

Good Afternoon,

**: Madam President of the General Conference,
: Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
: Madam Director General
: Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Hon. Akila Viraj Kariyawasam Minister of Education of Sri Lanka is unable to be present today, here at the 207th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board as his presence in Sri Lanka is mandatory due to the upcoming Presidential Elections.

Accordingly, I as the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Sri Lanka, will read out his views and observations.

Quote

‘First and foremost, I wish to record my appreciation to the Director General of UNESCO for having administered the UNESCO headquarters and system very effectively in the past.

Today, when the world is faced with many challenges such as violent extremism, climate change and poverty, the role of UNESCO as a platform for intellectual debate to foster peace and sustainable development through Education, Science and Culture has become all the more important.

The United Nations declared the global commitment as Sustainable Development Goals, agenda for 2030, in September 2015 after the successful implementation of Millennium Development Goals. Since assumption of my office in Sri Lanka as the Minister of Education, in January 2015, in view of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals No. 4, I have initiated key educational projects in Sri Lanka, as follows.

- Nearest school is the best school project
- 13 years guaranteed education
- Vocational training
- “Suraksha” insurance scheme covering 4.3 million school children

- Free distribution of electronic tablets, Many efforts are being taken to digitalize the education system establishing an education management information system, digital/ smart classrooms

We should persevere towards sustainable development in the 21st century and this could only be done through inclusive and equitable quality education with lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Madam President,

As Africa has 5 Regional Offices, Asia and the Pacific Region with two thirds of the world's population and extraordinary diversity, needs at least 3 or 4 sub offices. South Asia alone is fairly self-contained, with SAARC as the backbone. Over centralization can be detrimental to the implementation of UNESCO's mandate. Thus, we reiterate the fact that combining offices into major regional offices alone will not allow efficient coordination among countries and UNESCO Head Quarters.

The process of decentralization was done after many studies over the past years so we suggest such recentralization of offices will only weaken coordination and overlook the important roles played by small developing nations.

Madam President,

We are very thankful to UNESCO for the support given to Sri Lanka especially in the setting up of the South Asian Centre for Teacher Development (SACTD), which is one of a kind. As of date, SACTD is the only UNESCO Category II Centre in the South Asian Region and in the World dealing with Teacher Development. With the 2nd Meeting of the Board Management of SACTD held in late September, we are putting much effort to expedite the operationalization of the Centre before the end of 2019 observing the significance of the Centre potentially contributing to Quality Education in the region especially aligning with Sustainable Development **Goal 4.7.c** (*By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states*). We are in the process of securing a steady line of funds for the sustainable expansion and development of the Centre.

We are looking forward to work with other South Asian countries to support teacher development and become a renowned regional hub for teacher development. We hope this Centre would become a reality soon.

Madam President,

We wish to mention that we strongly support the Director General's efforts to strengthen UNESCO's fund raising strategies and we urge UNESCO to create a fund raising strategy which is entirely independent of assessed and voluntary contributions. We wish to propose a united effort and exchange of ideas amongst third party large scale charitable foundations, fund raising campaigns and philanthropic fund raising agencies for UNESCO. It is further proposed to renovate the management structure of UNESCO to accommodate these fund raising strategies.

Madam President,

The geographical distribution of the staff of UNESCO secretariat remains a concern for Sri Lanka who is currently a non-represented Member State. Therefore, we urge UNESCO to facilitate fair competition and balance in recruitments to ensure equal opportunities for applicants from around the world.

In conclusion, I wish to state that after 16th of November, Sri Lanka will have a new leadership as the President of Sri Lanka. I will assure the continuation of ongoing educational programmes towards the achievement of SDG No. 4, which is quality education for Sri Lanka.

With this 207th session of the Executive Board, Sri Lanka's term in the UNESCO Executive Board will expire and I would like to extend my gratitude to all the Member State who supported Sri Lanka to become a member of the Executive Board.

I finally would like to wish UNESCO success in all its endeavors.

Thank you.