This IGNOU Silver Jubilee lecture on “Building inclusive knowledge societies in a globalized world” by UNESCO Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in New Delhi, India on 11 January, 2010 during her first official visit to India as Director-General of UNESCO is truly invaluable and topical. Ms. Bokova stressed the key role of education in achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well as the importance of relevance and accessibility: “We cannot think about green growth and inclusive globalization without education that is relevant to the world of today and accessible throughout life,” she said. Further, she rightly pointed out that, “In our knowledge-based global economy, future prosperity and security will depend more than ever on being equipped with the right skills.” Ms. Bokova concluded her lecture by addressing young people worldwide, with the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “Be the change that you want to see in the world”. A word here about IGNOU, which the UNESCO website has termed the largest university in the world. Almost three million students in India and 33 other countries study at IGNOU which is also India’s National Resource Centre for Open and Distance Learning and a world leader in distance education. Through its 21 schools of study, 59 regional centres, 2300 learner support centres and some 52 overseas centres, the university offers 175 certificate, diploma, degree and doctoral programmes, comprising around 1500 courses. IGNOU’s staff consist of 380 faculty members and academic staff in headquarters and regional centres, while some 36,000 counsellors from conventional institutions of higher learning and professionals from different spheres are also there.

A.A.
It is a very great honour, as well as a true pleasure to be here with you today for this Silver Jubilee Lecture. Let me begin by warmly thanking you, Vice-Chancellor, for your gracious invitation to take part in the anniversary celebrations of this prestigious institution.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University is itself a living embodiment of the subject of my address: Building inclusive knowledge societies in a globalized world.

Your University reflects the deep commitment to uplifting the poor of its founder, the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi - as President Patel underlined when she inaugurated these Jubilee celebrations. Your pioneering accomplishments are recognized worldwide: enrolments of nearly three million students, networks across the country and a steady stream of innovations making the best use of ICT developments.

Let me say that UNESCO is proud to be associated with your university in a number of fields, including journalism and media literacy, and hosting UNESCO Chairs in different areas. You have unique achievements to celebrate in this,
your 25th year. I am delighted to have this opportunity to share in such a joyous occasion.

This is my first official visit of 2010 as Director-General of UNESCO.

I feel that it is highly auspicious for me to begin the New Year visiting a nation that was a founding member of UNESCO. India helped to shape our Organization; to articulate the noble vision and ideals that inspired its creation. India helped, year by year, decade by decade, - patiently, persistently - to build a structure capable of transforming elevated principles into concrete actions. With its huge cultural and linguistic diversity, and its spectacular economic advances, India is a leading example of how to reconcile tradition with modernity.

This undertaking is not complete. It can never be. And still today, India is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that UNESCO remains responsive and relevant in a fast-changing world - not only by contributing to the formulation of our policies and strategies, our projects and programmes: You also implement them in some of the most exciting and challenging fields of the 21st century: how to harness technology to put education at the heart of development, to name but one. And you do this on the scale of an entire sub-continent. In a country home to over one billion people.

What lessons there are here for UNESCO, for other nations! I stand here before you today to deliver a lecture, but I say to you most sincerely, that as the newly-elected Director-General of UNESCO, I am acutely aware that it is I who have much to learn from this particular Member State of our Organization. From your Country, from India.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today as the first ‘international’ speaker in this prestigious lecture series, I would like to start by scanning the international horizon, the global context in which the “knowledge societies” that are my topic have such a pivotal role to play.

We live today in multi-polar and interdependent world. It is driven by formidable advances in technology that have an impact on every sphere of human activity - how we work and live, learn and communicate.

For many, many of us, these changes enrich our lives in ways previously unimaginable: our globalized world is a treasure-chest of possibilities!

Globalization has lifted millions out of poverty. It has witnessed the emergence of middle classes in countries where there were once just the elites and the poor. These middle classes have purchasing power and a whole new set of ambitions. They may invest in consumer goods but they also invest in education.
But for untold millions, these changes spell yet another exclusion. And not only that. The world’s poorest are the first to suffer from the multiple crises that form the dark side of the modern world: environmental degradation, climate change, food and water shortages, health pandemics.

The financial crisis sent shockwaves the world over, from corporate hubs to towns and to the most remote villages.

Each time, the poorest and most vulnerable have been affected the hardest.

“Poverty,” as the revered Mahatma Gandhi said, “is the worst form of violence.” In the age of the Internet, mobile phones and unprecedented scientific advances, some 1.4 billion people live on less than $1.25 dollar a day. This figure is set to increase with the economic crisis. In many countries it is youth with low levels of skills who are inflating the ranks of the unemployed. It is women working in hard-hit export industries who are bearing the brunt of deteriorating labour market conditions.

It is the poorest families who are pulling their children out of school - all too often their daughters. It is the most vulnerable who are going hungry as food prices rise.

At the same time, globalization has also allowed new tensions to come to the fore - fears of a loss of identity and strife between cultures and faiths. Deepening inequalities - between and within countries - make the ground fertile for intolerance and violence to take root. We see this everywhere. No society benefits from poverty. The only answer is to work consistently to narrow the divides of income, literacy, knowledge and development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was this conviction that, in the Year 2000, rallied the world’s leaders around the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs constitute one of the most ambitious roadmaps ever adopted. The goals can be summed up in one resounding phrase “End Poverty by 2015.”

They reflect a global commitment to restoring human dignity through better livelihoods, health, nutrition, education, sanitation and women’s empowerment.

Just one of the MDG goals addresses education. But make no mistake about it: education links all eight goals. Learning empowers, enlightens, opens doors and gives individuals the knowledge to make informed choices, to improve their lives and that of their communities and countries. As your influential Nobel Economics laureate Amartya Sen puts it: education expands choices and allows people to lead lives they enjoy and value.

Education has the potential to act as a catalyst for wider progress across all the MDGs. Lack of investment in education puts a brake to such progress. This is a
point I cannot over-emphasise: We will not succeed in reducing poverty, improving child and maternal health or in promoting environmental awareness without better educational opportunities.

We are only five years away now from the target date for achieving these goals. They represent an absolute minimum for any country, the foundation for building more inclusive, more just societies. In our knowledge-based global economy, future prosperity and security will depend more than ever on being equipped with the right skills...Skills that allow us to make choices, to adapt to rapid change and to find sustainable solutions to pressing challenges. Our future well-being will also depend on our capacity to live together, to share knowledge and reduce deprivation.

We cannot think about green growth and inclusive globalization without education that is relevant to the world of today and accessible throughout life.

Internationally agreed goals have an impact. They concentrate minds.

They constantly hold before us the fact that we know what the right choice is.

So what is involved in not just knowing, but making this choice? In opting for an inclusive knowledge society? In seeking - in short - to harness change for the common good? I would answer that before all technical, strategic and organisational dimensions of a society’s efforts to build its future, comes an ethical dimension.

My own vision is that of a new humanism. Our adaptation to the immense speed of change must go hand in hand with a re-iteration of enduring values.

Without social inclusion, humanity will not ride the wave of change, it will be overwhelmed by it.

Without an ethics of climate change, we cannot avert disastrous consequences of global warming.

Without good governance, economic growth cannot deliver all its benefits.

The need today for clearly stated values to guide and drive policies has never been greater.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have in common a shared experience of societies coming to grips with vast mutations in a remarkably short space of time.

You here in India and I in Bulgaria, have seen transformations in our respective countries that could not have been imagined in earlier times.

As a Bulgarian, belonging to the post-war generation, I grew up in a divided Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was one of the marking events in my
life. It ushered in a world of possibilities for democracy and peace. It also profoundly changed the global landscape.

Change on such a scale is immensely disorienting unless one can hold onto the moral compass that core values provide. A new humanism provides the compass that can show us - amid all the complexities and global crises, amid all the progress and rapid innovations of today’s world - which is the right direction to take.

India has for some time been undergoing quite extraordinary transformations, with all the tensions and uncertainties that accompany rapid change. But India has held firmly onto the unwavering principle that education is a cornerstone of development and has made this a national priority. The scale of efforts is impressive by any standard in a nation characterized not just by its size, but by such a rich diversity of languages, landscapes and cultures.

Your flagship programme for Universal Elementary Education has led to rapid increases in school enrolment and progress towards gender parity.

The number of out-of-school children dropped by almost 15 million in just two years. To better respond to rising demand for secondary education, you recently launched a programme to expand coverage and standards at this level. This was essential. Today, a primary education simply does not suffice to enjoy decent job opportunities.

Your commitment was recently reinforced with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act passed by the Indian parliament last August. This marks a historic step that makes education a fundamental right of every child between six and 14. Your National Literacy Mission has been instrumental in spurring massive mobilization and increasing literacy rates. You have recently set ambitious targets for female literacy, reflecting your conviction that no social progress can happen without educating women. Your policies are targeted towards reducing the inequalities and poverty that are formidable brakes on development and peace everywhere.

And in applauding your achievements, it is necessary to acknowledge the great challenges that still remain. Expanding provision of primary and secondary education will inexorably lead to an explosion in demand for higher education. Your University is at the forefront of efforts to meet this burgeoning demand.

I am confident that India will once again demonstrate its capacity to take up the challenge and open new gateways for still more of its people to enter an inclusive knowledge society.

I will be launching the 2010 edition of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report next week at the United Nations in New York with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.
This edition of the report, which is prepared by an independent team of experts, warns that education for all is at risk not only because of the economic downturn but because governments in many countries are not doing enough to address the root causes of marginalization in education. This has long-term consequences that jeopardize the present and future. The report addresses the scale of deprivation and its underlying causes. It has developed a new tool for measuring marginalization. You will undoubtedly find this of interest because it identifies the key characteristics of those who are being left behind. The results highlight the powerful influence of social and economic circumstances on life chances - being born in a poor household, living in a rural area, speaking a minority language.

Against this backdrop, the first priority in combating marginalization is to guarantee equitable access. We have to reach those who are at the bottom of the scale. It is happening. But it is happening too slowly.

On current trends there will be 56 million out-of-school children in 2015, against 72 million today.

Breaking the cycle of poverty begins by acting where disadvantage is found. Parents’ inability to afford education is one of the major reasons why children are not in school. Girls still suffer from discrimination in access to education in many countries. Stigmatization - on the basis of caste, language, disability, HIV and AIDS are all factors of exclusion.

Child malnutrition is both a health and education emergency that can be very effectively addressed through quality early childhood provision.

Improving quality is the second imperative for making education inclusive. Millions of children leave school without having acquired the rudiments of reading, writing and numeracy. In these conditions education can hardly be described as a lifetime investment.

Quality is obviously multifaceted but let me insist on teachers. Technology has the potential to enhance learning, training and knowledge sharing, but does not replace a good teacher. As your Minister of Human Resource Development Shri Kapil Sibal stated at UNESCO’s General Conference last October, “The young may be hungry for learning but may not have quality teachers to ignite their minds.” He called upon UNESCO to commence a worldwide campaign to restore respect of teachers in society.

Teachers are a priority for UNESCO. We have to find ways to make teaching a profession of the future that attracts the brightest and most dedicated minds. There is a desperate need for more teachers at all levels.

We don’t only need more teachers but a profound shift in how we teach.

Teachers have to help students to analyse and assess information from multiple sources, to think critically, work together, solve problems and make informed
choices. They need to be trained to integrate technology into teaching and learning in meaningful ways. And finally, teachers transmit values and attitudes. They have the power to break damaging patterns of discrimination, such as those found in stereo-typed attitudes to caste and to gender. To quote the great poet Rabindranath Tagore: “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In stressing the importance of the teacher, do not imagine that I in any way overlook the potential of new technologies. Quite the contrary!

I see UNESCO’s role in the area of ICT for development as a pioneering one. And it is an area in which cooperation between UNESCO and your country has been and continues to be particularly fruitful. During this visit, I have been able to witness first-hand, some remarkable innovations and strategies for using the multiplier effect of these technologies.

Last February, India launched a national mission on education through ICT. It plans to provide internet connectivity to some 20,000 colleges and educational institutions: an operation requiring a one-billion dollar budget. At the same time, India is using ICT in truly original ways to empower marginalized communities and minority groups. UNESCO has worked hand in hand with the stakeholders in a number of these initiatives - giving ‘Voice’ to rural women and girls, opening new opportunities for the disabled, encouraging youth and civil society participation.

ICT must not been seen in a narrow way as a high-tech ‘fix’ for development. The notion of inclusiveness in an inclusive knowledge society also concerns technology itself. Flexible and creative mixtures of old and new technologies, combining hi-tech and low-tech, innovative and traditional means of communicating and of sharing information, have been at the heart of many successful projects. The rural women’s newspaper, the community-run cable TV station, the village telecentre and the community radio all have their place. Community Multimedia Centres, for example, combining new and old technologies, are successfully operating across the region, enabling isolated communities to access, produce and share information for development.

To return to the issue of education, an inclusive knowledge society must have this same all-embracing approach to learning opportunities. Take learning throughout life: it is needed not only because we need to upgrade skills or acquire new ones to adapt to rapid change.

Inclusion can only happen if second-chance options for adults are expanded, including literacy programmes and skills training. Illiteracy imposes huge costs on society. India still counts a large number of illiterate adults but its massive mobilization efforts are proof that political commitment backed by resources and targeted policies can go a long way. One of UNESCO’s international literacy
prizes was awarded last September to Nirantar, an organization that trains low caste women in Uttar Pradesh to become reporters and produce a fortnightly newspaper distributed to some 25,000 neo-literates readers. The experience is a telling illustration of literacy’s empowering nature - it nurtures confidence and citizenship.

When we tackle inequalities and marginalization, our societies become more inclusive. What I might call ‘a culture of inclusion’ is rooted in a commitment to equity and social justice that respects and values diversity. It is backed up by legal provisions and policies that combat marginalization within a wider framework to reduce poverty.

Bettering the human condition is a citizen’s issue. We need to forge broad alliances with public and private partners, with civil society networks, artists, intellectuals, youth groups, and the media to promote access to knowledge and foster a culture of cooperation and sharing.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity to address another dimension of India’s role as an invaluable member of the international community in general and of UNESCO in particular.

Through South/South cooperation, India is actively engaged in sharing its expertise with many countries facing similar challenges. We see it in nearly all fields, from education to science to information technology. Your country’s ambitious pan-African e-network demonstrates your commitment to bridging the digital divide globally - we have much to learn from it.

I would like to take this opportunity to particularly acknowledge Ambassador Mukherjee for her outstanding role and active leadership as chair of the South-South Cooperation Fund established in UNESCO in 2007 with a view to support developing countries in achieving the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.

Within the broad UNESCO community, India is encouraging knowledge-sharing on South-South cooperation in order to ensure that such initiatives are better known, understood and replicated. This is important, for I am convinced that it will have an increasingly significant role in the months and years to come.

I see 2010 as a year of opportunities that we must tap together.

The world is beset by global crises, but these crises can be turned into opportunities. They are teaching us where our resilience lies - in solidarity, in inclusive, united action.

We are still coming to terms with the aftershocks of an economic crisis that has called into question the foundations of our political and economic system. It has highlighted the urgency of rethinking global governance, strengthening
multilateralism and international cooperation. This is an opportunity for change - positive change - that must not be lost.

Similarly, on climate change: although the efforts to ‘seal a deal’ at COP15 in Copenhagen last month were not conclusive, significant new commitments were made in the lead-up and during the Conference by many countries. This is an area in which we must not slacken our efforts to reach a global consensus on decisive action. In Copenhagen, I launched a climate change initiative that encompasses education, the preservation of biological and cultural diversity, climate ethics and cooperation in the field of climate science. It is an interdisciplinary approach that reflects UNESCO’s unique set of strengths. Your own Professor Pachauri, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has been one of the most influential and respected voices in the climate debate. The Panel’s sterling work won global recognition with a Nobel Peace Prize.

Climate change can and must be tackled within the framework of efforts to build inclusive knowledge societies. India’s experience in the field of environmental education has been pioneering. The 2007 UNESCO conference on environmental education held in Ahmenabad with UNESCO marked a significant contribution to the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that we are leading.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Continuing to look ahead to the year before us: I intend to ensure that UNESCO makes this a year to intensify its efforts to build bridges between cultures, between people. Next month I will launch the International Year of Rapprochement between Cultures, for which UNESCO is the lead agency.

India’s involvement will be significant. As part of the Year, UNESCO is setting up an interdisciplinary programme around the works of three great poets, three resoundingly human and universal voices: Rabindranath Tagore, the Chilean Pablo Neruda and Aimé Césaire from Martinique.

UNESCO’s General Conference - our highest governing body that includes all our Member States - approved the creation here in India, of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development. I am confident that it will contribute to shaping more inclusive knowledge societies and refocusing on building a culture of peace in our globalizing world.

To further debate on reconciliation and respect for diversity in our societies, I have also created a High Level Panel on Peace and Dialogue among cultures composed of eminent persons from all fields. A similar panel on science will advise us on the most effective policies to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development. In all these endeavours I shall be looking to India for its contributions and most importantly for its inspiration.
I said at the start of this lecture that India was instrumental in shaping the institution that became the UNESCO we know today. Its influence has been spiritual, cultural, intellectual and political in the best sense of the word. Jawahalaral Nehru, a genuine world citizen, described UNESCO as the ‘conscience of humanity’. As our Constitution states, lasting peace cannot only be founded upon the political and economic arrangements of governments. It requires intellectual and moral solidarity. I am determined to rally citizens from all shores around the new humanism I mentioned earlier.

It is a universal vision rooted in a profound respect for human dignity, fundamental rights and the diversity of cultures.

Why do I call this humanism “new”?

Certainly not for the basic values at its core - they are enduring, unchanging. It is ‘new’ because we need a new articulation of long-standing values and principles. New, because new connections must be found to ground today’s globalized world in a true humanism. New, above all, because new generations, new forces in society, newly-emerging economies, must appropriate this humanism and carry it forward.

Each one of us can be a conscience of humanity. To quote Mohandas Gandhi once again, ‘Be the change that you want to see in the world.’

I say this to all the young people in this room and worldwide.

Let me once again thank your University for hosting this lecture.

UNESCO looks forward to the next 25 years of fruitful cooperation with you. I hope that a future Director-General of UNESCO will stand here and deliver a Golden Jubilee lecture!

Yesterday, I had the special privilege of paying my respects at Gandhi Samadhi and Gandhi Smriti to the world’s greatest leader and humanist, Mahatma Gandhi. Allow me to conclude and turn to the words of your great founding leader: “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”

Thank you.

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• Courtesy: Vice Chancellor, IGNOU/ This lecture is also carried by UNESCO on its website. Please see: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001865/186546e.pdf

** Elected the Director-General of UNESCO on 15th October, 2009 for four years, Mrs. Irina Gueorguieva Bokova begun her mandate on 15 November 2009. She was earlier Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to France and Monaco, Personal Representative of the Bulgarian President to the “Organisation
Internationale de la Francophonie” and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO from 2005 to 2009. Born on 12 July, 1952 in Sofia, she obtained an MBA from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and studied at the universities of Maryland and Harvard in the USA. During her long and distinguished career, she also served as Bulgaria’s representative to the United Nations and as her country’s Secretary of State for European integration and Foreign Minister. Ms Bokova has long promoted the transition to European integration. As Founder and Chairperson of the European Policy Forum, she worked to overcome divisions in Europe and promote the values of dialogue, diversity, human dignity and rights.

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**Mahatma’s Teachings Echo in Japanese Parliament* **

Sandeep Dikshit

Yukio Hatoyama

Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama invoked the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi during his policy speech at the 174th session of the Japanese Parliament, Diet, to outline the challenges facing Japanese society and the path to their amelioration.

Beginning the speech by narrating the seven social sins inscribed at the Raj Ghat, Mr. Hatoyama confessed that he was struck by how Mahatma Gandhi’s words “incisively” pointed to the problems facing Japan and the world today. The moment he stood before the Gandhi memorial, he resolved to begin his government’s major policy speech by narrating the seven social sins listed by the Mahatma.

“Has the economy that sustained the material wealth of the 20th century made people rich, in the true sense of the word, and happy? How should we control the excesses of ‘commerce without morality’ and ‘wealth without work’ while maintaining a capitalist society? What kinds of economy, politics, society and education are desirable to enable people to live happy lives befitting human beings?” Mr. Hatoyama said.

He answered the poser himself by pointing out that “to borrow Gandhi’s words, our challenge is to foster ‘the morality of commerce’ and restore ‘wealth
derived from work’. India figured again in Mr. Hatoyama’s speech when he mentioned it along with Indonesia, countries that held extremely high expectations for increasing cultural exchange activities between people.

**People-to-people exchanges:** To meet such expectations, over the next five years, Japan would expand people-to-people exchanges in Asia “dramatically” by inviting over 1,00,000 youth, primarily from the Asian nations.

“We will also reciprocally increase the number of people intimately familiar with the various languages and cultures of the countries of the Asian region dramatically, thereby fostering the human resources that will serve prominent roles at the core of the East Asian community,” he said.

Source: The Hindu, dt. 02.02.2010
http://www.thehindu.com/2010/02/02/stories/2010020260671800.htm
* Received by e-mail from info@mkgandhi.org on Feb 4, 2010.