



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Getachew Engida,
Deputy Director-General, UNESCO
on the occasion of the 2nd World OER Congress
in Ljubljana; Slovenia**

Ljubljana, 18 September 2017

Your Excellency Dr Milan Brglez;

President of the National Assembly of the Republic of
Slovenia,

Mr Tibor Navracsics; European Commissioner for
Education, Culture, Youth and Sport;

Ms Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of the
Commonwealth of Learning,

Honorable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome the global OER community convening here in Ljubljana at the second World OER Congress.

This is a moment to recognize good works and commitment we need from you as we look forward toward the prodigious challenge of achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

This Ljubljana Congress commemorates the 15th anniversary of Open Educational Resources, namely OER.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

OER was first coined at UNESCO fifteen years ago at a UNESCO meeting in 2002 on Open Courseware in Higher Education, even before the explosive growth of free and open-licensed knowledge became more widely available on the Internet and through mobile smart phones.

I would humbly say that UNESCO's role in the birth of OER reflects our natural mandate as the United Nations specialized agency devoted to intellectual foresight and collaboration.

The term "Sustainable Development" – familiar to you through the Sustainable Development Goals – also was

first coined at a UNESCO conference held in 1968 that led to the creation of Biosphere Reserves, one of UNESCO's flagship networks along with the World Heritage Sites for tangibly promoting sustainable development at a local level.

In 1953, a UNESCO Convention established CERN – the European Centre for Nuclear Research – a quintessential example of UNESCO's mandate to increase international, intellectual collaborations among nations and peoples.

Along with the advancement of sub-atomic particle physics, CERN, as you may know, is where two essential technologies for mobile smartphones were developed:

namely the development of touch-screen technology and the first World Wide Web page.

According to the 2017 UNESCO/ITU State of Broadband Report, there are now 5 billion unique mobile subscriptions in the world, of which around 80% are in the developing world, including more than 700 million mobile subscriptions on the African continent alone.

At the same time, books remain out of reach for large numbers of people.

A well-respected study of 16 sub-Saharan African countries found that a majority of primary schools have few or no books.

This book scarcity not only slows reading acquisition, but subsequently learning outcomes across all school subjects.

Throughout human history, limited access to books has been the major barrier to literacy.

Today this fundamental barrier to literacy has the potential to be receding, thanks to OER and ICTs.

For instance, the data connectivity fees required to read an open-licensed book on a mobile phone can cost as little as 2 or 3 cents.

This means that the cost of a comparable paper-and-ink book can be 300 to 500 times more expensive.

Mobile smart phones, some retailing today for as little as 25 dollars, offer individuals a portal to reading and learning. They are also typically easier to distribute, easier to update, and, in some instances, simply more convenient than paper-and-ink alternatives.

OER will amplify this impact, through fully recognizing authorship while being free to further share, retain, copy, redistribute or remix, including translating into local languages and cultural contexts.

Wikipedia entries, while of course not technically a form of OER to purists, is an example of our fundamental human impulse to share knowledge: now with more than 40 million open-licensed Creative Commons articles, impressively made available open and free in 126 languages. All told, we see there are more than a billion Creative Commons-licensed works searchable on the Internet.

What this intimates is the potential of continuous OER growth in the lives of all teachers and students, one day in the future.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda comprises 17 goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 on “Quality and Lifelong Education”, for which UNESCO is the lead UN agency for coordinating and monitoring 27 concrete indicators addressing education quality,

affordable access, equity, accessibility and lifelong learning.

UNESCO is also the UN agency mandated by its 195 Member States to promote the mainstreaming of OER around the world.

Over these past 15 years, OER has gained adherents and demonstrated concrete benefits at each level of education. Yet I feel there may be a sense in this room that monumental challenges still remain.

These challenges are prodigious and your role as champions of OER have never been more consequential.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope you will share UNESCO's belief that OER must play a key role if all countries have a chance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of quality and lifelong

education, and build peace through Knowledge Societies that are open and accessible to all.

Thank you, I wish you every success!