

**JOINT STATEMENT ASPAC GROUP**  
**209<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Board**

**Chairperson,**  
**President of the General Conference,**  
**Madam Director General,**  
**Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates.**

1. In my capacity as Vice Chair of Asia-Pacific Group, I have the honor to convey this Statement on behalf of the Group.
2. The ASPAC Group, takes this opportunity to congratulate you Mr. Chairperson, for your leadership and commitment to ensure the continued work of the Board during this difficult time.
3. ASPAC would also like to thank the Director General and the Secretariat, for the initiatives taken in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 to UNESCO and to ensure UNESCO's programs are kept on track.
4. As an electoral group with the second largest number and most diverse countries in UNESCO, ASPAC remains committed to ensuring the realization of UNESCO's goals in a post COVID world.
5. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing crisis is unprecedented in our lifetime. It has affected all aspects of our lives, greatly impacting how we work and conduct our business, including the working methods of UNESCO.
6. We therefore appreciate the Working Group on the Rules of Procedures of Executive Board, for their works in providing adapted Rules of Procedure of Executive Board which will enable us to continue our role and function.
7. We also appreciate the Secretariat initiatives to improve and adapt technological and management aspects, to allow us to hold the executive board meetings virtually.

**Chairperson**

8. The pandemic has created profound disruptions to the global education landscape. It has also greatly impacted other areas of UNESCO's work such as culture, science and communication and information.
9. For ASPAC the pandemic is testing our collective capacity to respond. It is a momentum for UNESCO to embrace solidarity, collective action and contribute to strengthening multilateralism. UNESCO has the opportunity to contribute towards mitigating the impact of COVID-19 through innovative solutions and building resilience in its core areas of competence including in open science and scientific cooperation.

10. In the field of education, the *unprecedented situation has unravelled gains made in the education system in many countries, adversely impacting students, parents, and educators worldwide*. ASPAC recognizes UNESCO's excellent work to bring inclusive, quality, and equity in education. We therefore urge greater support be given towards UNESCO's work in this field, to address the adverse impact of the crisis on education.
11. During the pandemic we have also seen unprecedented acceleration in the digitization of access to online information. There has also been an increased misinformation and fake news, which can lead to stigmatization. In this context, ASPAC would welcome more attention be given towards UNESCO's work in the area of media literacy, freedom of the press and the safety of journalists. This will help provide people with reliable and quality information in time of increasing rumors.

### **Chairperson**

12. ASPAC would like to underline the increasing importance of UNESCO's contribution in many cross-cutting issues such as climate change, gender equality and human rights. We appreciate the Director General's effort and consistency in executing programs and budgets agreed in 39 C/5, so that they are aligned with UNESCO's strategic objectives.
13. We also appreciate the Secretariat efforts to strengthen communication and cooperation with Member States, in dealing with important issues such as the Mid-Term Strategy 2022-2029, organizational reform, increasing UNESCO's visibility and increasing the impact of UNESCO's programs on Member States.
14. ASPAC encourages UNESCO to continue its effort to effectively and constructively overcome financial and human resource constraints, through the Integrated Budget Framework, Structure Financing Dialogue, Resource Mobilization Strategy and program rationalization through Stage-3 of Strategic Transformation. This process will help UNESCO to carry out its mandate by maximizing the utilization of the existing resources.
15. ASPAC also appreciates UNESCO's initiative in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak by holding a *Virtual Meeting of Education Minister* and UNESCO's readiness to assist affected Member States through *Distance Learning Program* for students who are unable to attend the school.
16. We also appreciate the convening of the virtual dialogue between 130 Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Culture who shared their policy and best practices to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural sector.
17. In closing, ASPAC stands ready to positively contribute to achieving our common goals through the spirit of multilateralism, solidarity and partnership. We encourage regular constructive dialogues, best practices and knowledge sharing and intellectual exercise among member states to enhance global solidarity and achieve collective resilience in facing current and future challenges.

Thank you