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## **Prominent world figures in UN panel seek to bridge cultural divides to bolster peace**



18 February 2010 – The United Nations today inaugurated a panel of prominent political, intellectual and religious figures from all regions entrusted with furthering peace founded on justice, respect for human rights, gender equality and solidarity in the context of an increasingly globalized world.

“This day marks the beginning of an intellectual journey throughout which we will reflect on ways to trace new perspectives for peace in the 21st century,” UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) Director-General Irina Bokova said at the launching ceremony in Paris of the High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures.

The ceremony also marked the launching of the of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, and the panel will take into account the challenges posed by climate change, management of resources and ethical and economic issues in regard to strengthening peace.

“The goal of the International Year is to help dissipate any confusion stemming from ignorance, prejudice and exclusion that create tension, insecurity, violence and conflict,” Ms Bokova said.

“Exchange and dialogue between cultures are the best tools for building peace,” she added, stressing that the main strategic lines of action entail strengthening quality education, including the teachings of the world’s great civilizations and cultures.

Panel members range from politicians such as former Icelandic president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, to religious personalities such as Mustafa Ceric, Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate for Literature and France’s Simone Veil, the former president of the European Parliament and honorary president of the Foundation for the memory of the Shoah (Holocaust).

“In the context of globalization, which is also that of migrations, the parallel challenges of preserving cultural diversity and cultural identities and promoting intercultural dialogue take on a new importance and urgency, UNESCO said in a news release.

“Education is the key to success, especially for girls. However, it is also the key to learning to live together. The concept of peace has greatly evolved since the creation of UNESCO [in 1945] and particularly in the last two decades, including greater involvement for women and youth.”

Today’s launch culminated in a conference on intercultural dialogue focused on ‘The Power of Cultural Diversity and Dialogue’ and ‘Building peace – the role of shared values in a globalized world.’

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