

**ADDRESS TO 207TH SESSION OF UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD, MONDAY 14
OCTOBER 2019**

[BEGINS]

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

On behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, I am very pleased to address this 207th session of UNESCO's Executive Board. The United Kingdom remains a strong believer in multilateralism and a determined defender of the rule based international system. We are pleased to support the statement of the European Union and its candidate countries, and proud of the positive relationships that we enjoy with all our partners in the Commonwealth and more widely in supporting UNESCO's important work.

Mr Chairman/Madame Director General the breadth of UNESCO's mandate and the range of its activities continues to be impressive in its ambition and challenging in its scale and breadth. There are many different aspects that one can comment upon. I would like to address the following.

UNESCO's mission is a worthy and admirable one. Its goals and objectives – working to build peace through dialogue, human understanding, culture interchange and the promotion of education – deserve our whole-hearted support. UNESCO's pluralist, humanist philosophy offers a framework open to all. UNESCO's engagement on the Sustainable development Goals delivers benefit for all.

That is the good news – and something we can all be proud of and take comfort in. But there are also warning signs on the horizon. Multilateralism is under threat. The threat to our physical environment grows ever more obvious by the day. And the threats to our moral and spiritual environment are also growing. Intolerance and populism are on the rise. Nationalism and isolationism pose a growing threat. Authoritarianism and prejudice seek to undermine a values-based and rules-based international system. Against this backdrop, UNESCO's work is more important than ever. We need an organisation that is robust and effective, fit-for-purpose and recognised as a model of best practice within the UN system and more broadly.

I would like to congratulate our Director General and all her team for the achievements of the last two years. UNESCO is undoubtedly in a better place than it was. The organisation's reputation is stronger, its brand – already well known and highly valued across much of the world – is more highly regarded. Management, financial and administrative reforms have put the organisation on a positive track. The previously corrosive impact of political disputes – that should be played out in other fora – has been effectively managed. And UNESCO is making its presence and its contribution clear through exciting and imaginative initiatives such as Reviving the Spirit of Mosul and work to address the Ethics of AI. On this latter point, the United Kingdom looks forward to playing an active part in supporting UNESCO's work, including in the consultation process for the recommendation.

Allow me to express particular gratitude to the Director General, ADG Chakchouk and Mr Guy Berger for UNESCO's support for the London conference on **Media Freedom** in July. The United Kingdom is delighted to be working with UNESCO and like-minded partners on this important agenda, reflecting UNESCO's lead responsibility for the UN Plan of Action.

But UNESCO is frequently operating in a crowded and increasingly competitive space – even with other UN agencies. We cannot afford to sit back and rest on what has been achieved in the last 2 years. Concretely, the United Kingdom believes UNESCO must continue to:

- Associate itself clearly and unequivocally with the wider reform of the UN being driven by Secretary General Guterres
- Ensure that its **resources and budget** are prioritised effectively, in line with the organisation's Strategic Transformation
- Continue to take steps to strengthen the **financial** health of the organisation. The growth of **Voluntary funding** is to be welcomed. But we must remain alive to the risks. UNESCO must remain a Member State organisation. And tightly ear-marked voluntary contributions must not be allowed overly to influence UNESCO's agenda.
- Press ahead with progress on **Management Reform**, including the mobility strategy, UK supports the rejuvenation of staff and the broader perspective, motivation and energy that working in the field can provide to staff. Ultimately this is about having a modern, agile and capable UNESCO fit for the 21st century.
- Continue efforts on **Risk Management** so that UNESCO can plan strategically.
- Encourage more capacity building of staff on **evaluation of the programmes**. This should include moves to start **measuring outcomes instead of outputs**. UNESCO

should explore the scope for Peer review, seeking to share lessons from other UN agencies.

Mr President/Madame Director General, I could go on. There is much to do. But we can achieve great things if we draw on the strengths of the membership, pull together and focus our efforts.

The United Kingdom is stepping back from the Executive Board at this session, in order that other Member States who are similarly committed to UNESCO's mission may take their turn on the governing body. Please rest assured, the UK will continue to be an active, committed and constructive partner over the period ahead.

In conclusion, allow me to remind us all of the three observations I offered in April. I believe they remain just as relevant today, six months on:

- 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 16 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.

[ENDS]

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