

2026 New Year's greetings



Happy New Year to all of you.

(Looking Back to 2025)

2025 was a year of significant change for UNESCO.

First, a new Director-General was elected in November. Ms. Audrey Azoulay, the 11th Director-General from France who served two terms totaling eight years, stepped down. Her successor, Dr. Khaled El-Enany from Egypt, was elected as the 12th Director-General of UNESCO. He is the first Director-General from the Arab Group. Dr. El-Enany previously served as Egypt's Minister of Antiquities and Tourism and has strong ties with Japan through his collaboration on the Grand Egyptian Museum Project, which officially opened last November.

In July last year, the United States under the second Trump administration announced its withdrawal from UNESCO. This marks the third time the U.S. has withdrawn from the Organization. While the withdrawal will officially take effect at the end of this year under the UNESCO Charter, the U.S. has stopped paying its assessed contributions since last year and has ceased participating in UNESCO meetings. This U.S. stance is significantly impacting UNESCO's activities.

Regarding Japan's relationship with UNESCO, 2025 marked the 75th Anniversary since Japan applied for UNESCO membership in December

1950. On the occasion of this milestone, our Delegation launched the “75th Anniversary of Japan’s UNESCO Membership” initiative and has been organizing various events. On June 24 last year, a commemorative reception was held featuring a screening of footage from the time of Japan’s UNESCO accession. Furthermore, in September, restoration work was carried out in the “Garden of Peace” at UNESCO Headquarters, designed by Isamu Noguchi, in cooperation with Japanese gardeners. On November 20, we held a commemorative reception to mark the 80th Anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO Constitution on November 16, 1945. This reception was attended by the 9th Director-General, Mr Koichiro Matsuura, and the new Director-General, Dr. El-Enany. Video messages were also received from the 10th Director-General, Ms. Irina Bokova, and the 11th Director-General, Ms. Azoulay, making it a memorable event with messages from all living former UNESCO Directors-General.

Regarding Japan, at the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in New Delhi, India, in December, the extension of three Japanese nominations was approved: “Traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan,” “Washi, craftsmanship of traditional Japanese hand-made paper,” and “Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan.”

(Aspirations for 2026)

2026 is an important year both for UNESCO and for Japan’s diplomacy within UNESCO.

It will be the first year of the mandate of the new Director-General, Dr. El-Enany. He is expected to swiftly establish the new team and steadily advance UNESCO’s reform, “UNESCO80”. Japan intends to spare no effort in cooperating with the new Director-General’s initiatives.

Regarding Japan-related items at UNESCO, the nomination of “Ancient Capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara” for inscription on the World Heritage List will be examined at the World Heritage Committee meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, this July. The nomination of “Calligraphy” for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will be examined at the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Xiamen, China, this

December. We will continue to work closely with relevant parties to strive for successful inscription.

This year marks the conclusion of the “75th Anniversary of Japan’s UNESCO Membership.” Since being admitted at the UNESCO General Conference on June 21, 1951, and formally joining on July 2, Japan has consistently supported UNESCO’s activities. At last year’s 43rd UNESCO General Conference, Japan was re-elected to the Executive Board, where it has maintained a seat since joining, and will serve as Vice-Chair of the Executive Board for the next two years. I myself was also elected Chair of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), one of the subsidiary bodies of the UNESCO General Conference.

Marking the 75th anniversary of its membership, Japan will renew its commitment to UNESCO and actively pursue its diplomatic efforts across all areas of UNESCO’s activities, namely education, science, culture, communication, and information.

We sincerely appreciate your understanding and support.

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Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO