainly with my election, we now have three women at the helm of the key sectors of this Organization – the General Conference, the Executive Board and the Secretariat. You have sent a very powerful message to the world that UNESCO is serious about its commitment to promoting gender equality and recognising the abilities of women.

More importantly, you have sent a message to hundreds of millions of girls and women whose voices and hopes are currently unheard, that they too can aim high and realize their dreams. Our message from the top, however, strong as it may be, will not suffice. As Member States of UNESCO, we must work together towards transforming gender equality from an aspiration into a reality at all levels everywhere.

Distinguished Delegates,

I have enumerated some of the challenges that set the background to our current work. Together these challenges call for multilateral solutions and remind us that the tasks for which UNESCO was created are yet to be accomplished. We must ensure that UNESCO is versatile enough to cope with the rapidly transforming environment while maintaining its steadfast commitment to its mandate of peace. More specifically, we need to focus on our comparative strengths while coordinating with external partners on finding common strategies.

The critical role of science and technology within an ethical framework for developing countries and, in particular, Africa must be emphasized.

We need to realize our Organization's constitutional mandates. These include using dialogue to promote peace and the rapprochements of cultures, as well as supporting reconciliation and other measures that impart tolerance and mutual understanding. Given the enormity of the task, inertia and inaction are simply not an option.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was brought up behind the Iron Curtain in a little Hungarian village called Mór. It lies in a valley between the Bakony and Vértes, two lovely mountains, and is famous for its huge vineyards and wine-making tradition. My father was the local doctor and he taught me: “*If someone needs you, you have to go whatever hour of the night or day. There are no working hours*”. In this village, people from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds used to live together. My father never looked at their color, language, clothing or traditions and went whenever and wherever he was needed. His example has shaped my sense of responsibility.

What I have also learned through the years is that effective communication is not enough. Unless it is combined with genuine leadership, we simply will not be able to push through the obstacles standing in our way and real change will not take place.

As a European, my education was much influenced by the egocentric thinking of *Descartes: I think therefore I am*. Lately, however, I feel that much can be achieved by following the African concept of ubuntu which states: *I am human because I belong. I participate*. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others and does not feel threatened by the apparent strengths and abilities in others. People with ubuntu have the self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong to a greater whole. They feel diminished when others are tortured, humiliated or oppressed.

As a Hungarian, I know only too well that survival depends not on the individual but on the abilities of the collective. Here at UNESCO, we have a global responsibility to lead by example. In these times of social and financial insecurity, in particular we need to listen to all the voices! It requires great creativity, persistence and strength in order to survive without losing one’s humanity and the smaller and poorer states have much to teach us. In order to work well together at UNESCO, let’s develop ubuntu. All nations have valuable contributions to make and together we can achieve more than individually.

So our question is: How can we make these ideas relevant in our everyday work? How can we honour each other’s homeland, language and culture, participating together to make the world a better place for future generations?

We can start by emphasizing our cultural diversity rather than our cultural differences. Cultural diversity includes the particular qualities that each nation brings to the expression of its identity. It enriches the greater whole and is something to be celebrated. Cultural differences imply division and are often used as an excuse to explain why nothing can change. I believe that cultural differences should never become an excuse for our inability to reach global understanding.

We must remind ourselves that there are no cultural differences in the fundamental values of human life. We all want to belong and feel safe, to contribute and be appreciated, and to be able to provide for our children. We must teach our children that the people of the world all have much more in common than not and that is what we should build on.

I see our world as a global cultural space, a multi-layered treasure, a magic box full of undiscovered jewels. The process of inspiration followed by the creativity of people working together, is, to me, the most beautiful aspect of this varied cultural space. For a culture to open its doors wide, it must believe in its own strength, knowing that it is rich enough to nourish other cultures, yet sensitive enough to benefit from foreign influences.

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

I personally have always had a somewhat problematic perception of politics. I used to say that I was more interested in the human motives underlying political decisions. I now realise that what I was always uncomfortable with is the inevitable existence of promoting *only* political interests. That is why I have become a firm believer in what I call the art of cultural diplomacy.

I am just reminding ourselves that UNESCO was established:

“to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of

the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.”

If traditional diplomacy is seen as ”hard”, cultural diplomacy is ”soft”; but the so called soft power is not so soft after all because it channels the wider, connective and human values.

If traditional ’hard’ diplomacy is seen as prose, then ’soft’ cultural diplomacy is poetry. The American poet *Williams Carlos Williams* wrote: *“It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day from lack of what is found there.”*

He reminds us that poetry may not be practical and straightforward but its less tangible attributes can lead to unexpected revelations that enhance our lives.

The poetry of diplomacy allows us to embrace the subconscious and our deepest most hidden thoughts and feelings. It makes full use of intuition, lateral thinking and creativity which, in our troubled times, can lead to surprising breakthroughs where traditional methods have failed.

Maybe I feel this way because I come from a land where poetry has always played a strong political role. Maybe I feel this way because I am a woman. We women like to deliver, whether it’s thoughts, ideas, plans or babies! We women would rather die than see our sons dying or our daughters widowed so we are always looking for new and positive ways to act where everybody wins. I believe that is probably why women play a significant role in problem-solving, conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

I hope that during my mandate we will be able to give many examples of what can be achieved by the art of cultural diplomacy.

In the meantime, let us not forget our joie de vivre!

The General Conference is a celebration.

We are celebrating each other! Let us always have time for a smile for each other !

But please, do mean it!

Merci beaucoup pour votre attention.

Thank you!