

## **PHILIPPINES**

**National Statement by  
H.E. Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro  
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate  
209<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO Executive Board  
2 July 2020**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,  
Mr. President of the General Conference,  
Madame Director-General,

75 years ago the United Nations was established as a framework for international cooperation to promote peace, security and development. UNESCO was created at the same time because it was determined that peace must be built on the foundations of education, science, and culture to take lasting hold. While large-scale military conflicts have abated, allowing for economic and social development in previously colonized countries of the South, new global threats have emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are aware of the dangers of international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change and natural disasters, the disruptive nature of ICT, biotech and artificial intelligence. But the coronavirus, a microscopic threat, caught us off guard and has kept us on our knees. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our international system, with dire consequences on human life and things we took for granted: school, work, shopping, travel, shaking hands.

The Philippines takes this opportunity to express again its profound condolences to all victims and solidarity with Member States.

No country can face this challenge alone. But many countries are left to their own devices, and it brings to the fore the need for enhanced multilateral cooperation and global governance. The pandemic has severe impacts on the SDGs and aggravates social tensions and inequalities. For instance, lack of technological capacities and internet connectivity have become even greater obstacles for developing countries to ensure the right to education for millions of students and their families.

In the Philippines, our Department of Education has implemented “blended” education packages, using both ICT and traditional learning approaches, as well as television and radio, to provide educational materials to students and teachers.

And so, while we acknowledge the formation of the Global Education Coalition, we would appreciate more comprehensive information on its terms of reference, projects and procedures: how are activities determined, what governance and coordination mechanisms are in place, and how can Member States help shape the policies and programs of this initiative so that it can address our interests and concerns? We had requested for terms of reference of major initiatives launched during the last months, and hope these can be provided to Member States soonest.

The Executive Board has a mandate under the Constitution to provide oversight over implementation by the Director-General of the programme and budget approved by the General Conference. Indeed, we are surprised that it has taken UNESCO so much time before its Governing Bodies have been able to pronounce on the substance of the pandemic, unlike the General Assembly, ECOSOC and even the Security Council in New York. We must take an honest look at ourselves and the manner in which we conduct our business. It should no longer be, “business as usual.”

We call on Member States to start engaging in more constructive dialogue and cooperation with a view to ensuring the independence, impartiality and balance of UNESCO as an intergovernmental organization. Trust has to be built on mutual respect and adherence to the spirit and letter of our rules and regulations, with open minds to reform what can be improved for strengthening integrity, inclusiveness, effectiveness and added-value.

We firmly believe that programs have to be less donor-driven, and more needs-driven. Capacity-building for the most vulnerable, without more conditionalities. Hence, self-assessment of results and targets has to be complemented with evidence-based analysis from Member States and beneficiaries. We also think that certain activities and initiatives have to be pursued with a comprehensive approach, taking into account the diversity of opinions on sensitive matters, such as freedom of expression, justice and the rule of law.

It is time to overcome politicization and re-orient our vision and energy towards making real, measurable differences in people's lives. Let us be guided by this principle. Hence, our governance must be inclusive, responsive and reflect the interests of all, not just a chosen few. The future of UNESCO depends on this paradigm shift.

The Philippines is doing its part to support UNESCO, by hosting expert meetings of the IOC Western Pacific Sub-Commission and engaging in partnerships for local sustainable development in its Biosphere Reserves. Only by working together can we emerge from the COVID crisis stronger and more resilient.

We have an opportunity to renew our common destiny as one human race, ever so punctuated by this pandemic. What hurts one of us, can eventually hurt all of us. Let us make this a source of inspiration to build a better tomorrow, today.

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