



209th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board

29 June to 10 July 2020

ELECTORAL GROUP V (A) STATEMENT

BY

H.E. Mr. Henok Teferra,
Ambassador of Ethiopia and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO,
VICE-CHAIR GROUP V (A)

Chairperson of the General Conference,

Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Madam Director-General,

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

1. On behalf of Africa Group, allow me at the outset to pay tribute to our elder brother and pillar of our Group, the late Professor Manda Kizabi, former Deputy Permanent Delegate of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who contributed so much to our Group and to UNESCO in general. May his soul rest in eternal peace!
2. I also would like to express my deepest condolences to the Government, the People of Burundi and the bereaved family on

1, Rue Maitlis 75015 Paris

dl.ethiopia@unesco-delegations.org TEL: 0033145683462 / 61 FAX: 0033147823145



the passing of H.E. PIERRE NKURUNZIZA, President of the Republic of Burundi.

3. I want to also express my sincere condolences to all those who have lost loved ones at UNESCO Delegations and Secretariat as a consequence to COVID-19 and convey my wishes for quick recovery to those who have been affected by the pandemic and are undergoing treatment.
4. Africa Group warmly congratulates the Chairperson of the Executive Board for his leadership in ensuring the holding of this session under challenging circumstances.
5. Our Group highly commends the Director-General and the entire Secretariat for the measures taken so far and for the work carried out in proactive manner to meet the exigencies of the current difficult situation.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

6. Allow me to draw your attention to Agenda Item 32 of our session. With a view to contributing to the re-conceptualization of Global Priority Africa, our Group has presented Item 32 that seeks to positively engage UNESCO Member States and our Secretariat in a reflection leading to a new vision of Priority Africa within the Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4).
7. We are strongly convinced that time is ripe for the dialogue that informs the preliminary proposals by the Director-General for the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5. Building on lessons learnt and expectations for the future, we are confident that with your

1, Rue Maitlis 75015 Paris

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support we can elaborate a new programme that responds to the needs of African Member States and strengthens UNESCO Field Network in Africa.

8. We highly appreciate the efforts of the PAX Sector to forge new partnerships in support of Priority Africa activities and in the provision of strategic guidance for the implementation of the programme activities of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa.
9. In particular, we note with appreciation the organisation of the first edition of the Pan African Forum for the Culture of Peace “*Biennale of Luanda*”, in cooperation with the Government Angola and the African Union.

Madam Director-General,

10. **In Education**, Africa Group commends the great effort you and your team have deployed in a proactive manner to support our efforts to respond to challenges of COVID-19. In particular, Africa welcomes UNESCO’s response to the pandemic through the initiation of a Global Covid-19 Coalition aimed at supporting countries to respond to the educational needs with a focus on improving connectivity, teacher empowerment and girls.
11. Likewise, we call upon UNESCO to continue its support for African countries in their efforts to ensure that hard-won gains in schooling for vulnerable groups are not eroded and that girls, students with disabilities and those living in remote and pastoral

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areas return to school as soon as possible, bearing in mind the post-COVID-19 environment.

12. We recognize the Secretariat's continuous efforts to strengthen its cooperation with the Africa Union for effective implementation of SDG4-Education 2030. Education remains the key centrepiece for the achievement of the SDGs in Africa as we enter the last decade of implementation.
13. We note that coordination of SDG4 in Africa remains a challenge and call on the prioritization of SDG4 Coordination Mechanisms in Africa, notably regarding SDG4 and the AU Continental Education Strategy (2016-2025) and their linkages with the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.
14. The global Covid-19 pandemic is still on the rise on our continent with educational institutions remaining closed. To meet the challenges of the pandemic, African governments should not be made to choose between saving lives or providing essential services and honouring their debt obligations. The continent is united in calling for cancellation of debt and the global community should hear this call if global solidarity and multilateralism still have a meaning.
15. Lastly, Africa welcomes the Futures of Education Commission initiative with strong participation of Africa for the development of resilient education systems that can stand shocks, like the one we are going through at present, and reaffirmation of education as a public good in the 21st century.

1, Rue Mollat 75015 Paris

dl.ethiopia@unesco-delegations.org TEL: 0033145683462 / 61 FAX: 0033147833145



16. **In Science**, Africa welcomes the focus on the promotion of scientific research and innovation through initiative and the application of science-based integrated approaches for SDGs.
17. Africa calls on the strengthening of the programmes relating to the basic sciences by fostering the uptake and application of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).
18. Our Group notes with concern the resources limitations of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, in view especially of its role in the implementation Plan for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
19. **In Culture**, Africa commends the Secretariat for the integrated approach to program design and implementation that creates synergies between conventions and programs.
20. Cultural activities have been highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly with the closure of world heritage sites, the increase in looting and poaching, and the slowdown in the creative industry. We urge UNESCO to monitor the impact of the crisis and assist Member States in implementing appropriate mitigation measures.
21. Africa calls on strengthened collaboration between the World Heritage Centre and the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) based in South Africa for the protection, preservation and enlisting of Africa's cultural and natural heritage.



22. Lastly, in line with Agenda 2063 of the Africa Union on repatriation of all African cultural heritage, Africa urges Member States and the Secretariat to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.
23. Finally, on **Geographical Distribution** of staffing at UNESCO, our Group expresses its concern over Africa's under-representation and wishes to request the Director-General to find ways to address the situation in line with the prevailing rules in the United Nations System.

Thank you!