

SOFTWARE FOR PEACE

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The revolutions in the Middle East have reminded everyone of the power of aspirations for human rights and dignity. Only a few years ago, it was not uncommon to hear prominent analysts declare “authoritarian capitalism” as the *zeitgeist* of our times. Democracy, the argument went, was under pressure from all sides in many countries, while authoritarian rulers had never seemed more firmly in place. Certainly, very few expected democratic change to occur in the Middle East.

The Arab Spring has taken the world by surprise. In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, we have seen the courage of men and women rising up in the face of daunting opposition and the potential of societies for renewal despite heavy pressures. As time passes since early 2011, we are increasingly aware also of the obstacles to be overcome for positive change to take deep root.

UNESCO’s role lies here. This may come as a surprise to those who know the Organization primarily for its pioneering work to safeguard World Heritage across the world and for its global leadership to promote “Education for All” by 2015. UNESCO’s role in supporting societies undergoing profound transformation is less well-known. It should be, because peace-building from this wide angle is written in the DNA of the Organization.

UNESCO was created in the wake of the Second World War on the idea that peace had to be built on new foundations *between* States and *within* them. Our 1945 Constitution opens with the memorable phrase that “since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” The idea was forthright and innovative – lasting peace could not be based solely on political and economic arrangements between States. It had to take root inside societies, and it had to be advanced through cooperation between States in education, the sciences, culture, and communication. From this angle, peace is more than the absence of war and conflict, and it cannot be crafted solely through “hard power.” Peace refers to the existence of healthy and vibrant societies, where human rights are respected and the dignity and aspirations of every citizen are promoted.

This humanist vision was poignant in 1945, as the world rebuilt from the devastation of world war. It remains ever more so today, at a time of bewildering change in a world featuring as much uncertainty as opportunity.

Lasting peace in the 21st century cannot rely solely on intergovernmental agreements. It must be embedded in a vision of sustainable development that promotes the inherent dignity of every member of society and that allows every woman and man to develop to their full capacity. The challenge of peace today

lies less in the arms control treaties that took so much of our time in the last century and far more in the stakes raised by education, the sciences, culture and communication.

These are the focus of UNESCO's work. The Organization does not keep the peace – it lays foundations to make it last. UNESCO does not deliver development or financial aid. Rather, it crafts the conditions to make development and democratic reforms more sustainable. We do not provide the hardware for peace but the software to make it meaningful.

To these ends, UNESCO has sought to support peaceful change in the transformations underway in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. We have worked with local actors and civil societies on the ground and through our field offices in Cairo, Rabat, Beirut, Doha and Amman. We have stood up publicly against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we have worked to promote the rights of all members of society – especially women – as the basis for healthy democracy in the 21st century. We have used our global convening power to mobilize international networks to act quickly, and we have made the case for education, culture, the sciences, and communication to be placed at the heart of all international efforts for peace-building and development. Throughout all of this, we have moved in step with all members of the United Nations family and our partners in the international community.

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Five Pillars of Strategy

Five strategic objectives have guided UNESCO's action throughout the Arab Spring.

Our first goal is to improve the quality of education. Countries across the region have significantly increased access to and investment in education. However, the quality of education systems leaves much to be desired. Sector-wide reform is required, along with quality teaching, new pedagogical approaches, and revised curricula. In a word, the region needs an education *overhaul*.

Linked to this, our second objective is to support the development of relevant skills and economic opportunities – especially for young people whose frustration has fuelled so much movement for change. The Arab region has the world's highest youth unemployment rate, with one in four young people out of work. The mismatch between labor market requirements and graduate skills is worrying. This gap should be bridged, including by making technical education and vocational training more relevant.

Third, it is vital to support peaceful social transformation by bolstering the emergence of democratic societies. Expectations are high across the region, and so are the needs. Civil society should be strengthened, including youth and women's organizations, as the foundation for human rights, tolerance and the rule of law.

Supporting freedom of expression and press freedom is a fourth strategic objective. Egypt, Tunisia and Libya face the challenge of building professional and independent media environments that enable freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media. Media freedoms are especially important in circumstances of change, for sharing information, as well as for debate and exchange.

Our fifth objective is to protect the region's unique cultural heritage from pillaging and damage. Egypt hosts seven World Heritage sites, while Tunisia contains eight and Libya holds five. Cultural heritage is a source of strength and cohesion for societies facing turbulent times. These countries are known for their immensely rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage, which takes the form of unique cultural expressions, know-how and creativity. Culture is a core economic motor in a region where cultural tourism is – or has the potential of becoming – one of the most important revenue and job generating sectors of the economy.

Tailored Action

In practice, this strategy has taken different shapes to reflect different situations and needs across the region. UNESCO actions have combined immediate measures to address emergencies along with engagement for the longer term.

Protecting Culture

UNESCO acted immediately to protect the cultural heritage of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya from the risks associated with political instability. We worked with all relevant actors to safeguard this heritage against damage, looting and illicit trafficking, and we alerted customs and police, along with art dealers and collectors, to

raise awareness about stolen cultural goods. We also continued to monitor developments and to share information, maintaining close contacts with actors inside these countries in order to secure archaeological and cultural sites as well as institutions.

In a first instance, we worked to support the authorities in Tunisia, and especially the Minister of Culture, in his commitment to adopt a law putting an end to the constructions around the World Heritage site of Carthage. On 15 March 2011, we held an Emergency Technical Meeting in Paris with Interpol, the International Council of Museums, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. This helped define a Framework for Action to protect the cultural heritage of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – through concrete actions to prevent the illicit trafficking of museum objects and through the provision of support to museums in disaster preparedness. UNESCO helped strengthen the capacity of museum professionals in Tunisia and Egypt, where we focused notably on Cairo's National Museum of Egyptian Civilization.

The situation was precarious in Libya, where volatility was high and information most scarce. In March and April 2011, UNESCO called on Libya and the coalition of States implementing the non-fly zone to respect the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols, as appropriate. We requested specifically that military operations ensure the appropriate protection of cultural sites throughout Libyan territory. To this end, UNESCO compiled a detailed list of important cultural properties that was transmitted to the members of the Coalition so as to ensure their protection during military operations.

The rapid evolution of the situation in August 2011 increased the risks of cultural goods being illegally exported and channeled to international antiquities markets – in contravention of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. On 25 August, UNESCO alerted Interpol, the World Customs Organization and the International Council for Museums to this danger, calling for enhanced efforts to monitor cultural property originating in Libya and requesting Libya's six neighboring countries to support international cooperation.

Since August, we have turned our focus to clarifying the situation on the ground, through an assessment of major sites and monuments as well as moveable heritage inside Libya. On 21 October, we held an Expert Meeting on Libyan Cultural Heritage in Paris to this end, bringing together all relevant actors. We are moving ahead now with a "Libya Cultural Profile," working with national counterparts, institutional bodies and professionals, to prepare the ground for urgent action where needed.

UNESCO acted on all of these fronts, because we know the dangers that political instability pose to cultural heritage. Since the first Gulf War, the Museum of Baghdad – one of the most spectacular museums in the world – has lost some 15,000 unique objects to theft. In January 2011, hundreds of Egyptians formed a chain around the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, to protect its inestimable collection of some 120,000 pieces. This spontaneous movement was inspiring. At the same time, the Arab Spring saw also the devastating theft, in May 2011, of Libya’s “Treasure of Benghazi.” UNESCO drew immediate attention to what was one of the largest recorded thefts in history, and we worked with Interpol to alert the international community, customs and police, as well as art dealers and collectors. All of this shows the importance of acting to protect culture in situations of instability. Thefts can occur overnight but the loss to societies may be permanent.

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Promoting Freedom of Expression

UNESCO is the United Nations agency with the mandate to promote freedom of expression. On this basis, the Organization had forceful public positions during 2011, calling on relevant authorities to protect the safety of journalists and condemning the clampdown on freedom of expression, including on the internet. As Director-

General, I spoke out every time a journalist was murdered and called for an appropriate investigation.

We worked quickly to support change on the ground. On the basis of the UNESCO Media Development Indicators, we carried out assessments of the media landscapes in Egypt and Tunisia. These are essential tools to map the state of the media sector, including a comprehensive list of short and long term actions to strengthen professionalism and pluralism and to protect the independence of public service broadcasting. On 31 May, we presented these assessments to a conference co-organized with the European Broadcasting Union and France Televisions, in order to catalyze greater and more coherent international support to public broadcasting in both Tunisia and Egypt. We have started working with the national authorities to take forward these assessments in practice.

Media freedoms must be backed by good laws but they also need professional journalists. To this end, UNESCO has undertaken training seminars across Tunisia

– in Tunis, Monastir, Sfax, Tataouine, le Kef and Gafsa. These have touched a wide range of local journalists in an effort to promote fair, safe and professional reporting before, during, and after the elections of 23 October. We have led similar training across Egypt. In addition, UNESCO is designing new communication curricula for Cairo University, in line with the UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education – the gold standard for excellence in journalism education.

In partnership with the European Union, UNESCO has started a similar media sector assessment in Libya to examine the state of regulatory frameworks and to explore actions required to underpin freedom of expression, pluralism, and diversity.

Freedom of expression and media freedoms are especially important for societies undergoing change. Throughout 2011, UNESCO worked to strengthen these on the ground as well as at the global level. On 13 September 2011, UNESCO held the first United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. With the strong support of the United Nations Secretary General, Ban-Ki moon, this brought together key actors in the United Nations with inter-governmental organizations, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations and States with a single goal – to sharpen the global action of the United Nations to protect the safety of journalists.

Building Back Education

UNESCO acted quickly to bolster education in each of these countries.

In Egypt, we have launched a nation-wide literacy initiative, entitled “Together We Can.” This campaign will seek to eradicate the basic illiteracy of some twenty million citizens over the next five years, with a special effort to reach marginalized women. This will be taken forward with the national authorities and civil society as well as the Vodafone Foundation. In this campaign, UNESCO has introduced a broader definition of “literacy” – to include teaching such concepts as democracy, citizenship, tolerance, gender issues, and information literacy. We will combine this with a national public awareness campaign on major television and media channels designed to educate the public on concepts of human rights issues, freedom of expression, citizenship, tolerance, and gender equity.

At the regional level, UNESCO is leading a new initiative called Literacy Enhancement Arab Programme, designed to increase the quality of literacy programs and to improve coordination among partners. We are also supporting the reform of secondary and tertiary education across the region. This includes, for instance, guidelines for writing history textbooks in ways that promote a culture of dialogue,

religious tolerance, respect of others and understanding. We have established a regional network of experts in curriculum development, teacher training, as well as HIV prevention.

Throughout all our work on educational planning and management, we are committed to mainstreaming gender equality. Promoting the rights of girls and women is vital for building inclusive societies, underpinned by respect for the rights and aspirations of all of its members. These are core ingredients for developing healthy democracies.

Teacher training is essential for quality education. To this end, for instance, UNESCO is gearing up to train over one million teachers in Egypt on information and communication technology skills. This will draw on UNESCO's Competency Framework for Information and Communication Technology.

Libya's schools reopened on 17 September 2011 after months of fighting. UNESCO has been joined by UNICEF to carry out an assessment of all schools in Libya, from pre-school to secondary and including centers for technical education and vocational training. In the framework of the Libya Consolidated Needs Assessment, conducted by the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Commission, UNESCO will focus on improving the quality of education – through curriculum and textbook reform, educational planning and management, teacher education as well as technical education and vocational training. We are poised also to resume support to higher education in Libya.

This work on the ground is mirrored at the global level. UNESCO has pushed hard to place education at the heart of international peace-building efforts. In 2011, our benchmark Education for All Global Monitoring Report was entitled *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. The conclusions were eye-opening. Between 1998 and 2008, some two million children were killed in conflicts. Six million were left disabled, while around 300,000 children are being exploited as soldiers. The last decade has seen an increase in the level of attacks on schools. For UNESCO, this is an immediate human rights crisis and a long-term development disaster. Education must rise on the peace-building agenda of the United Nations and the international community. UNESCO's report helped clear the ground for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1998 of 12 July – this is a strong step to enhance the protection of schools as well as hospitals in armed conflict. The resolution paid tribute to Germany's Presidency of the Security Council. It also reflected UNESCO's power of advocacy.

The focus above has fallen on UNESCO's work in the fields of education, culture and media freedoms. As a values-based organization, our angle has been wider –

including support, for instance, to science and technology education in the region, capacity-building for water management, as well as work to strengthen civil society and electoral processes. In Tunisia, for instance, UNESCO is working to support youth citizenship and engagement in democratic processes. This involves working closely with the Ministry of Education as well as a wide spectrum of civil society organizations. This has included the development of a manual on citizenship and democracy for the Tunisian context and training sessions across country for vulnerable youth between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.

Working for the Long Term

The day after revolution is never easy. Euphoria fades quickly; expectations are prone to quick frustration.

One year after the dramatic events of the Arab Spring, the debate has already started – on the nature of the revolutions, on their democratic credentials, on their uncertain future. However interesting, the debate strikes me as misplaced.

Experience shows that change is never easy, and it never happens overnight. The story of Eastern Europe after 1989 – in which I took part– illustrates the drawn-out and difficult character of change. Instead of “transitions,” we should rather speak of “transformations.” Political change on the scale we saw in Eastern Europe and we are witnessing today in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya involves more than transition – it takes in all aspects of a State, its institutions and its society.

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History also shows that democracy is more than the euphoria that accompanies popular demonstrations and uprisings. Democracy is not a force that can simply be unleashed. It must be built, institution by institution, from election to election. New forms of leadership must be developed, new institutions built, new rules of economic governance set, and a new civil society supported. Change on this scale can only succeed if all voices, especially women and also society’s most marginalized members, are included. The rule of law and a genuine culture of democracy are essential ingredients here.

The transformations underway in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are precarious. Every

situation is different, and we know there may be as many steps sideways as they are forwards. In these transformation processes, democratic institutions and elections are vital, but they are not enough. To work, transformation requires vibrant and healthy societies and informed citizens, able to exercise their rights and freedoms. These are foundations for the long term.

UNESCO has acted in these areas during the Arab Spring, guided by a vision of peace and sustainable development based on human rights and dignity. We believe that new societies will be formed on the benches of schools. Education is the best way to foster good citizenship, tolerance, respect and understanding. It equips individuals with the skills to handle change and provides sustainability to all development initiatives. We are committed to harnessing the power of cultural heritage as a source of strength and a foundation for social cohesion. This heritage allows citizens to preserve their identity and self-esteem, to profit from their diversity and history and to build for themselves a better future. We are also convinced that freedom of expression is the human right that underpins all other civil liberties. It is a key ingredient of tolerant and open societies and vital for the rule of law.

Lasting peace and sustainable development require work at these levels. Peace must start in the “hearts and minds” of every woman and man. This idea inspired the creation of UNESCO in 1945. At a time of rapid change, in societies undergoing transformation, I believe that this vision has never been so relevant. The Arab Spring has raised high expectations inside these countries and great hopes across the world. We must do everything to meet these expectations and to fulfill these hopes – they embody the promise of a new humanism at a time of uncertainty.