Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the ceremony to mark the new location of the statue of
Sri Aurobindo

UNESCO, 21 October 2014

His Excellency Dr Karan Singh,

Excellency Ambassador Ms Ruchira Kaamboj,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you on this very special occasion. Allow me to express my gratitude to you, Madam Ambassador, for this initiative, and for your kind words.

Today, the great sage Sri Aurobindo looks onto the Garden of Peace with his penetrating expression and humble demeanour, so eloquently expressed by the talented artists of Calcutta.

In this House, which Jawaharlal Nehru described as the “conscience of humanity,” Sri Aurobindo’s spirit stands as a universal inspiration.

In the West, one might describe Sri Aurobindo as a “renaissance man” – an immense philosopher, a scholar, a poet, who started his life fighting for India’s freedom and who, in captivity, launched a lifetime exploration of the unlimited potential for good and creativity of the human soul.
To him, we owe also the magisterial commentary of the *Bhagavad Gita* -- the gift of sharing understanding of Hinduism's deepest sources across all borders, the gift of drawing bridges of understanding between western and eastern cultures, between all societies.

The life of Sri Aurobindo was inspired by a deep devotion to human dignity and freedom, guided by his vision of life as an opening of the mind.

The stars might find it is no coincidence he was born on the day that India achieved independence, when he appealed for unity, peace and concord, qualifying his great nation as a "*helper and leader of the whole human race*." 

Sri Aurobindo embodied the conviction that the ethical and spiritual dimension -- the quest for self-knowledge -- offered the most fertile ground for creating more peaceful, just and harmonious societies.

He inspired educators and generations of disciples, with the founding of his Ashram in Pondicherry in 1926.

Sri Aurobindo will also forever be associated with the founding of Auroville -- a unique international township founded in 1968, as a place where people from different cultural, educational and political backgrounds can work together towards the common goal of unity through diversity. I have indeed visited this magical place.

Today, his learning and vision continue to draw devotees from the world over -- following his profound Integral Yoga teachings.

As he wrote, "*true knowledge is not attained by thinking -- It is what you are and it is what you become.*"

Sri Aurobindo counts among the immense humanists from India whose wisdom has shaped world history -- these include Swami Vivekananda, whose anniversary we celebrated here last year with Dr Karan Singh.
They include also, of course, Mahatma Gandhi, a giant of the 20th century, whose name is now also associated with the UNESCO’s first Category I in Asia, the *Centre of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development*.

These are just two examples, but they are major and they embody the great spirit of humanism that has such deep roots in Indian history and society.

I can think of no greater humanist than you Dr Karan Singh to celebrate this event. Today is indeed a celebration - of India’s wisdom and contribution to humanity, of humanism and of the importance to seek understanding of ourselves and of others.

Mesdames et Messieurs, l’inauguration de cette statue est aussi l’occasion de rendre hommage à un autre grand indien, le Prix Nobel de la paix Kailash Satyarthi, que l’UNESCO est fière de compter parmi ses proches.

Le fil rouge qui nous rassemble, c’est la conviction que les droits humains et la dignité humaine sont le point de départ et la mesure de l’impact de toutes nos actions.

À la veille de notre 70e anniversaire, je suis profondément reconnaissant à l’Inde, et à vous Dr Karan Singh, de nous inspirer, de montrer que la paix ne peut être assurée par les accords économique et financiers arrangements, mais par la solidarité morale et intellectuelle de l’humanité – de montrer que toute action, pour être efficace et durable, doit s’appuyer sur la sagesse, la philosophie, l’art, la poésie même.

Car les crises auxquelles nous sommes confrontés ne sont pas seulement économique et financière, mais morale, éthique et spirituelle. Nous devons y répondre par la solidarité, la promotion de l’éducation, le dialogue interculturel, l’égalité et la dignité de chaque femme et de l’homme.

Ce message, c’est le message de l’Inde, et nous en avons besoin aujourd’hui plus que jamais.

Et de la même manière que cette statue, forgée dans le bronze par des artistes de Calcutta se trouve ici, à Paris, je ferai le chemin inverse et je vais me rendre en
Inde, dans quelques semaines, pour renforcer cette coopération si spéciale, et poursuivre ce dialogue d’amitié et de solidarité.

Oui, c'est un grand jour pour l'Inde, et c'est un grand jour pour l'UNESCO.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.