

Brazilian Speech 209th Session of the Executive Board

Mme. Director-General,
Mr. President of the Executive Board,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Dear colleagues,

This session of the Executive Board takes place in a very unique time. And I would like to stress the importance of holding it today, despite the difficulties

It was not an easy path that led us here, but this organization, once again, has shown great resilience and capacity to adapt amid a major crisis, displaying the same flexibility and resourcefulness that allowed it to gain some breathing room and to approve its budget in the recent past.

I believe UNESCO emerges from this crisis strengthened and its leadership unchallenged. And that gives us the legitimacy to think ahead.

We are navigating uncharted waters. Despite all the uncertainty lying ahead, it gives us an opportunity of reinventing ourselves and sketching a new future. To a new world, we must trace new paths. UNESCO is more important than ever.

To accomplish our task, we should avoid the fragmentation of our initiatives and promote greater synergy between the different sectors of UNESCO, and between headquarters and Field Offices. Without losing sight of the specificities of our regional and national branches, our action should be seen as one.

Mr. President,

We are all aware of the unprecedented financial restraints lying ahead of us. So preparing the future also means UNESCO needs to engage with new partners. Voluntary contributions can reinforce UNESCO's capacity to act and should not be avoided. Instead, we must strike a balance between voluntary and regular contributions – always bearing in mind the multilateral and intergovernmental character of this organization.

But if partners are to engage with us, we must deliver palpable outcomes. We must be clear about our goals, transparent about our means and make our actions visible. When we do that, as in the case of the recently launched Global Educational Coalition, results appear.

Developing new inclusive digital learning tools is a priority, alongside the focus on the quality of education. However, we must bear in mind that at least half of the students worldwide haven't access to online tools and that we still have a long way to go in addressing persistent challenges such as illiteracy and school drop-out. We must look forward, but leaving no one behind.

Culture, undeniably, was the first major victim of COVID-19. Paradoxically, it was culture – books, films, music – that allowed so many to face the crisis. UNESCO must, more than ever, think about how to prepare the creative sector and the people behind

it to a new post-pandemic era. We should aim at multisectorial and integrated training programmes so as to bolster capacities and build up new skills.

Needless to say, science is the key to overcome the current crisis. UNESCO's Recommendation on Open Science is an opportunity to strengthen Member States' scientific systems and to bridge the scientific and technological gaps between countries, including the digital one.

Digital technologies got us through the crisis, amplifying communication and facilitating international cooperation. But they have also intensified inequalities and injustices and spread hate speeches and fake news. In Brazil, the issue has become central to public debate, both in Congress and among members of civil society.

Democratizing the access to these technologies should be a priority of UNESCO, alongside the strengthening of its capacity to fight fake news and hate speeches, particularly racism.

Artificial Intelligence may be the tool to reach those goals. It should be designed to abide by ethical parameters, including the ROAM principles.

Still regarding science, I should like to add that Brazilian scientists are doing their part. Brazil has joined the University of Oxford efforts to develop the COVID-19 vaccine and is the second country, just after the UK, to test the new vaccine on human beings.

The pandemic affects all of us. We shall keep working together to overcome this crisis and our common challenges, assuring that UNESCO keeps making a difference in the world.

Thank you very much.