

National Statement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at UNESCO's 209th Executive Board H.C. Wesseling, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to UNESCO

Mr. President,
Mme Director General,
dear colleagues,

I know that there are more than 30 items on our agenda, which will force us to discuss many procedural, programmatic and financial matters. But let me start on a reflective note. After all, this is not a run-of-the-mill session of the Executive Board. We are in Room 1, we are wearing masks and we are sitting meters apart from each other. The COVID-19 crisis has had an immense impact on our societies. We have all learned lessons from the crisis. Let me share a few of those lessons my country has learned as they pertain to the work of UNESCO.

First, the crisis has confronted us with the globalized world's interconnectedness. A virus that would have remained local five centuries ago, has now spread throughout the world in a matter of months. Because the challenges that we face are global, the response has to be global as well. This leads us to the realization that we need more multilateralism, instead of less. We need a strong UN-system, and a strong UNESCO within this system. We need a UNESCO that is committed to a human rights approach.

Second, the COVID-crisis has shown the importance of science, knowledge sharing and transparency. We appreciate the lead role UNESCO took in bringing ministers of Science together in a virtual manner to address the COVID-19 crisis. This has increased our resilience and our capacity to find each other more quickly, to foster scientific cooperation and common values. For the same reason, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain a strong supporter of Open Science and Ethics in Artificial Intelligence. Because without a clear ethical recommendation, we will witness growing inequality and societies that will lose their grip on disruptive technological developments. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is committed to UNESCO as a normative organization.

In the field of education, we highly value its monitoring role and the data collection, and through this the improvement of the quality of educational programs and inclusion.

In the field of culture and cultural heritage we thank UNESCO for setting up a worldwide exchange on culture and the COVID crisis, as well as supporting MS in fulfilling its tasks in these difficult times. As a member of both the intangible cultural heritage committee and of the trade in cultural goods committee the Netherlands remains an active supporter of UNESCO's role in safeguarding cultural heritage.

Three, we have once more witnessed that Freedom of Expression is a precious commodity. The COVID-crisis brought forth a wave of fake news and disinformation. Freedom of expression, promotion of independent media, access to information and safety of journalist are priorities for the Netherlands and the active leading role of UNESCO in this field is very important to us. That is why we will remain closely connected with the Communication and Information sector. Also I would like to take this moment to mention that the World Press Freedom Conference 2020, organized by UNESCO and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, will take place on 9 and 10 December in a new innovative format, merging digital and in-person elements. Sessions will be broadcast from the World Forum in The Hague and multiple other locations around the world. The purpose of the WPFC will be: to convene a community that aims to improve press freedom around the world, to learn and inspire

each other, to set political agendas and to take action together.

This year we will also celebrate the 40 years anniversary of the IPDC program. As long time donor and member of the IPDC, we see the importance of the program and its potential to mobilize extra resources and use its rapid response mechanism to address emergencies and effectively respond to the global media crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

And four, the crisis showed once more that women are pivotal pillars of our societies and that they are affected more by this and other crises. Therefore, we need to keep gender equality high on the multilateral agenda. The Netherlands commends UNESCO's initiative to set up the online women's future forum and we will remain outspoken defenders of Gender Equality as a global priority for UNESCO.

Mister chair, madam director-general, esteemed colleagues, The Netherlands is honored to be a member of the Executive Board of UNESCO. We will try to reflect the diversity of all of the countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, that is Aruba, Curacao, Sint-Maarten, and The Netherlands. And we will do our best to represent the BENELUX, since we are a strong supporter of rotation in the Board and view our seat as a rotating responsibility we proudly share with Belgium and Luxembourg.

Last but not least, the Netherlands is committed to making UNESCO Crisis Resilient. We greatly appreciate the diligence and care with which the African Member States in particular have proceeded to try to enable online deliberations. Africa has set a good example for how UNESCO member states can prepare for a future in which regular crises might be the new normal.

Thank you mister chair.