



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

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of International Youth Day**

12 August 2020

In seeking to construct a better world by responding to the crises and major challenges of the 21st century – whether this be the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, widening inequalities, climate change or even the technological revolution – this action is always centred on working for youth.

This is because young people will be the ones who have to live with the consequences of what we do today. We owe it to them to act, but even more so, we owe it to ourselves to give them the means to act. All this because we need young people to build the world of tomorrow.

This is the main direction of our commitment to quality education for all, which teaches young people to be active participants in their lives and in the world – and we must make this education truly inclusive. By ensuring that a diversity of views held by young people can develop through education, this will allow youth to benefit from the richness of mutual learning and of understanding each other, which will in turn enrich our societies.

The principle of inclusivity must determine the structure not only of education, but of all places where young people can learn and grow, as youth is a decisive phase in personal development. It is the age when people seek new horizons; it is a time of encounters, and it is a time of first commitments. However, youth is also a vulnerable age, when negative experiences can quickly lead to withdrawal, isolation and marginalization.

At school, in cities, on the Internet, and everywhere that young people meet and discuss, it is necessary to guarantee respect for freedom of expression and the dignity of each and every individual, beyond differences of gender, culture, language and religion. It is essential to drive out discrimination, harassment and all forms of violence, whether overt or insidious, and help to prevent attempts at indoctrination.

This is how we will create the conditions for harmonious personal development, providing a climate of confidence in which all young people may freely express their potential and strengthen their self-esteem, thus allowing them to fully contribute to the sustainable development of their societies and of the world.

Today, UNESCO is working with young people as proactive contributors and not just beneficiaries of its programmes and projects. Young people are highly engaged in our work in reducing inequalities and building peaceful societies through numerous initiatives such as the UNESCO Global Youth Community, a Youth Climate Action Network, and projects on preventing violent extremism – with these initiatives allowing youth to be involved in the very design of programmes by UNESCO.

We also share the great moments of UNESCO's life with young people in particular the General Conference, with the Youth Forum that is held alongside it, as well as by making youth the central theme of the 40th session of the General Conference in 2019.

Giving young people from all walks of life the opportunity to truly be active participants in the social and political life of their societies, as well as in the multilateral project, means ensuring that we are building a world that is truly for them. As Patty Smith wrote in her novel *Just Kids*, we also ask: "Who can know the heart of youth but youth itself?"

On this International Day, I invite young people to work towards building the world that they want, and I call on all civil society stakeholders, policymakers and entrepreneurs to harness the vast potential of youth and enable it to express all within it that is unique and promising.