

Address by Ms Róża Karlikowska, *Chargé d'affaires a.i.*,
Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Poland to UNESCO

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*Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies,*

It is my great honour and pleasure to take part in the Plenary Debate during the first regular session of this Executive Board with Poland as its member.

We meet in these special circumstances. The sudden global crisis caused by the COVID-19 has changed our perspective in many spheres of private and public life, and it set new challenges for our Organization. It forces us to face the urgent problems of today, but it also warns us to be prepared for potential next crises in the future. And definitely this kind of threats cannot be omitted in the discussion on the future Medium-Term Strategy and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-25.

As for today, our assessment of UNESCO's response to the global health crisis, and its effects in the field of education, culture, sciences, and communication and information, is very positive.

We would also like to thank the Secretariat for all reports presented in item 4 and item 5, especially for the quality of the Programme implementation report and Strategic results report.

We welcome the information on UNESCO's activities in the context of asserting its leadership and coordination role on SDG 4 – Education 2030, including new initiative “Her Education, Our Future”, to empower women and girls, and efforts to place education at the heart of the global development agenda.

We are convinced that in the context of climate change, UNESCO's assistance to better protect biodiversity (especially thanks to the MAB Programme), and in the field of Water management, in particular within the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme, are all the more significant.

In the field of social sciences, we need to stress the importance of activities aiming at fostering intercultural dialogue, increasing women' and youth participation for peace, promoting human rights and ethical principles, and the Futures Literacy initiative.

We appreciate efforts of the Culture Sector to introduce more integrated approach that cuts across all the culture conventions and programmes, and the focus on the emergency issues, as well as on reconstruction, an example of which is the adoption of *the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* in 2018.

We also commend the CI Sector for its work during the last biennium, in particular promoting freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, assisting Member States in building inclusive knowledge societies, promoting media literacy, access to information for all, and the preservation of documentary heritage, in particular within the Memory of the World Programme.

Mr. Chairperson,

We follow with great attention UNESCO's achievements regarding the intersectoral cooperation. We welcome such actions like establishing the intersectoral AI Task Team, cooperation on Media and Information Literacy and Open Science, or cooperation between several programmes in response to climate change, to name a few. Good example of importance of strengthening the intersectoral approach is the initiative "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" with focus on recovery and reconciliation through culture in conflict situations, but also with the education component - the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) by education, addressed not only to students, but also teachers, families and communities.

Regarding Priority Africa we welcome UNESCO's capacity-building activities, in particular within flagship initiatives on harnessing the power of culture for sustainable development and peace and on promoting freedom of expression and media development.

We appreciate information on efforts to implement Gender Equality Priority across all sectors and programmes, and on the gender balance when it comes to UNESCO staff, also at management level.

However, in our view there is still room for improvement in terms of enhancing intersectoral and internal cooperation within the sectors. We would also like to stress the importance of continuing efforts to strengthen UNESCO's position within the UN System. In this context I would also like to mention the constant need to achieve better visibility, and broader awareness of UNESCO's mandate and actions. While we noticed significant progress regarding the social media presence, the UNESCO website still needs to be rebuilt and updated.

Let me also stress the special role of National Commissions in better implementation of UNESCO's programmes and values at national level, but also the role of other UNESCO networks.

We see the regional cooperation as an important dimension of strategic transformation, including the harmonization of the UNESCO reform with the reform of the UN development system and the ongoing reform of UNESCO field offices.

Poland also supports expert involvement in the UNESCO works, especially when technical knowledge is required or given group is concerned. That applies for instance to the "Futures of Education" Initiative and Geoparks Programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of COVID-19 crisis, the relevance of UNESCO's mandate is confirmed with a new strength, especially in such areas as: universal access to high-quality education, knowledge and culture; human rights and ethical reflection on social, and technological changes, including AI; promoting solidarity, dialogue, and respect for cultural diversity; countering disinformation; and naturally, protection of heritage in all its forms.

The current crisis made this Executive Board rather a chamber than symphony orchestra, but also shows how crucial is our personal involvement. Therefore, let me end by quoting words by Pope John Paul II, whose 100th anniversary of birth is one of the UNESCO anniversaries this year, addressed directly to the Executive Board's Representatives forty years ago, and exactly 100 sessions ago, the words which I believe apply also to us: "Your personal contribution Ladies and Gentlemen, is important, it is vital. It lies in the correct approach to the problems, to the solution of which you dedicate your service. My final word is the following. Do not stop. Continue. Continue always".

Thank you.