

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Philosophy Day**

19 November 2021

On 17 September, to celebrate Philosophy Night, UNESCO Headquarters opened its doors to all those contemplative night owls who, from dusk to dawn, pursued the ideal of the “search for wisdom” which is the essence of philosophy.

The French philosopher Edwige Chirouter, holder of the UNESCO Chair in the practice of philosophy with children at the University of Nantes, spoke in the middle of the night at Headquarters. According to her, the purpose of philosophy is to give substance to what Hannah Arendt called “oases” of thought, that is to say, to create, away from the bustle of the world, time and space where participants can take a step back for calm reflection together.

Therein lies why philosophy is utterly necessary and so useful in times of crisis and uncertainty.

From the very beginning, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a linguistic dimension: What should the pathogen be called? How should the situation be described? How should the emergency measures required be given meaning?

However, words sometimes fail to grasp the complexity of the world and its upheavals. To paraphrase the great philosopher Ibn Khaldūn, without the transmission of thought, language is only a barren land.

As an antidote, UNESCO works daily to bring philosophy, that universal language of thought, into service in order to identify all the ramifications of the crisis and to clear a common path for humanity.

It is indeed necessary to open up new horizons to enlighten reflection and public action in all the regions of the world. Philosophy and, more broadly, the humanities can and must help us to do this.

Let us therefore take the opportunity afforded by this World Day to take a necessary step back and, through philosophical practice, put into perspective the whirlwind of events so that we can consider how to rebuild a juster and more dignified world.