In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Excellency - Chair of the General Conference,

Heads of Delegation, my fellow Ministers, Experts, Civil Society Representatives, media colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

I bring warm greetings and best wishes from the people and the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for a very successful UNESCO General Conference. We thank UNESCO for hosting and managing this conference.

For Afghanistan, UNESCO remains a trusted partner to support our commitments and efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. On behalf of Afghan people, we express our sincere thanks to the UNESCO community for the continued support to our efforts.

Excellencies,

Over the last eighteen years, despite challenges, Afghanistan has been working steadily to strengthen the defenses of peace through education, sciences, culture and communication to advance respect for justice, rule of law and fundamental freedoms and promote global citizenship.

Article 43 of Afghanistan’s constitution “Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, guarantees the Right to Education for all Afghans. To realize this right, I am pleased to share that our education system has had significant qualitative and quantitative achievements over the last 18 years, in terms of access, quality and management.

Presently around 9.6 million students (39% of whom are girls) are being educated by 229,000 teachers in around 18,000 educational institutions across the country. This marks over 9 folds increase in the numbers of learners since 2001.
We are currently implementing the National Education Strategic Plan III (2017–2021) to expand and improve the equitable access to quality educational opportunities for all, through strengthened institutional governance and management capacities at all levels.

In line with the SDGs 2030 and Government Vision, we have drafted the Education Decade Plan (National Education Strategy 2020–2030) to guide and advance our educational efforts to ensure our commitment to all the learners in close engagement with teachers, parents and communities. We are working on alternative pathways to provide education and learning opportunities for over 3.7 million out-of-school children and youth.

We are currently finalizing the new National Curriculum Framework for both formal and non-formal education, with technical and financial support from UNESCO and World Bank. In coming years, we will have revised syllabus, textbooks and will require massive investments in teachers, both Pre-Service as well as In-Service Training for which, we are already seeking the support of UNESCO, GIZ, GPE and our friends in the international communities.

In the field of higher education, we are pleased to witness a rapid growth as a result of the Government’s productive efforts over the last decades. During this period, the number of public universities has increased from 7 to 38, enrollments in the public and private universities has increased more than 440% over this period.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Government of Afghanistan firmly believes that sustainable development is possible only when such development efforts are grounded on our rich and diverse tangible and in-tangible cultural heritages as enshrined in our constitution to promote peace through the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind. Afghanistan Government is committed to UNESCO’s Cultural Conventions to which Afghanistan is a State Party to safeguard Afghanistan’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Excellencies,

We are pleased to share with you that the Afghanistan’s efforts in promoting access to information and freedom of expression has been noteworthy. Starting with only one state channel in 2001, today we have more than 65 TV and 174 radio channels, hundreds of newspapers and magazines. Over 70% of citizens listen to radio and over 55% watch television. Over 90% of the population have
access to telecommunication services and the social media users is growing steadily, currently estimated at over six million users.

The Government takes the rights and safety of the Journalists and media workers seriously. We have endorsed the provisions guaranteeing these rights to ensure effective implementation of the Article 34 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression for all Afghans.

Excellency Chair and Friends,

We are also pleased to share positive advancements in the areas of women empowerment and gender equality in Afghanistan. Some of the highlights are:

- Number of women Judges have reached 240
- 28% of the lower house and 17% seats at the upper house of the parliament are reserved for women.
- 36% of the teachers across the country are women.
- Across Afghanistan 7,003 female doctors provide health care services and this number is growing.
- At the provincial level 32 provincial directorates are led by women and 35% of the local development units are led by women.
- 22% of the public service staffs of Afghanistan are also women.
- Over 800 entrepreneurship initiatives are led by women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the people and the Government of Afghanistan, I would like to express our sincere thanks to our friends and international partners for support to the efforts of Afghanistan to bring peace and prosperity to its citizens.

Thank you.