

Speech by H.E. Mr. KANO Takehiro (Japan)
Revisiting the UNESCO Japanese Garden
(12 September 2025)

H.E. Madam Simona-Mirela Miculescu, President of the General Conference,

Madam Vera Lacoeuilhe, Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Mr Kojima Hiroshi, Vice-president of Japan Federation of Landscape Contractors,
and all other landscape gardening professionals from Japan, and their French and
American counterparts,

Madam Kurashima Miwako, curator-designer of the exhibition **folding cosmos*,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

I would like to thank you all for taking part in today's event, which aims at presenting the maintenance project carried out by the Japanese landscape gardening professionals together with their French and American counterparts this week.

This Garden is commonly known as the Japanese Garden, due to its designer, Mr Isamu Noguchi and the involvement of Japan. But I am slightly hesitant to call it that way. Rather, I should emphasize that this is the Garden of Peace, an integral part of the Fontenoy building inaugurated in 1958 as the Headquarters of UNESCO.

Documents preserved in the UNESCO archives tell us how people engaged in the Fontenoy project at that time, such as then Director General, Mr Luther Evans from the United States, the Hungarian born American architect, Mr Marcel Breuer, or the French art historian Mr Georges Salles, and many others tried to accommodate modernity and diversity in this compound, which was supposed to symbolize the newly resurrected multilateralism. And they decided to commission Mr Isamu Noguchi to design a Japanese style garden as a symbol bridging the East and the West.

Isamu Noguchi was born in Los Angeles in the early 20th century between a Japanese father and an American mother, and his life was truly cosmopolitan. He spent his younger days in Paris, being influenced by the Romanian sculptor, Mr Constantin Brancusi, and traveled worldwide to Europe, Latin America and Asia, whose cultures greatly influenced his works. But his life was not without turbulences. Because of his unique identity as well as the impact of the war, Noguchi was sometimes not fully accepted, neither in the US nor in Japan. UNESCO may have provided the most suitable place for Noguchi's work.

The Fontenoy project was also important for Japan, which joined the Organization in 1951, when the project started. It was a good opportunity for Japan to show its commitment to the multilateralist ideals of the Organization, and both the Government and private individuals actively supported the completion of the Garden, and the sense of attachment to this Garden is still widely shared today.

One of the most remarkable moments we had in this Garden in recent years is a tea ceremony offered in April 2019 by Dr. Sen Genshitsu, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and the 15th Urasenke Grand Master, who ended his dramatic 102 years life last month. Born in the prestigious family of grand master of tea ceremony and a former student being mobilized as kamikaze pilot, Dr Sen dedicated his life to “constructing the defences of peace in the minds of men and women” in his own way, namely promoting the culture of tea ceremony. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to his life-long commitment to peace.

Excellencies, distinguished guests,

80 years after the adoption of its Constitution, UNESCO is now facing great challenges again. The current geopolitical situations with persistent conflicts and growing unilateralism are impacting its multilateralist ideals and governing structure. Our collective will and efforts to sustain the Organization are tested.

In this context, I would like to stress that we should remind ourselves of the spirit of the Fontenoy Building, with its headquarters facilities and gardens, the collection of artworks and the archives. This is our ‘common heritage’, vividly testifying to the passion with which our predecessors were so eager to re-establish multilateralism, based upon the lessons learned from the devastation of the war.

And I would like to take this opportunity to thank the incumbent President of the General Conference, H.E. Madam Simona-Mirela Miculescu, for her initiative highlighting the importance of preserving the UNESCO archives. As many of you may know, I am currently running for the Presidency of the 43rd Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. If I were given the honour to succeed to her position, this would certainly be one of the priorities that I should carry on. And I am pleased to announce today that Japan has decided to allocate 150 000 USD to contribute to preserving and enhancing universal access to the audiovisual documents in the UNESCO Archives. I would like to appeal to all Member States to join in this endeavor.

Finally, I hope you will enjoy the visit of the Garden and the cocktail, and also the exhibition of **folding cosmos*, a bridge between the artwork of Isamu Noguchi and the contemporary artists.

Thank you.

(781 words)