

Address by**H.E. Mr. Santiago Irazabal Mourão,****President of the 41st General Conference,****on the occasion of the closing ceremony of the****Seventh International Conference on Adult Education****(CONFINTEA VII)****Marrakech, Morocco****17 June 2022**

Mr Chakib Benmoussa, Minister of National Education, Preschool and Sports of the Kingdom of Morocco

Mr David Atchoarena, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning,

Mr Daniel Baril, Chair of the Governing Board of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning,

Ms Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education,

Ambassador Zohour Alaoui, President of the 39th General Conference of UNESCO,

Ms. Myrian Caldeira Sartori, Director of Policies and Guidelines for Basic Education, Ministry of Education of Brazil,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be in Morocco to participate in the 7th International Conference on Adult Education.

I thank the His Majesty King Mohammed VI for the patronage of this important event organised by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Adult Education is a human right that must be respected for the consolidation of sustainable development.

It must be at the forefront of all efforts across the world to create green, just and resilient societies as we can not achieve social and economic progress without empowering every man and woman with the skills and capacities to operate positive changes.

This inextricable relationship has already been highlighted in the last edition of CONFINTEA, held in Belém, Brazil, in 2009.

The Belém Framework for Action raised awareness of the global stakes for harnessing the power and the potential of lifelong education for the dignity of every person and opened the path for regularly monitoring adult education.

Many efforts have been undertaken since then to promote this vision as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, particularly the Sustainable Development 4 of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

But it is also true that a large part of adult and youth populations across the world continues to be deprived from basic skills needed to fully participate in contemporary workplace and societies.

Still today the world counts with at least 773 million illiterate adults.

The number of women with no or low literacy skills has hardly changed in the last 20 years – in some regions as sub-Saharan Africa it has even increased.

Traditionally, education has been linked to a set of reading, writing and counting skills.

However, the growing importance of the digital technologies in our daily lives calls for new, higher-level competencies as a source of dynamism.

In the last years, we have been confronted with challenging questions about unemployment and job creation, about the response of educational institutions to empower learners to succeed in the digital world.

The Covid-19 pandemic can be considered a turning point in the way that the new technologies of information are influencing how we communicate, learn and consume, giving rise to new issues related to lifelong learning.

It became clear that we must prepare adults and young people, notably the most vulnerable, for living in these fast-changing societies, by focusing on technical and vocational education and training, and on girls' education for responding to the needs of the labour market.

This is why we need to close the digital divide, to bridge the gap between knowledge and lifelong learning.

More investment is needed to train teachers to make the most of digital tools to ensure quality education.

The use of new information and communication technologies are indeed connecting individuals and offering opportunities for creating and sharing knowledge.

It must be used to support, enrich and transform education for the better – by strengthening literacy, by providing vast possibilities for non-formal and informal education.

This is about inclusion and ownership.

Every woman and man must be encouraged to embrace learning as lifelong process so they can act not only as users of digital technologies, but as citizens that can shape the world they want to live in.

By providing adults with lifelong education opportunities, we equip them with critical thinking skills to make the good choices in a planet under pressure, to adopt attitudes and behaviors that allow living together based on a culture of peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have now a historic opportunity to put adult and lifelong education at the heart of all post-pandemic recovery strategies, and we must seize it.

More than ever, we need to forge together our political vision to raise the flag, to mobilise for action, to help building a better future for millions of women and men.

Member States have a huge responsibility to shape inclusive educational policies and anticipate the challenges to come.

For a better governance, we must develop solid partnerships, bringing multiple stakeholders on board, as civil society, the private sector and Youth voices.

This idea is at the heart of the UNESCO's Futures of Education Report, launched in the last General Conference, that calls for a new social contract for education that can repair injustices while transforming the future.

This includes the respect of diversity, facilitating access to knowledge and didactic material in mother tongues.

This is also one of the main elements of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), a landmark initiative for mobilising global efforts to support the use and preservation of those languages, including through digital technologies.

Based on the force of its mandate, UNESCO holds a unique position to advance education as a common good and make a decisive contribution to the United Nations "Common Agenda" led by the Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres.

The forthcoming Transforming Education Summit – which is part of this initiative and whose Secretariat is hosted by UNESCO - is an outstanding opportunity to prioritize global cooperation and investment in education.

It is in this spirit that this 7th edition of CONFINTEA comes at a decisive moment, some days before a high-level pre-Summit to be held at UNESCO Headquarters from 28 to 30 June.

I truly hope that the recommendations presented in the Marrakesh Framework of Action will nourish Member States' reflections in the conception and implementation of adult education policies in the next years and will have an impact in the discussions of the Transforming Education Summit.

Investment in education has frequently been sacrificed in times of crisis.

Stronger political will and policies are needed to leverage education as a force for life, for building a positive future.

International solidarity must be our compass to promote initiatives to boost adult education - especially in the Africa region, which remains UNESCO's Global Priority.

As President of the General Conference, I remain engaged to raise the attention of Member States to the need of reinforcing South-South and North-South-South cooperation to achieve better results.

We must act with a sense of urgency if we wish to fulfil the 2030 Agenda's promise of leaving no one behind.

The debates of these last days were extremely prolific, and I would like to congratulate all participants for bringing innovative perspectives on issues that are of special relevance for ensuring learning opportunities to all.

Thank you.
