

**207<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Board of UNESCO**  
**Plenary, items 4, 5 and 17**  
**Representative of Finland, H.E. Mr. Tuomas TAPIO**  
**Monday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Mr. Chairperson, Madam Director-General  
Madam President of the General Conference,  
Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Finland aligns itself with the EU statement.

We are convening here after several major events in the United Nations system. These include the High-Level Political Forum in July, as well as the more recent SDG Summit, General Assembly and Climate Summit meetings over the past few weeks.

What all these meetings conveyed is a sense of urgency. All signs point to the fact that it is vital to speed up action on the 2030 agenda. We are racing against time.

On a more positive note, we noticed with satisfaction that UNESCO was quite visible at these important events. We welcome the Director-General's launch of UNESCO's global initiative on the Futures of Education to discuss how to rethink education to meet the challenges of today's increasingly complex world. We also appreciated the participation of the Director-General in high-level events to promote media freedom, safety of journalists as well as UNESCO's efforts to counter hate speech. UNESCO's active participation in the Climate Summit, drawing attention to the protection of cultural and natural heritage and highlighting especially participation of the Youth, was equally appreciated.

We are grateful to the secretariat for this active input, as we feel that UNESCO has an essential role to play in the broader, system-wide effort to tackle global challenges. This is because UNESCO is dealing with some areas of sustainable development that are not only important, but are also under increasing pressure.

For example, freedom of expression is being challenged in many parts of the world. Journalists are murdered, and artists and scholars detained. There is a worrying trend toward shrinking democratic and civic space. This problem is far from being only a local or national one: if the trend continues, it can seriously undermine our efforts to solve our common, global problems.

Also, UNESCO's work to promote quality education is vital if we want to efficiently address any of the SDGs. Currently some 750 million adults are illiterate and over 600 million children do not learn at all. Lack of education seriously limits the capacity of individuals to understand phenomena such as the climate crisis, or the changing world of media and communications.

Excellencies, Colleagues,

Over the past year, UNESCO has been stepping up its strategic transformation process. Finland supports this process.

We fully support the comprehensive reform package of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The implementation of the reform, including the UN development system, is crucial, and we encourage UNESCO to continue its efforts to bring the reform forward.

Recent assessments such as the one prepared by the MOPAN network show that the Organization is moving in the right direction.

As member states, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we keep on the right track, and that there is a match between ambition, expectations and resources.

The solution is not to resort to micro-management. Instead, we must focus on prioritization – on helping the secretariat to focus the organization's activities on the most relevant, core areas of competence. If conducted successfully, the reform process should also increase the transparency and accountability of UNESCO's work.

Defining priorities is also, of course, a central part of our discussion concerning the next two-year program period.

We see this program period as a transition towards three things:

1. an even sharper focus on the 2030 Agenda and on UNESCO's custodian responsibilities for the SDGs;
2. a stronger alignment with the UN system;
3. a stronger emphasis on the human rights-based approach, with a focus on key themes such as freedom of expression, gender equality, the right to education and cultural diversity.

To meet the extremely urgent and ambitious objectives we are setting for this organization it is, of course, equally important to ensure that UNESCO has sufficient financial resources at its disposal. The organization needs to be properly funded to cooperate efficiently within the UN system, and it needs funds to deliver on its mandate on the ground. In our view this calls for the budget scenario of 534.6 million USD.

Dear Colleagues,

For all of us, this session of the Executive Board will be an important opportunity to outline the future orientations of the Organization. Although I fully understand that sometimes it is also necessary to discuss procedural matters, I hope that we can focus on the many important substantive questions ahead of us, and on what we collectively wish to achieve. I look forward to fruitful discussions.

Thank you.