



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
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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 Day for Biological Diversity,

World Environment Day and World Ocean Day

22 May, 5 June and 8 June 2021

Between mid-May and early June of each year, UNESCO celebrates three international days that are as central as they are complementary, as they allow the three systemic pillars of climate change to be considered together: biodiversity, the environment and the ocean.

This year's international environment season is once again marked by the very particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is showing us that the environment cannot be taken as an isolated issue.

As young people, citizens, voluntary organizations and scientists urge us to take action, we must heed their call and radically change our relationship with the world and with living beings.

To this end, UNESCO can count on its Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB) – a pioneering programme in many respects whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating this year. In the more than 700 UNESCO biosphere reserves around the world, a different relationship between humans and their environment is being invented and put into practice on a daily basis – a relationship based on ethics and respect, with greater emphasis on indigenous knowledge.

As 2021 marks the beginning of United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, led jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and with which UNESCO is closely associated, the formidable reservoir of experience accumulated in our biosphere reserves will now be of service to the world.

UNESCO will be responsible for the “Humans in Nature” panel, which will expand and extend the avenues that have been explored for the past 50 years in our biosphere reserves in order to prevent the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

This year, 2021, also marks the beginning of another major decade of action for the international community: United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

UNESCO, with its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), will make the most of these ten years so that the international community develops knowledge about the ocean and protects it sustainably. The latest UNESCO report, published in April 2021, shows that, without this protection, the ocean’s crucial role in climate control might in the future be diminished.

There is an urgent need for action, by using all the potential offered by these two Decades, and by taking advantage of the major events of this year to ensure that strong and collective commitments are made. After the UNESCO Biodiversity Forum on 24 March, the international community will be meeting in Kunming for the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15), Glasgow for the Climate Change Conference (COP26) and Marseille for the World Conservation Congress.

But this commitment to the environment is playing out first and foremost in minds, and therefore in schools. This is why UNESCO presented in May 2020, at the Berlin World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), its new global framework for education for sustainable development, which will provide the critical keys to learning to respect these common goods of humanity, such as ecosystems, living beings and the ocean.

As we celebrate biodiversity, the environment and the ocean, let us then hope that 2021 will be a decisive year and finally allow us to extend to the Earth the ubuntu concept, “I am, because we are”.