

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

Let me start by thanking you Mr. President for your sincere efforts to ensure the continuity of the work of the Executive Board during these difficult times. We also extend our appreciation to the Director General and the Secretariat for keeping UNESCO relevant in face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is no doubt that this pandemic is a challenge for the entire humanity. Its impact on a globalised and interconnected world is unprecedented. In this global crisis, we must have international solidarity and cooperation. Once again the need for collective action and multilateral approach is being felt. UNESCO and its governing bodies must respond through innovative solutions and joint efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid 19 on core areas of its competence.

Mr. President,

We must all draw some satisfaction on the holding of this session today. The Executive Board membership in coordination with the Secretariat was able to overcome administrative, legal and technical challenges for us to meet today. However, the nature of our debates and discussions of the past few months do require some introspection as well. We must carefully analyze our responses and our positions. We must be constructive and be ready to adapt our working methods to be able to handle future emergencies.

Covid-19 crisis is far from over. As warned by the WHO, we may see a second or third wave in the coming months. And there could be other unforeseen situations which prevent us from meeting in presentia. It is, therefore, imperative that the Governing Bodies of UNESCO are equipped with the requisite tools for virtual sessions, should circumstances require so. In this respect, we appreciate the work done by the Working Group chaired by Ambassador Qazi of Bangladesh and urge all members to demonstrate constructive and flexible approach so we can adapt the current rules and procedures for continuation of our work.

Mr. President,

In this unparalleled crisis, it is essential for all of us to uphold the principles and values of our constitution. We must work together to promote peace, tolerance and respect for diversity and universal human rights, and reject any form of racism, discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice. It is, therefore sad that in some parts of our world, there are people and communities whose fundamental rights are being curbed in a systematic and brutal manner. In violation of international law, they are subjected to months long lockdowns and curfews, not due to any pandemic, but due to exclusionary and flawed policies. Facing untold miseries, these people have no access to schools and medical care. Their right to speak and assembly is being denied. Their very existence is threatened. This is humanity at its worst.

It is equally unfortunate that few governments are also exploiting this health crisis to stigmatize some ethnic and religious minorities in their countries. Such policies and tendencies need to be rejected as they are against the principles and values of UN Charter and international humanitarian law.

Mr. President,

We are pleased to see the report on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Action Plan in the current Session. We call for a more integrated and robust Action Plan in UNESCO's Mid-Term Strategy 41 C/4 and its Programme and Budget 41 C/5. Pakistan is also humbly contributing towards UNESCO's strategy for the SIDS by offering annual scholarships, to reinforce their human and institutional capacities through education.

Mr. President,

We welcome Director General's report on the activities of SESAME, the International Centre for Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East. Pakistan is one of the founding members of SESAME. Both SESAME and International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy are the brain child of Pakistani Nobel Prize Laureate Abdus Salaam. We thank the government of Jordan for hosting SESAME and call upon members of UNESCO to become actively engaged in research activities at SESAME to foster and promote science diplomacy.

Mr. President,

We further welcome DG's initiative of organizing online ministerial dialogue on Covid-19 and Open Science in March this year. Participating in the event, our Minister for Science and Technology pleaded for enhanced scientific collaboration and urged the importance of knowledge sharing as a pre-condition for open science. Pakistan Academy of Sciences actively contributed to the Jakarta Statement of Action on Open Science to strengthen evidence-based policy actions for managing Covid-19 and other emergency challenges. In line with Pakistan's advocacy of Science Diplomacy, we re-iterate our call for North-South as well as South-South collaboration.

Mr. President, dear colleagues,

In these unprecedented times, it is vital that at UNESCO we continue our dialogue and collective action in the spirit of multilateralism. Let us continue to build mutual trust and collaboration and strive to achieve the ideals of UNESCO. In this respect, Pakistan will always play an active and constructive role.

Thank you.