Ms. Olga NACHTMANNHOVA, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic

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Madame Director General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to speak here at the 40th General Conference of UNESCO, and I appreciate the opportunity to address you as one of the key organizations in the United Nations family. Next year the United Nations and UNESCO will celebrate the 75th anniversary. Their role and mandate is as important today as it was 75 years ago. The original ideas behind their creation – promotion of peace and cooperation among nations, prevention of conflicts and crises are still relevant and valid. Education, science, culture, communication, and information are even more important in today’s world where everything and everybody is interconnected and dependent on each other.

UNESCO is a specific organization within the UN system, which has achieved many significant achievements. They all have one in common – compliance with rules and norms. It is a method that strengthens the responsibility of member states, mutual trust, and predictability of organizational processes. Mutual trust is an invisible, but strong bond, which keeps the states united. Non-compliance with rules is not the problem, but the distortion of them is. Spreading of hate, in forms like hate speech cannot be labelled as freedom of expression. Violation of human rights cannot be mistaken for the fight against extremism. In line with the European Union, the Slovak Republic has a message to share: „We wish to see a human rights-based approach in all sectors for the full mandate of UNESCO. We also expect UNESCO’s leadership to be a strong and proactive voice, in particular in the field of right to education, freedom of expression and safety of journalists“.

We do have difficulties in agreeing about the new rules. Those difficulties arise mostly in the areas, which are essentially new – the consequence of our progress and achievements as a humankind. It mostly concerns the issues of climate change, new technologies, cybernetics, and artificial intelligence. UNESCO possess an indispensable role in all those areas.

We welcome UNESCO’s initiative “Future of Education” declared during the UN General Assembly in September 2019. It is the right time to globally assess and choose the approach
that is adequate in relation to education in the era of increasing connectivity, given the dynamics of the contemporary world. In this regard, we do share the vision of Madame Director General - let me use her words: “Our deeply humanist DNA cannot let us reduce education to a technical or technological issue, nor even to an economic one.”

The main task of all UN organizations, including UNESCO is the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as soon as possible. The cornerstone of achieving progress in this regard is an effective financing of development with a key lying in mobilization of public and private resources. Education, especially education of youth plays an indisputable role in this process. Let me use the words of my fellow colleague, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of my country Slovakia – “With the education about sustainability we lead young people towards the values and solidarity and later to the knowledge that to help and to give is the best expression of humanity.”

UNESCO is part of the multilateral system of the United Nations. It cannot depart from its role within the UN system, as the Earth cannot leave the solar system. That is why the transformation of UNESCO is directly linked to the broader UN reform. Although, this does not mean that UNESCO cannot improve its own scope for roles given by the UNESCO’s mandate. The Slovak Republic fully supports the efforts of UNESCO’s Director General and her team in making the strategic transformation possible, with integrated cooperation of member states. Slovakia also supports measures and proposals aimed at strengthening the payment discipline within the organization.

Slovakia, being a legal successor of UNESCO founding member - Czechoslovakia, fully supports work and activities of the organization. We not only do this bilaterally but also through our membership in the EU. We support UNESCO politically, practically and financially wherever the situation requires it.

Soft power in international affairs is continuously replacing hard power, which is inevitably good. Nevertheless, we have to face some obstacles. For instance, frenetic speed of technological progress connected to the explosion of information abundance in the context of shrinking world (what we simplistically call globalization). Naturally, these new instances raise some doubts about the future path for UNESCO. In such a situation, we need to look back and realize where we are coming from. The very purpose of establishing UNESCO was not technical, but rather ethical – elimination and prevention of wars and conflicts, elimination of suspicion and mistrust among nations through better understanding each other, education, and
cooperation. This has been the basic premise of UNESCO since its creation and it is a premise on which we need to base our future steps. This is true - more than ever, even after 74 years since the establishment of this unique organization.