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SPEAKER



H.E. Madame Irina Bokova

Former Director-General of UNESCO, Patron of the International Science Council ("ISC") and Co-chair of the ISC's Global Commission on Science Missions for Sustainability

Irina Bokova, born on 12 July 1952 in Sofia (Bulgaria) has been the Director-General of UNESCO between 2009 and 2017. She is the first female leader to lead the Organisation.

Having graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and studied at the University of Maryland (Washington) and the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University), Irina Bokova joined the United Nations Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria in 1977. Appointed in charge of political and legal affairs at the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York, she was also a member of the Bulgarian Delegation at the United Nations conferences on the equality of women in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). As Member of Parliament (1990-1991 and 2001-2005), she participated in the drafting of Bulgaria's new Constitution, which contributed significantly to the country's accession to the European Union.

Irina Bokova was Minister for Foreign Affairs a.i., Coordinator of Bulgaria-European Union Relations and Ambassador of Bulgaria to France, Monaco and UNESCO and Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). As Secretary of the Council of Ministers for European Integration and as Foreign Minister a.i., Irina Bokova has always advocated for European integration. Active member of many international experts networks, active in civil society and especially President and founding member of the European Policy Forum, she has worked to overcome European divisions and to foster the values of dialogue, diversity, human dignity and human rights.

As Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova is actively engaged in international efforts to advance quality education for all, gender equality, cultural dialogue and scientific cooperation for sustainable development and is leading UNESCO as a global advocate for safety of journalists and freedom of expression.

Irina Bokova is Executive Secretary of the Steering Committee of the UN Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), Co-Vice-Chair of the Broadband Commission and Chair of the UN High Level Committee on Management.

Irina Bokova has received state distinctions from countries across the world and is Doctor honoris causa of leading universities.

In addition to her mother tongue, she speaks English, French, Spanish and Russian.