

ADDRESS TO 205<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD, TUESDAY 9  
OCTOBER 2018

Mr Chairman, Madame Director General, Madame Chair of the General Conference, Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to address the Executive Board today on behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

As the Director General herself said yesterday, the origins of the creation of UNESCO can be traced back to the conflicts that shook the world in the first part of the last century. In just over one month's time, on 11 November, we will commemorate the centenary of the Armistice on the Western Front at the end of the First World War. That conflict saw young men and women from across the globe – from many countries represented around this table today, and many others besides – fight in a conflict of unprecedented scale and destruction. Just over 20 years later, the world found itself plunged into darkness once again.

The vision that UNESCO's founders shared – a vision of peace and understanding fostered through dialogue, education, the sharing of knowledge and scientific discovery and the preservation and promotion of culture – remains a noble vision and a worthy ambition today, as it did over 70 years ago.

Mr Chairman, when I addressed this Board six months ago, I welcomed the positive new dynamic that was evident since last year's General Conference. I also observed how the new Director General and the Secretariat faced a considerable task, how that task would not be achieved overnight nor would it be delivered easily.

Sitting here today, I stand by those judgements. But I would also like to offer congratulations to the Director General and her team for what has been achieved. UNESCO is now more visible than it was 12 months ago. There is a sense of direction and ambition for the future. Although challenges remain, UNESCO's finances are on a sounder footing. The political disputes that have plagued this organisation for too long have been de-escalated and there is a renewed sense of optimism for the future. Initiatives such as Reviving the Spirit of Mosul, discussions on the Permanent Restitution of Cultural Property, plans to reactivate the international network of Ministers of Culture and consideration of how to address the ethics around Artificial Intelligence are reminding people once again of the organisation's relevance. UNESCO – and the Director General herself – made an important and visible contribution to last month's UN General Assembly with a strong focus on education. We are delighted – and encouraged – that the DG has joined the Panel on Girls' Education alongside others from Kenya, Fiji, Rwanda, Trinidad & Tobago, Ghana, Canada, India, Australia, Pakistan and the UK.

And we congratulate the DG on pulling together her senior team. We have already enjoyed working with the DDG, Madame Giannini and Mr Ottone, and we look forward to close cooperation with other colleagues.

But as we all know Mr Chairman, there is more work to be done. In this context, the establishment of the Strategic Transformation process is welcome. This offers the prospect of reform and modernisation. Importantly, it also puts in place a positive mechanism for ensuring dialogue between the Member States and the Secretariat.

This matters Mr Chairman, not just because dialogue is essential to UNESCO's core mandate – to understanding, to learning, to sharing and to building peace. It matters because the multilateral system is under closer scrutiny than ever before. We can no longer assume, because we see the value and utility in the work this organisation does and we share the vision of its founders, that others will automatically do the same. So we need to be better at explaining, at advocating, at delivering an impact where it really counts. And I say we because this is not a task either for the Secretariat or for the Member States. It is a task that we must all get behind.

We need to build trust and confidence – through greater accountability. We welcome the progress achieved on ethics training, and the high take-up rates. This needs to apply to all staff, and mandatory training needs to be just that - mandatory. And we applaud the Secretariat's actions earlier this year to tackle concerns about sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. As Member States we need to stand up to those who seek to undermine the capability of UNESCO to monitor human rights. We need to hold a mirror to ourselves and have honest conversations about what we can – what we must – do better. And, yes, we should not only look to others for innovative financial support and encourage capitals to invest in UNESCO's capabilities – but we need to recognise that the most persuasive arguments will be made by an irrefutable demonstration of impact, by robust efficiency and by a confident embracing of transparency

And we should champion the full range of what UNESCO does. In the UK, we are very fortunate in having a dynamic, capable and highly committed National Commission. Whilst we represent our capitals' views here at the seat of the organisation, the UK National Commission are representing the organisation to the UK. Perhaps the most visible demonstration of UNESCO for British nationals can be found in the more than 160 UNESCO designations we have. These continue to thrive. They are often run by unique grassroots organisations, contributing to the local and national economy. They form part of the world's heritage. Beyond the more than £100 million per year of financial benefit the UK designations bring to the UK economy, they are a tangible connection for local communities with UNESCO.

I am delighted Mr Chairman to note that, in partnership with a number of others and co-led with Switzerland, the UK National Commission is conducting a pilot project to measure the national contribution of UNESCO designations in Sustainable Development Goal terms, focussed on UNESCO Chairs. This pilot project is being presented today at the global meeting of National Commissions during this 205th Executive Board.

In conclusion, allow me to offer three final observations:

- We know this organisation matters and does valuable work. We all need to make sure that others understand that equally well.
- There has been a genuine, and very positive, sense of progress and forward momentum over the last 10 months. That achievement deserves recognition and praise. But we have to keep going and do more.
- Lastly – and perhaps most importantly of all – if we are to succeed, we will have to work together.

Thank you Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen for your attention.