Mr. President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers,
Ambassadors, Permanent Delegates,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you warm felicitations from the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as the best wishes of President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, for a successful 40th Session of the General Conference. We congratulate, you, the newly-elected President of the Conference, H.E. Altay Cengizer, and look forward to working with you in this Session and the biennium. We also appreciate Her Excellency, Ambassador Zohour Alaoui,
President of the 39th Session of the General Conference for the very many successes recorded during her presidency.

Madam Director-General,
The past two years have been impactful with you at the Head of the UNESCO Secretariat. Nigeria appreciates your laudable efforts in repositioning the Organization to improve its overall efficiency as a vital organ of the United Nations family. We therefore commend your efforts in this direction, particularly the process of Strategic Transformation, which continues to gather momentum and is already producing some visible outcomes.

As we move on to the implementation level of the Organization’s Strategic Transformation Initiative, Nigeria eagerly awaits the report on UNESCO’s presence worldwide which is to be submitted to the Executive Board at its 209th Session next April. Nigeria is convinced that the report will mark a positive step towards improving the structure, efficiency and visibility of UNESCO’s field network, particularly in Africa. We are convinced that the report will afford the Executive Board the opportunity to reconceptualise its priorities in Africa, given the continent’s urgent needs for the actualisation of UNESCO’s lofty ideals of promoting
functional education, social cohesion, global peace and understanding.

Your Excellencies,

Two years ago, on this same podium, Nigeria solicited UNESCO’s technical support towards hosting a crucial **International Conference on Lake Chad**, which was successfully organized from 26th – 28th February, 2018 in Abuja, our nation’s capital. It should be recalled that this project sprang from the long-standing mutually-benefiting Programme of the **“Nigeria-UNESCO Special Plan of Cooperation”**. Nigeria remains committed to the continued development of phase 2 of the Special Plan of Cooperation, particularly the implementation of the consortium of inter-sectoral projects that have been put together with the assistance of the UNESCO Secretariat. Similarly, Nigeria is pleased to play **host to the 32nd Session of the International Coordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme**, one of UNESCO’s major programmes in ecological and earth sciences, scheduled to hold in Abuja from 22nd to 26th June 2020. I take this opportunity to welcome Member States of the MAB-ICC to Abuja on this occasion.
In the field of **education**, Nigeria is committed to achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal No. 4 on Education 2030. In this regard, Nigeria is making every effort to promote inclusive education by upholding the SDGs **slogan of Leave no child behind**, by ensuring that every child of school age, has unfettered access to Basic Education. Closely related to education, Nigeria has also developed a skills acquisition framework for the promotion, standardization and recognition of employability skills irrespective of where and how the skills are acquired, to enhance SDGs 8 and 9. To this end, a National Council on Skills has been established and UNESCO will soon be invited to provide technical support in this area.

Following the successful hosting of the UNESCO Regional Workshop on Online Learning and MOOCs at the National Open University of Nigeria in June, 2019, Nigeria is already working with the UNESCO’s Regional Office, to organize in June, 2020, an International Conference on the Future of Higher Education in Africa. We welcome the Director General and other dignitaries, to what promises to be an invaluable knowledge festival.
I should add that Nigeria is working with the World Bank and other strategic development partners like the French Agency for Development (AfD) as well as captains of industry, to advance the cause of skills acquisition and entrepreneurship, for which the nation’s entire curriculum is currently being reviewed.

In addition to launching Nigeria’s first-ever National Policy on Open Education Resources (OER), new Guidelines on Cross Border Higher Education have just been approved to align our higher education landscape with international best practices. With these guidelines, our Government has undertaken to provide the requisite eco-system for the import and export of educational partnerships, developmental cooperation projects, and academic exchange programmes, which would create and strengthen collaboration between our Higher Education Institutions and their foreign counterparts.

Concerning **Global Priority Africa**, Nigeria appreciates the efforts of the Priority Africa and External Relations (PAX) Sector in strategizing for new partnerships to support the provision of strategic guidance for the implementation of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa. However, we note the challenge of
underfunding as already indicated in the summary strategic assessment of the implementation of this programme. The impact of the Global Priority Africa cannot be fully felt if, at this stage, it is hampered by the challenge of underfunding. We therefore urge the Secretariat and Member States to join hands in overcoming this challenge.

Finally, Nigeria is pleased to also inform the Conference that the United Nations Building in Abuja which houses the UNESCO cluster and other UN Agencies, that was damaged in 2011, has been fully reconstructed by the Nigerian Government and re-opened at a grand ceremony to commemorate the UN Day in October, 2019.

I wish you a successful session, once again, and thank you for your attention.