

***Washington, D.C., US, October 12 (Infosplusgabon) - The US announced on Thursday that it has decided to withdraw from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and will seek to establish a permanent observer mission to the UN cultural agency but the UN agency has expressed profound regret at the US' action.***

A statement issued by Heather Nauert, Spokesperson for the US Department of State announcing the withdrawal said: "On October 12, 2017, the Department of State notified UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova of the U.S. decision to withdraw from the organization and to seek to establish a permanent observer mission to UNESCO. This decision was not taken lightly, and reflects U.S. concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO.

"The United States indicated to the Director General its desire to remain engaged with UNESCO as a non-member observer state in order to contribute U.S. views, perspectives and expertise on some of the important issues undertaken by the organization, including the protection of world heritage, advocating for press freedoms, and promoting scientific collaboration and education."

The statement said pursuant to Article II(6) of the UNESCO Constitution, U.S. withdrawal will take effect on 31 December 2018. The United States will remain a full member of UNESCO until that time.

In a reaction after receiving official notification by the United States Secretary of State, Mr Rex Tillerson, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova expressed profound regret at the decision of the US describing it as regrettable, and a loss to UNESCO, the UN family and multilateralism.

In a statement, she said: "Universality is critical to UNESCO's mission to strengthen international peace and security in the face of hatred and violence, to defend human rights and dignity.

"In 2011, when payment of membership contributions was suspended at the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference, I said I was convinced UNESCO had never mattered as much for the United States, or the United States for UNESCO.

"This is all the more true today, when the rise of violent extremism and terrorism calls for new long-term responses for peace and security, to counter racism and antisemitism, to fight ignorance and discrimination."

Ms Bokova said she believed that UNESCO's work to advance literacy and quality education, harness new technologies to enhance learning, enhance scientific cooperation, for ocean sustainability, promote freedom of expression, to defend the safety of journalists empower girls and women as change-makers, as peace-builders and bolster societies facing emergencies,

disasters and conflicts were shared by the American people.

She said despite the withholding of funding, since 2011, UNESCO had deepened the partnership between the United States and UNESCO, which had never been so meaningful.

"Together, we have worked to protect humanity's shared cultural heritage in the face of terrorist attacks and to prevent violent extremism through education and media literacy.

"Together, we worked with the late Samuel Pisar, Honorary Ambassador and Special Envoy for Holocaust Education, to promote education for remembrance of the Holocaust across the world as the means to fight antisemitism and genocide today, including with, among others, the UNESCO Chair for Genocide Education at the University of Southern California and the UNESCO Chair on Literacy and Learning at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ms Bokova said together, they had worked with the OSCE to produce new tools for educators against all forms of antisemitism, as they had done to fight anti-Muslim racism in schools and launched the Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education in 2011. They have also together, with the American academic community, including 17 UNESCO University Chairs, also worked to advance literacy, to promote sciences for sustainability, to teach respect for all in schools.

She said this partnership had been embodied in several areas in their interaction with the United States Geological Survey, with the US Army Corps of Engineers, with United States professional societies, to advance research for the sustainable management of water resources, agriculture, as well as the celebration of World Press Freedom Day in Washington D.C in 2011, with the National Endowment for Democracy.

"At the time when the fight against violent extremism calls for renewed investment in education, in dialogue among cultures to prevent hatred, it is deeply regrettable that the United States should withdraw from the United Nations agency leading these issues.

"At the time when conflicts continue to tear apart societies across the world, it is deeply regrettable for the United States to withdraw from the United Nations agency promoting education for peace and protecting culture under attack."

Ms Bokova said UNESCO's task was not over, and they will continue taking it forward, to build a 21st century that is more just, peaceful, equitable, and, for this, UNESCO needs the leadership of all States.

"UNESCO will continue to work for the universality of this Organization, for the values we share, for the objectives we hold in common, to strengthen a more effective multilateral order and a

more peaceful, more just world," she added.

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