

Irina Bokova Urges World Leaders to ‘Finish the Job’ on Women’s Empowerment at UN General Assembly

The UN General Assembly opens and the UN Women’s Conference in Beijing marks three decades of the landmark Declaration.

PARIS, FRANCE, September 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With the United Nations General Assembly underway in New York and the [UN Women’s Conference in Beijing](#) preparing to commemorate 30 years since the [Beijing Declaration](#) and Platform for Action, [Madam Irina Bokova](#) — former Director- General of UNESCO and patron of the International Science Council — has issued a powerful appeal for governments, businesses and civil society to complete what she calls “the unfinished business of the 20th century.”



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Madam Irina Bokova

Bokova described women’s empowerment as the keystone for solving humanity’s most pressing problems — from climate change and migration to technological disruption and conflict. “Gender equality is not a zero-sum game — when women gain, men don’t lose. Society as a whole wins,” Bokova said. “If we don’t bridge the gender digital divide, we will deepen inequalities instead of closing them.”

The UN General Assembly’s 2025 session is expected to focus heavily on global development and inclusion. Bokova called the Assembly a “vital platform” for recommitting to

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a time when only 17 percent of the targets have been achieved halfway to 2030.

Bokova placed particular emphasis on the UN Women's Conference in Beijing, which will mark three decades since the Beijing Declaration, widely regarded as the most progressive global agreement on women's rights.

Two shifts from that Declaration continue to transform policy today: recognising the girl child as a distinct priority for education and protection; acknowledging women not only as victims of war but as active peace-builders, paving the way for the UN Security Council's landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security.

"This anniversary is not simply a commemoration," Bokova said. "It is a recommitment to a civilisational project: weaving responsibility, education, inclusion and mentorship into the fabric of a world order."

During her tenure at UNESCO, Bokova launched programmes to keep girls in school, provide secondary and technical training, and link education to women's economic empowerment. She also enlisted high-profile champions such as Professor Peng Liyuan, China's First Lady, who became UNESCO's Special Envoy for Girls' and Women's Education and led the UNESCO-China Prize on Girls' and Women's Education.

"A high-profile, competent woman lending her prestige to girls' education is more than symbolism," Bokova said. "It is a model of the feminine principle at the top of the hierarchy reaching down to lift others." "It is Looking forward," Bokova warned that the gender digital divide — exclusion of women and girls from the technological revolution — threatens to undo hard-won gains. She urged governments, tech firms and international organisations to design the next wave of innovation as inclusive from the start. With the UN General Assembly and the Beijing anniversary as a backdrop, Bokova's message to leaders and young women is clear: "Have confidence. Strive to be everything you want to be. Don't give up, don't give in. Look for mentors. Support other women — don't hit the ladder after you climb."

Key Facts

17% of SDG targets achieved halfway to 2030.

Women's empowerment is "the unfinished business of the 20th century."

Bridging the gender digital divide is essential to avoid deepening inequalities.

Professor Peng Liyuan's role as UNESCO Special Envoy helped catalyse projects linking girls' education with economic development and inclusion.

About Madam Irina Bokova

Irina Bokova served two terms as Director-General of UNESCO (2009–2017), becoming the first woman and first Eastern

European to head the organisation. She is a member of the Board of the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and patron

of the International Science Council. She h

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