

**National Statement by Ms. Wajiha Akram,**  
**Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Professional Training and**  
**Pakistan's Representative to UNESCO Executive Board**  
**at the 207<sup>th</sup> Session of UNESCO Executive Board**  
**15 October 2019**

**Mr. President**  
**Madam Chairperson of the General Conference**  
**Madam Director General**  
**Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I thank you Mr. President for your able stewardship of the work of the Executive Board. I would also like to congratulate the Director General for her efforts towards a stronger and more visible UNESCO.

Mr. President,

More than 7 decades ago, UNESCO rose from the ashes of a devastating and horrifying war. It was a time of suspicion and mistrust between peoples. It was a time when people were either ignorant or dismissive of each other's way. Fully aware of these challenges, prejudices and lack of mutual respect, our founding fathers established this house of peace and dialogue.

They very rightly noted in the UNESCO constitution that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a sincere and a lasting peace. Therefore, they noted that peace must be founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

Unfortunately, today again we are witnessing that the intellectual, moral and legal basis for maintaining global peace is eroding. The very purpose of this organization to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms is under threat.

International relations are again being constructed on the basis of policy of appeasement and narrow commercial interests, leading to situations where peoples fundamental freedoms are curbed; and human rights are violated with impunity under the guise of national security and development. Even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, communities could be locked down with communication blackout and no access to schools, hospitals and basic human needs. Such situations require attention of international community.

We hope that UNESCO's moral authority can be exercised to call upon responsible governments to lift such restrictions and restore the fundamental rights of the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pakistan commitment and support to UNESCO's core functions in the fields of education, culture, science and communications has always remained a key element of our national policies and multilateral diplomacy.

Pakistan attaches highest importance to Education. Our National Education Policy Framework is devised to achieve four key objectives: a Uniform Education System, universal enrolment, teacher Quality Enhancement, & Technical and Vocational Training.

Mr. President, Pakistan has consistently supported UNESCO's work in education sector. We are happy to note that UNESCO's Fund for Girl's Right to Education, which was established with initial seed money of US\$ 10 million provided by Pakistan, has now been expanded with generous contributions from other countries and carrying out important projects in Pakistan and many other developing countries.

Since 2015, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, a UNESCO Cat-II Institute in Karachi is offering ten scholarships each annually for PHD and Masters to the Small Island Developing States, Africa and Latin American States in UNESCO.

Mr. President, I am also honoured to announce that Pakistan has been appointed as the Chair of the Education Commission in the upcoming General Conference. Promoting education, as a life transforming tool, has always been at the heart of our development agenda to build peace, eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. We therefore look forward to constructively working with all member states for achieving our shared objectives within the scope of the Education Commission.

Excellencies,

We also believe that UNESCO's initiative on Open Science should allow public access to scientific knowledge and technology for all stakeholders contributing to transfer of knowledge. In the same spirit we welcome UNESCO's lead in promoting Open Educational Resources.

Mr. President,

Pakistan is culturally a diverse country, with each region having its own distinct traditions and customs. Pakistan is also home to ancient civilization 6000 BC and major religious of the world. This cultural and religious diversity is well represented through UNESCO listing of six cultural sites in Pakistan. This also helps in peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony.

Mr. President, the freedom of expression forms an important part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan. We therefore attach

importance to our partnership in the Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO. The Government of Pakistan has taken a number of steps in this regard includes establishing five regional centres across the country for recording threats against journalists.

Mr. President, dear colleagues,

We are living in challenging times where there are multiple threats to multilateralism and global peace and security. It is important that at UNESCO we continue our dialogue and collective reflection. Let us continue to build mutual trust and collaboration and strive to achieve the ideals of UNESCO. You will always find Pakistan an active and ardent partner in all such endeavours.

I thank you all.