



***Statement of I.R. of Afghanistan
to
209th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board
Plenary Debate***

***presented by
Mrs Parwana PAIKAN, Chargé d’Affaires
of I.R. of Afghanistan to UNESCO***

Paris, 3rd July 2020

Statement of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

209th Executive Board Session, UNESCO

3 July 2020

Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Madame Director-General,

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Distinguished colleagues,

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to you Mr. President and members of the Bureau for the excellent work in paving the way for this session to take place despite the current circumstances where our daily lives and work modalities have been affected due to COVID-19.

Afghanistan as a responsible member state reaffirms its commitments to UNESCO's programs and activities in response to the COVID-19 crises and aligns itself with UNESCO's response to the call for solidarity and coordination. This pandemic has demonstrated our inter-connections, inter-dependence but also our fragility. Now more than ever, solidarity and unity must be our leading principles.

In the education sector, Afghanistan has made remarkable progress over the past two decades, however, the COVID-19 pandemic poses one of the biggest threats to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of quality education for all globally by 2030 as the pandemic and its impact increases an already dire situation owing to the ongoing conflict.

Our Delegation sincerely appreciates the launching of the "COVID-19 Global Education Coalition" by UNESCO, to support member states in need to cope with the crises. We should ensure the continuity, equity and enhancement of the supports within the poor and vulnerable states during and after the crisis.

Allow me to express particular gratitude to UNESCO's efforts on fast tracking girls' and women's education under the initiative "Her Education, Our Future", during the G7 France-UNESCO International Conference held in Paris last year.

Additionally, we appreciate the recently adopted “Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020-2025)” focusing on 20 countries with a literacy rate below 50%. It is worth mentioning that after 10 years of UNESCO interventions, 1.2 million Afghans have acquired basic literacy skills and literacy facilitators have been trained across the country.

Afghanistan appreciates the support provided to us to strengthen national capacities in cultural property protection; and, in contribution to SDG 5 and in the framework of UNESCO Gender Equality Action Plan II.

World Heritage is a source of identity for nations and communities, Afghanistan is proud to be part of the 1972 World Heritage Convention for nearly 4 decades now and a member of the 1970 Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property since 2005.

However with the spread of COVID 19, cultural heritage sites and property have been at risk. The lockdown has directly impacted the value chain on our intangible cultural heritage. There is no creation, production, distribution and access to the creative industries sector. The restoration projects of historic monuments have been affected and the heritage sites are under threat of destruction.

In this regard, we urge UNESCO to strengthen their implementation on both conventions.

Economic fallout following the COVID-19 crisis could create major stressors, particularly in fragile societies and less developed countries. Economic instability will have particularly devastating impacts for women and children. The large numbers of female-headed households in conflict-settings are especially vulnerable to economic shocks.

It is necessary to think about it and imagine the world after Covid-19. Our focus should not only remain on crisis management we should also affirm our commitments on post-pandemic world to preserve and strengthen the economy, education, culture and science. With this being said, Afghanistan endorses the #TakeCareBeforeYouShare initiative of the United Nations to help stop the spread of fake news on social media.

On matters of media, Afghanistan welcomes UNESCO's continued focus on freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, media pluralism and diversity.

As a member of the IPDC, we are fully committed to the guidelines to provide safety for journalists, media personnel and to combat impunity. We ask UNESCO to continue their efforts to secure a healthy environment for the growth of a free and pluralistic media, so that young democracies, such as Afghanistan continue to grow.

Afghanistan also supports UNESCO's new campaign "The Next Normal" on asking people to change their perception about how societies function- particularly since the beginning of this pandemic.

Afghanistan also recognizes the importance of water security and as a new member of the IHP, we support the council's stance on water research and management, and related education and capacity development in today's water challenges.

UNESCO was founded in the wake of the World War II, born of the belief that the unprecedented conflict could give rise to a better world, today as countries begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to question our priorities and build a better normal from the one left behind, a world where multilateralism thrives and we remain united in our shared humanity.

We echo the call by Secretary General of the UN, for a global ceasefire in order to silence conflicts and focus on fighting the pandemic, a global enemy.

Finally, I would like to conclude my speech by congratulating Director General and all her team for the achievements particularly in the field of education, culture and gender equality. Please rest

assured, that Afghanistan will continue to be an active, committed and constructive partner over the period ahead.

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