

**National Statement by H.E. Kazi Imtiaz Hossain
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Bangladesh for UNESCO
209th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board
Plenary Debate: Paris, 2 July 2020**

**Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madam Director General,
Excellencies, dear Colleagues**

We are meeting at an extremely critical time in our lives. Covid - 19 pandemic has wrought havoc across the world. Thousands of invaluable lives have been lost. We fear many more will be. I convey our deepest condolences to the bereaved families and express strong solidarity with our fellow member states in their fight against Covid-19.

2. We align ourselves with the Statement **to be made** Indonesia on behalf of Group IV

3. The pandemic is not mere a health crisis - it is **a human crisis**. It has challenged the humanity as never before impacting every aspects of our lives everywhere. But the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies are the hardest hit. The crisis threatens to reverse hard-won development gains and hamper progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **UNESCO's support is most needed in these countries and for the most vulnerable and most affected people.**

4. Bangladesh is making its best efforts to cope with this unprecedented health and economic crisis. The Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has committed nearly 3.7 per cent of GDP

amounting to US\$ 12 billion (US\$ 11.7 billion) in several stimuli and recovery packages to address the crisis. A key strategy in our Covid response is to "*leave no one behind*".

5. School and university closures in my country have kept over 41 million students and youth out of the classroom impacting on their learning and development. To cope with the adverse impacts of the pandemic, we have adopted *COVID-19 Response Plan* for Education Sector which provides a framework of strategies and interventions for the school education system.

5. Our Ministry of Education was quick to lay out remote learning and distance education programme delivered through Electronic Media, Mobile, Radio and Internet Platforms. Madame Director General has highlighted the perils of digital divide. In our effort to maintain continuity of education, we faced multiple challenges in rolling out a robust, equitable and inclusive distance learning programme, most notable being limited access to and high cost of internet connectivity, lack personal computer or tab for every student across the country. The impact of the crisis on cultural sector has been equally profound. Government is providing financial aid to 5000 artists from across the country.

6. In this context we acknowledge the policy design support by the UNESCO Dhaka Office particularly its digital campaign #beCreative which has connected the public with artists and cultural professional digitally during the crisis.

Mr. Chairperson,

7. The scale and magnitude of the pandemic is so much so that its impact is going to be felt for years to come. This session of the Executive

Board is not a "business-as-usual" session. We have a special responsibility to make sure that UNESCO can effectively carry out its responsibility to address the challenge it is confronted with. In this context, I would like to share a few observations:

- I thank Director General and her entire team for the organization's timely response to the crisis. You deserve our special commendation to implement the mandate of the Organization in most challenging times.
- The pandemic has profoundly disrupted global education landscape. An exceptionally large number of children and youth are deprived of education, resulting in long term impact on their learning and development. We therefore need to prioritize the policy and implementation of remote/ distance learning. Access to online learning, digital inclusion of children and youth to education should remain a top priority for UNESCO.
- This session will consider several strategies such as on resource mobilization youth and adult literacy (2020-2025) and few others. UNESCO needs to reposition the strategies considering the crisis and its future impacts.
- The Strategic Transformation process, we believe, take on board the lessons learn from the crisis to better position UNESCO to meet the future challenges.
- UNESCO should undertake a rapid impact assessment of the situation particularly in the developing countries and small island developing states. We need to know the impact the pandemic has and will have on existing programmes and activities of the organization to better respond to the need at country level.

- UNESCO should 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.
- We encourage the organization to carefully reflect on the lessons learned; to explore how Covid-19 is shaping its programmes and activities and to continue to assess the effectiveness of its approaches and interventions going forward. I call UNESCO to further strengthen emergency preparedness, needs assessments and response planning.
- Covid-19 provides an opportunity for UNESCO to expand its partnerships with the private sector, in new areas, and with innovative approaches to overcome the impacts of the crisis and to build back better. We applaud the initiative Global Education Coalition to bring together all stakeholders to support continuity of education.

Finally, Mr. Chair,

8. Several initiatives have been taken and programmes launched during this period where Secretariat could not obtain inputs from the Member States in the absence of appropriate legal mechanism to do so during confinement. We are heartened that a set recommendation on the working methods for a virtual session of the Executive Board will be approved at this session. We record our appreciation to the informal working group for these recommendations. Henceforth, the Board will be in a position to hold its sessions online should it be needed. This will allow the Board to carry out its mandated functions of oversight and decision-making in the event *in-person* meeting is impracticable.

Distinguish colleagues,

9. 17 March was the 100th birth anniversary of our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. UNESCO is associated in the celebration of the birth centenary. We had to postpone the celebration due to the lockdown. We look forward to your participation in the celebration later during the year.

Mr. Chair

Excellencies, dear colleagues

10. The pandemic has reminded us that how interconnected our world has become and how much our lives and destinies are intertwined. In many senses, the pandemic is a litmus for the humanity. No one country can deal with this global crisis all by itself. More than ever before, we need the solidarity, the resolve and collective strength of the humanity to effectively win over this unprecedented crisis of our lifetime and build a better, fairer, inclusive, and sustainable future for all.

11. I thank you.