

Statement of H.E. Mr. Ahmad Jalali
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the I.R. of Iran to UNESCO

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Madam President of the General Conference
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

My condolences to my neighbour, Indonesia, on the tragedy that befell his people. My thanks to the Director-General and the Secretariat for the report and their efforts. I explained my ideas on UNESCO's Strategic Transformation during the last three sessions of the Preparatory Group; no need to repeat them here. The major question is what form UNESCO would have after this envisaged transformation; to simply say a more efficient one, or to load our documents with references to the SDGs, will not suffice.

However, whatever the transformation, UNESCO's uniqueness illustrated in its founders' vision should be preserved, neither duplicating other agencies nor opening the way for them to overshadow this.

Yes, we are opening UNESCO's doors to new partners; but upon which criteria and framework to be aligned with its intergovernmental character? What magic hand should create equilibrium between UNESCO's mandate and the private sector's motives behind its contributions? We have to first initiate well-defined proposals and then establish a dialogue.

As a nostalgic example, let me take you back to what I call UNESCO's intellectual golden age. In 1948 a now defunct project named the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works was launched to translate masterpieces of the literature of Member States into various languages, and thus introduce this intellectual heritage to other nations.

This was not merely a decorative act, it is intellectuality in action; an effective move towards the envisaged intellectual and moral solidarity that we are striving for, which will not be found in clichéd texts created under instruction. Why? History is a strict examiner, and masterpieces which have passed this test of time along with contemporary universally valued works have thus proved that they bear some enduring values. While our own lifespans are brief, they channel to us

the collective wisdom of humanity and the flavour of others' ways of life. Imagine the glory of feeling that I am biting the same fragrant apple that was bitten by Rumi, 800 years ago, for example. Works translated include those of numerous Nobel laureates, *inter alia* the Indian Rabindranath Tagore, the French Albert Camus and the Japanese Yasunari Kawabata. It is worth recalling that some writers went on to win the Nobel Prize in literature after their wider exposure through this programme.

The translations were not limited to UNESCO official languages: for example, the Upanishads were translated from Sanskrit into German, the work of Kawabata from Japanese to Indonesian, and the Pakistani poet Ahmed Faiz from Urdu into Hungarian. Alignment with UNESCO's ideals was also a major criterion for their selection. Over 1300 titles were translated from more than 80 countries, from fiction, drama, and travelogues to works of philosophy and history.

How wonderful that UNESCO created such a library of world literature, a standing meeting place of all cultures. If the project's *raison d'être* remains valid, is the issue merely budgetary?

Why do we not direct the new partners towards such projects? This requires a proper dialogue; but who will conduct it, and how? Can you tell me, Madam Director-General?

Thank you.