

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

UKNC welcomes UK's decision to remain in UNESCO

London, UK – 2 March 2011. The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) welcomes the UK Government's decision to remain in UNESCO, following the outcome of its recent Multilateral Aid Review (MAR). DFID, the UK's international development department, announced that it would continue its membership in UNESCO, with a commitment to supporting reform within the organization over the next two years.

"We welcome the Government's decision to remain in UNESCO as an important recognition of the relevance of the organization and its work," said Professor John Morgan, Chairman of the UK National Commission for UNESCO. "We passionately believe in the value of UNESCO and remain fully committed to our belief that the best way to reform UNESCO is from within. We look forward to working with UK Government and our international counterparts on progressing reform."

The Review recognises that UNESCO's new Director General, Mrs Irina Bokova, has already established a good track record of tackling inefficiencies and progressing reform.

"We have always been strong and active proponents of reform within UNESCO," said Professor Morgan. "As the UK steps-up its efforts to strengthen and improve UNESCO's work, we welcome the opportunity to bring the UKNC's years of collective experience to support this agenda for change."

DFID also announced it will increase its aid to conflict and fragile countries to help target some of the world's most vulnerable populations. Although it is essential to remember that UNESCO's fundamental mission is not primarily that of an aid agency, such work does match the remit of UNESCO, as embodied in the opening lines of its Constitution which say that: "It is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed." UNESCO does this through calling Governments that restrict freedom of expression and access to information to account, through developing a respect for cultural diversity and world heritage, through supporting education undermined by conflict and through various peace initiatives.

Other UNESCO contributions to DFID priorities are acknowledged in the Review, including monitoring progress on Education for All, vital input to climate debates and supporting gender equality. The review also acknowledges that the UK's membership in UNESCO brings broader benefits to the UK in the fields of culture, heritage, education and science. This point was emphasized strongly by the UKNC in its evidence to the Review.

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Notes to Editors

- *The UK National Commission for UNESCO is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making and programme*

implementation, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.

- **The Multilateral Aid Review (MAR)**, conducted by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), assesses 43 multilateral organisations, including UNESCO. The review makes its assessment against a set of criteria which focus on DFID's own international development priorities.
- There are a large number of UNESCO sites and programmes active in the UK, including 28 World Heritage Sites, eight Biosphere Reserves, three UNESCO Creative Cities, 18 UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks at UK Higher Education Institutions, and 66 UNESCO Schools, among many others. These assets bring domestic benefits to UK citizens, communities and institutions.
- The UK was instrumental in establishing UNESCO when its constitution was signed in London in November 1945 and has helped shape the organisation and its work ever since. In 2010, the UKNC hosted representatives of 50 countries worldwide, to debate UNESCO's priorities and budget for 2012-2013. The conference took place in London at the Great Hall of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the same room where UNESCO's constitution was first signed in 1945.