

National Statement of Turkey
209th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board
3 July 2020

Mr President of the General Conference,
Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madame Director-General,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As stated by several other Member States, the 209th Session of the Executive Board is taking place under circumstances which can be described as historical. After more than three months of postponement, an unprecedented period of confinement, a virtual 6th Special Session, extensive deliberations and exhausting uncertainty, we have succeeded to convene a regular session of the Executive Board. Throughout this process, Mr Chairperson, your leadership has been important and instrumental.

Over the past months, we have been debating intensively UNESCO's response to the crisis caused by Covid-19 pandemic. As Members of the Executive Board who are mandated to ensure proper and effective functioning of this Governing Body even in difficult times, we have been considering necessary and possible measures in order to continue our work uninterruptedly and seriously under any circumstances.

In our view, during this pandemic, one of the most important lessons learned for us as Executive Board Members was the need of developing immediate solutions and taking necessary decisions for the smooth and efficient functioning of the Organization at all times as we cannot rule out the possibility of new crisis in the period ahead. To this end, we have undertaken an important work for our Organization by drafting and putting in place a basis for holding virtual meetings. This, however, has to be considered as a work in progress.

A second very important lesson learned was the continued relevance of multilateralism and the critical role of international organizations in the global system. The pandemic has once again highlighted the importance of multilateral cooperation. It became visible that UNESCO has key roles to play in confronting contemporary challenges and overcoming the impacts of the current crisis. In this context, we thank the Director-General and the Secretariat for their efforts and measures taken to ensure business continuity throughout UNESCO during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Having noted this, we should make further efforts to strengthen the role of UNESCO in its core areas of expertise, to make it more relevant, efficient and transparent by ensuring that its rules and procedures are followed. We must always bear in mind that UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization. Turkey will continue to provide its contributions with this understanding.

Mr Chairperson,

As many predict, the pandemic has the potential to open a new chapter in which the international relations will be approached and handled differently in many ways. In the new era, UNESCO is well-positioned to foster its leading role within the UN System as it can shape the international activities falling under its core mandate. The focus on new areas such as Artificial Intelligence and Futures Literacy may give UNESCO an increased prominence.

In this regard, we also look forward to the success of the ongoing Strategic Transformation. We will soon be starting the preliminary discussion on the Medium Term Strategy 41 C/4 and Programme and Budget 41 C/5. Our deliberations will be crucially important with a view to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals as set out in the UN Agenda 2030. By this discussion we will also be able to reaffirm the high ideals that our Organization has been pursuing.

Mr Chairperson,

We would like to underline one important point about the internal functioning of UNESCO. Recognition of Member States' contributions to this Organization is of key importance. These contributions entail not only financial obligations, but also provision of expertise by Member States.

In this regard, as far as the human resources issues are concerned, we see a continued imbalance and thus reiterate our call that the issue of under-represented or non-represented Member States should be addressed as a priority. Equitable geographical representation is a fundamental principle and it should be applied at all levels of the Organization. Therefore, we once again strongly encourage the Secretariat to be more transparent and accountable during the recruitment process.

Mr Chairperson,

Last but not least: Despite the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we should choose to remember 2020 as the anniversary of milestones and key achievements in UNESCO's history. This year we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the foundation of UNESCO and the 50th anniversary of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. We should spare no efforts to ensure a higher and broader visibility of these important occasions.

Thank you for your attention.