



## United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

**Establishment:** 16 November 1945

**Director-General:** Irina Bokova

**Member States:** 195 Member States and 8 Associate Members

**Areas of Work:** Education, natural, social and human sciences, culture, communication and information.

**Strategic Priorities:** Africa, gender equality, access to education, intercultural dialogue

**Headquarters:** 7 Place de Fontenoy, Paris, France

**Website:** <http://www.unesco.org>

### BACKGROUND

As early as 1942, the governments of the European countries met in the United Kingdom for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) looking for ways and means to reconstruct their systems of education once peace was restored after the Second World War. Other governments, including that of the United States, decided to join in.

Upon the proposal of CAME, a United Nations Conference for the establishment of an educational and cultural organization (ECO/CONF) was convened in London from 1 to 16 November 1945. At the end of the conference, thirty-seven countries founded the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Israel was admitted to UNESCO in 1949, one year after its creation. In 1974, UNESCO stripped Israel of its membership on the grounds of alleged damage being done by Israel's archaeological excavations on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Israel's membership was renewed in 1977.

In 1984, the United States withdrew from the Organization citing disagreement over management and other issues, followed by the United Kingdom and Singapore in 1985. The UK returned to UNESCO in 1997, followed by the United States in 2003 and Singapore on 8 October 2007. The most recent members of UNESCO are South Sudan and Palestine, admitted in 2011.

### OBJECTIVES

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values, as a means to achieve sustainable development, observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which are at the heart of UNESCO'S mission and activities.

The broad goals and concrete objectives of the international community – as set out in the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – underpin all UNESCO'S strategies and activities.

UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. The Organization focuses on a number of overarching objectives:

- Attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning
- Mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development
- Addressing emerging social and ethical challenges
- Fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace
- Building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication

## COOPERATION WITH OAS

**Sustainable development:** the UNESCO/OAS Internationally Shared Aquifer Resources Management (ISARM) Americas Program is a regional initiative launched in 2002 aimed at improving the understanding of scientific, socio-economic, legal, institutional and environmental issues related to the management of trans boundary aquifers. As the leading agency in coordinating the American Program, the OAS has focused on helping American countries become involved in carrying out the program's tasks.

**Education:** collaboration with UNESCO is in two major challenges in tertiary education: access and social inclusion in education for the Latin American and Caribbean region. With an integral capacity strengthening approach, the OAS Office of Scholarships aims to support the evolution into research and "problem solving" universities, with the creation of Knowledge Centers for Development with the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, (IESALC).

The OAS Educational Portal of the Americas (PEA) and UNESCO both participate in technical committees on Open Education Resources, and Mobile Learning Literacy. The PEA recently joined the Mobiles for Education Alliance, along with UNESCO, IDB, World Bank and other key international organizations in order to reduce the technological divide while improving learning outcomes.

**Meeting between the UNESCO Director-General and the OAS Secretary General:** On April 19, 2013, the heads of both organizations met at OAS headquarters to discuss each other's concerns about education and scientific innovation in the region, assess the joint work that both organizations have been carrying out in the hemisphere, and consider future opportunities to strengthen their cooperation.

**51st Lecture of the Americas "Promoting Human Development and Quality Education in the Americas":** The Director-General of the UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova was the keynote speaker at the 51 OAS Lecture of the Americas held on April 19, 2013 at OAS headquarters. Ambassador Bokova remarked in her speech the main challenges of the Latin American and Caribbean education systems; highlighting the poor quality of education, the inability of some states to provide broader access to education and the high cost of inequality.

Ms. Bokova commended efforts such as reform education and conditional cash transfers which have yielded positive results and helped mitigate the impact of the region's inequality. The

Director-General stressed that “education remains our foremost priority. It is the center of our fight for human rights, human dignity and human security. Education drives development and prosperity”.

**Human Rights/Gender Equality:** The OAS recently hosted a Regional Consultation Workshop on Latin and North America and the Caribbean in the framework of the project "Mobile Phone Literacy - Empowering Women and Girls" which aimed to present initiatives, foster discussion, raise awareness, and facilitate the creation of a regional network of experts interested in exploring ways forward with mobile learning for women and girls in the Americas and the Caribbean.

## LEADERSHIP



**Irina Bokova**, originally from Bulgaria, is the Director-General of UNESCO since November 2009, becoming the first woman elected head of the Organization. Ms. Bokova joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria in 1977 where she was responsible for human rights and equality of women issues.

She was later appointed in charge of political and legal affairs at the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York. Ms. Bokova participated in the drafting of Bulgaria’s new Constitution, which

contributed to the country’s accession to the European Union.

Ms. Bokova was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and Coordinator of Bulgaria-European Union relations from 1995 to 1997; Ambassador of Bulgaria to France, Monaco and UNESCO from 2005 to 2009; and Personal Representative of the President of Bulgaria to the "Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie" (OIF).

Ms. Bokova graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and has postgraduate studies from the University of Maryland and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

## GOVERNANCE

### The General Conference

The General Conference consists of the representatives of the States Members of the Organization. It meets every two years, and is attended by Member States and Associate Members, together with observers for non-Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Each country has one vote, irrespective of its size or the extent of its contribution to the budget.

The General Conference determines the policies and the main lines of work of the Organization. Its duty is to set the programs and the budget of UNESCO. It also elects the Members of the Executive Board and appoints, every four years, the Director-General.

### The Executive Board

The Executive Board oversees the day-to-day operations of UNESCO. It prepares the work of the General Conference and sees that its decisions are properly carried out. Other functions stem from agreements concluded between UNESCO and the United Nations, the specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations.

Its fifty-eight members are elected by the General Conference. The Executive Board meets twice a year.

### **The Secretariat**

The executive branch of the Organization is the Secretariat, consisting of the Director-General and the Staff appointed by him or her. The Secretariat employs around 2,000 civil servants from some 170 countries. More than 700 staff members work in UNESCO's 65 field offices around the world.

### **The Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs (LA)**

This is UNESCO's central legal service. It provides legal advice and answers legal questions for the Organization and its various bodies, represents the organization before tribunals and courts, and assists in the drawing up and application of international standard-setting instruments.

### **The Internal Oversight Service (IOS)**

This advisory entity provides independent and objective audits and evaluations of UNESCO's programs and services, as well as investigations of alleged irregularities and staff misconduct. In conjunction with the Ethics Office, Bureau of Human Resources Management, and the Office of the Mediator, it shares responsibility for addressing grievances.

### **Sources:**

<http://www.unesco.org>

<http://www.oas.org>

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