

Speech by His Excellency Mr Takehiro Kano
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO
Japanese Evening - 23 June 2026

Her Excellency Madam Irina Bokova, the 10th Director General
of UNESCO,

Madam Lidia Brito, Assistant Director General of UNESCO for Priority
Africa and External Relations,

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

Dear Japanese citizens in Paris,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the “Japanese Evening”.

The day before yesterday, 75 years ago, on 21st June 1951, the 6th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO at its Headquarters located then on Avenue Kleber, decided to admit Japan to the Organization. The Japanese Representative, Mr MAEDA Tamon, former Minister of Education, after expressing his appreciation of the decision, flew to London and signed the UNESCO Constitution. He then deposited Japan’s instrument of acceptance on 2nd July, thereby making Japan a full member of UNESCO as of that date.

The accession would not have been possible without grassroots movement burgeoning in Japan. In 1947, inspired by the spirit of the UNESCO Constitution, many Japanese citizens and educators began

promoting its principles of building the defenses of peace in the minds of women and men, establishing the world's first private UNESCO cooperative organization in Sendai.

Japan's membership to UNESCO preceded the San Francisco Peace Treaty that enabled Japan to regain independence, as well as Japan's membership to the United Nations, which was realized five years later in 1956. So, UNESCO was the very first platform for Japan to rejoin the international community in the post-war period.

As you may recall, since last year, we have organized a series of events commemorating the 75th Anniversary. Now we are at the final stage of the year-long program.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to all of those who have made contributions since last year. My special appreciation goes to the following people:

1) the Tea masters of the URASENKE School, who kindly offered to organize a tea ceremony on a couple of occasions,

2) the Gardeners of the Japan Federation of Landscape Contractors, who generously undertook a series of maintenance activities for the Isamu Noguchi designed "Garden of Peace" in Fontenoy,

3) the Team of the Kura Master Association who always entertain us with a great selection of Japanese sake, our intangible cultural heritage,

4) TBS, one of Japan's leading television broadcasters which made a special short film today featuring beautiful World Heritage sites from its video archives of 30 years long TV programmes, and

5) the PARIS Taiko Ensemble who made outstanding performances today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have just seen the short film highlighting Japan's partnership with UNESCO over the past 75 years. Some of the early videos and photos were drawn from UNESCO's archives, and the film was made by the team of the Secretariat, as part of the project that we fund with voluntary contribution, of digitizing documents of the archives. I would like to thank the Secretariat for its excellent work.

Since its accession to UNESCO, Japan has been a steadfast contributor to the Organization in all its mandates.

We are also proud to have had the first Japanese Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, from 1999 to 2009.

In Japan, we now have 26 world cultural and natural heritages inscribed, 23 intangible cultural heritages, 9 Memory of the World inscriptions, 12 creative cities, 11 UNESCO Global Geoparks, 10 Biosphere Reserves, 13 UNESCO Chairs, and 1065 ASPnet schools. By the end of this year, we may have another world heritage and intangible cultural heritage inscribed, as our nominations of "Ancient Capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara" and "Shodo, calligraphy in Japan" will be examined in Busan, Republic of Korea and Xiamen, China respectively.

Last month, during Director General Professor El-Enany's visit to Japan, the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO organized the Japan-UNESCO 75th Anniversary Celebration Forum in Tokyo, with attendance of participants with a variety of backgrounds, from cabinet ministers, national diet members, academia in education, science and culture, and private sector.

The event showed how the spirit of UNESCO has been deeply embraced by a wide range of Japanese people over the decades.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

Now, 80 years after its establishment, UNESCO is facing unprecedented challenges in the current geopolitical situation, where multilateralism gains diminishing recognition.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to reaffirm Japan's unwavering commitment to its partnership with UNESCO. In order to effectively tackle the challenges facing us, we are ready to work with the Member States and the Secretariat in steadily implementing "UNESCO80" reforms proposed by the Director General.

In the field of education, Japan has supported UNESCO's initiatives for many years.

On a personal note, my own first experience of UNESCO was to attend the Education for ALL Conference in Dakar, Senegal in 2007 chaired by the former DG, Mr Koichiro Matsuura. UNESCO played the norm setting role in education, and we supported the initiative. We invited DG Matsuura to the 4th session of the TICAD Summit in 2008, where he led the discussion on education with African leaders.

Another example is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Japan has supported UNESCO in promoting ESD for more than 20 years, particularly for SIDS, in terms of formulating educational policy and curriculum. The World Conference on ESD to be held early next year in Nairobi, Kenya, will provide further momentum for ESD.

Safeguarding the right to education for children and girls in conflict-affected areas, including Ukraine, Gaza, and Afghanistan, is the more recent UNESCO's activities that Japan has highly valued and attached priority. We welcome UNESCO's active role in this area.

Science is the pillar of UNESCO that deserves more attention. Japan has supported the Organization to that end, notably in oceanography, hydrology, emerging technologies and disaster risk reduction.

Earlier this month, the Island States Ocean Summit was held in Tokyo, organized by the Nippon Foundation in partnership with the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. The conference was graced by the presence of His Majesty the Emperor, with attendance of leaders and ministers of 35 island and maritime countries. The Conference was a unique opportunity for UNESCO-IOC to demonstrate its expertise of fostering knowledge sharing and cooperation for resilient island communities.

The UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) has also played a vital role in advancing scientific knowledge in water and Japan remains committed to supporting the Organization's role in water resource management and response to water-related disasters.

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and neurotechnology are areas where UNESCO should play a unique role, particularly in terms of capacity building for Africa and SIDS.

UNESCO has shown its unique and tangible contribution recently in disaster risk reduction. Emergency Fund for Sciences, established last year with our voluntary contribution, has enabled the Organization to implement rapid technical deployments across Africa, Asia, SIDS, the Middle East, and Latin America, addressing natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and wildfires.

Culture is the most widely recognized activities of UNESCO in Japan as elsewhere, and we have contributed to safeguarding

cultural heritage in all its forms over decades, with combination of financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity-building.

Cultural heritage is more than a legacy of the past. It embodies the history, memory, and values of communities, and forms an essential foundation of our identity. For this reason, Japan deeply values UNESCO's efforts to protect and preserve cultural heritage around the world.

Japan has been engaged in post-conflict cultural heritage restoration and protection with UNESCO, starting with Angkor, Cambodia three decades ago, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq. More recently, we have supported UNESCO's emergency responses in Ukraine, Sudan, Mali, and Syria. We will continue to support international efforts led by UNESCO to safeguard and transmit humanity's shared heritage to future generations.

In the context of the World Heritage Convention, our contribution of the Nara Document on Authenticity in the 1990s has inspired ongoing reflections on authenticity of cultural heritage in Africa, initiated at the Nairobi Conference last year. These efforts seek to make the World Heritage system more universal, inclusive, and reflective of the world's diverse cultural traditions.

Likewise, Japan has been actively engaged in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Last week, Japan was elected as a member of the ICH Committee for 2026–2030. We express our sincere gratitude to all member states for their support, and we reaffirm our commitment to further contribution in this area.

Fostering freedom of expression, including safety of journalists, media independence, pluralism and diversity, is a core responsibility of UNESCO. Japan has supported its programmes to ensure the safety of journalists in Ukraine, and to secure access to accurate information in Moldova and South Sudan.

I was honored to be elected Chair of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication last December. We have just concluded the 70th session of IPDC Bureau Meeting last week with fruitful outcome. As IPDC Chair, I will work closely with the Member States and the Secretariat so that the Organization can deliver its essential services in this area.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

80 years ago, our ancestors established UNESCO with the firm belief that the defenses of peace must be constructed in the minds of women and men. Now the mission of this Organization is more important than ever.

Today, I touched upon 75 years history of Japan's partnership with UNESCO. But I am sure that each Member State has its own unique history with UNESCO.

This Organization is our common heritage for which we have shared responsibilities into the future. Only through our collective commitment can UNESCO continue serving as a beacon of peace and international cooperation in education, science, culture, communication and information for generations to come.

Japan is ready to continue working with all of you in that endeavour.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you all a wonderful evening.