

UNESCO International Conference on the  
Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education: Taking Action  
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New Delhi, India

Opening speech pronounced  
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**on behalf of  
The UNESCO Director-General**

Honourable Dr Karan Singh,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,

On behalf of the UNESCO Director-General, it is my pleasure to open the *International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education: Taking Action*, co-organized by UNESCO Headquarters and the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP).

I would like to thank the Government of India for its support to the organization of this Conference and its unfailing support to the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP).

Working under the wise guidance of the Honourable Dr Karan Singh, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute has been a precious partner in the organization of this event, which is the first international conference on the prevention of violent extremism that focuses specifically on education.

Over the past year, the rise in the number of attacks perpetrated by violent extremist groups has been alarming.

As we have witnessed, violent extremism knows no boundaries and affects every society.

Young people are, however, most at risk. They are the main targets of recruitment strategies of extremist groups and fall victim to its violence.

The phenomenon alerts us to the risk of losing a generation of youth to despair and disengagement.

If we rely exclusively on hard power to find solutions, we will not tackle the many underlying conditions that breed violent extremism and drive youth to join violent extremist groups.

We need soft power as well, and this means education. Not just any education, relevant, inclusive and equitable quality education.

This is the *sine qua non* to effective action. Because violent extremists are made, not born.

As Gandhi said: *“If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children”*.

The pivotal role of education in the prevention of violent extremism was furthermore recently recognized by the UN General Assembly Resolution on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review 70/291, that was adopted last July.

Prevention through education implies ensuring that education systems address the drivers of grievances such as poor education, injustice, marginalization and gender inequality, which fuel violent extremism

The objective of this Conference is therefore that you leave New Delhi inspired and informed to lead those effective educational reforms and new partnerships that make a real difference.

The journey may be long, but with a clear vision of our goal and your leadership, at the national and international level, I believe we can be successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may know, this Conference is the direct result of the adoption of a decision taken by UNESCO's Executive Board at its 197<sup>th</sup> session (197 EX/Dec46), through which Member States acknowledged the importance of preventing violent extremism through education and requested that UNESCO assist [them] in this endeavour.

This Conference also stems from UNESCO's broader commitment to Global Citizenship Education, which is part and parcel of Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Finally, it marks UNESCO's effort to contribute to the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which recognizes education as one of the seven priority areas to be considered when developing national plans of action and regional strategies for prevention.

To address the multiple facets of the challenge, UNESCO established an inter-sectoral team on the prevention of violent extremism, coordinated by the Education Sector, which addresses issues relating to youth, the internet, culture and education.

Over the past year, UNESCO also stepped up its efforts to provide technical support to countries in this domain.

UNESCO expanded its Clearinghouse of educational materials on Global Citizenship Education hosted by the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) to include materials and resources on the prevention of violent extremism.

We developed a Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism that was released in the spring.

UNESCO is now developing a Guide to help policy-makers prioritize, plan and implement effective actions for the prevention of violent extremism through education and, in the process, contribute to national PVE efforts. A zero draft was sent to you before the Conference.

We look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions over the next two days in order to enrich the document. Finalized, it will be available to education policy makers around the world.

After this conference, UNESCO will scale up its capacity building activities, in cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), and other partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are more than 180 senior education policy-makers, educators, experts, youth advocates and civil society representatives from nearly 70 different countries, who have gathered today to build a common understanding about how education systems can appropriately and effectively prevent violent extremism.

We also have with us close to 50 young people from around the world who have expressed a determination to be part of the solution.

Your presence with us is critical. It demonstrates the increasing focus of attention to prevention and the growing commitment to take appropriate action in this area.

For UNESCO, it is an important step in building a more peaceful world through dialogue.

UNESCO stands ready to work together with its partners to help Member States face and overcome the challenge through appropriate educational interventions, policies and practices.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) as well as the United States Department of State for their generous support.

We have Arabic interpretation for this meeting, thanks to the “Fund of the Project of Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz for the support of the Arabic language at UNESCO” and upon the positive response from the Permanent Delegation of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO.

Thank you for your attention.