



## 55th Annual General Meeting Canadian Commission for UNESCO

### CALL TO ACTION

Culture is a set of ideas, beliefs, and practices that characterize our everyday lives and are expressed in both tangible and intangible ways. This can include learning and education, language and communication, ethics and laws, spirituality and customs, science and technology, institutions, literature and art. Moreover, culture acts as a foundation for people's way of life, social ties and experiences of the world. In doing so, it is essential in establishing a collective identity, serves as our guide for living harmoniously in communities.

Thus, culture unites, but culture can also divide. Lack of opportunity or willingness to engage with each other can lead to cultural misunderstandings, prejudice, exclusion and insecurity. In this decade of cultural rapprochement, we believe it is essential to engage in positive and open dialogue. As has been emphasized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UNESCO Constitution, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, all people are deserving of equality, dignity and respect. To quote from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it is imperative that we recognize *"the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such. Affirming also that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind."*

Numerous challenges can prevent the fulfillment of this common heritage. These are caused by racism, discrimination, economic disparity, ecological crises, destruction of cultural and natural heritage, hatred and war, ethnic cleansing, violence, breaches of privacy, censorship, cyberbullying, violation of human rights and freedom of expression.

An appreciation of the diversity of cultures provides a catalyst for achieving unified societies. Thus, our societies must nurture and embrace the rich variety of cultures, spiritualities, beliefs and practices that bring people together and provide them with meaning, self-worth and dignity. This is critical in UNESCO's objective to set the stage for a global citizenship. Cultures can focus on common ideals and work collectively in creating a better world for current and future generations.

We believe that projects and initiatives supporting intercultural dialogue must have stronger commitments. They must be integrated into existing and new global initiatives, including the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. We must learn to act locally with a global perspective. Skills that will

enable and encourage empathy, openness and responsibility need to be developed in all areas of our society, taking into account the most vulnerable. Instead of working in silos, peoples and organizations are prompted to work in concert, to share expertise and resources, and build active networks. We have to engage with youth and offer them enriching opportunities. We must harvest the wisdom of elders, honour the heritage of ancestors and commit to more intergenerational dialogue.

To address the challenges that are standing in the way of global citizenship, we propose actions that are simple, measurable and concrete. Such actions could include:

At the individual level:

- Participate in new cultural experiences to broaden your knowledge and understanding
- Engage in dialogue with people from different backgrounds
- Participate in community festivals, including art-based festivals
- Become informed and involved in issues and situations that are impacting our communities and neighbourhoods.

At the community level:

- Encourage municipalities to become members of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination and UNESCO's Creative Cities Network;
- Encourage and support schools to become members of the Associated Schools Project Network;
- Emphasize intercultural dialogues within Biosphere Reserves, particularly with indigenous peoples and communities of interest.
- Support the creation of arts education activities in your community, at the ground level and with community partners, such as with the Canadian Network for Arts & Learning.
- Use the knowledge and implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, through partnership and exchanges between schools to create a common understanding of our past.
- Ensure the promotion and participation of citizens of all ages in human rights education projects, including participatory training sessions and engaging with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

At the organizational level:

- Authentically engage youth and indigenous peoples to fulfill their right to participate in society and shape the future.
- Work to collaborate actively with CCUNESCO, involving them in your projects enriching your common visibility in the community.
- Encourage UNESCO Chairs to communicate their work, research and results with CCUNESCO partners, stakeholders, members and the public at-large.
- Create intersectoral partnerships and join networks that work in different fields, therefore enriching discussions and adding new perspectives.
- Submit documentary heritage to CCUNESCO for inclusion in the international and national Memory of the World registers.

All members, partners, and stakeholders of CCUNESCO should track activities relating to the Call to Action. These activities should be shared with the CCUNESCO in the next year using a tracking template that will be created and distributed to all. Achievements and highlights will be presented at the next CCUNESCO AGM.

In the spirit of sharing and openness, we are calling everyone to take action. Our priorities must now be translated into simple, measurable and concrete steps and achievements. Only by bridging cultural divides will we honour the promise of creating peace in the minds of all.

Ottawa, June 6th, 2015