

Zambia's Statement to the 209th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO

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The Chairperson of the Executive Board
The President of the General Conference
The Director-General of UNESCO
Distinguished Representatives to the Board
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Chairperson, please allow me to begin by expressing our deepest condolences to the people of Burundi and Oman on the passing of H.E. PIERRE NKURUNZIZA, President of the Republic of Burundi and the Sultan Qaboos Bin Said respectively.

Zambia would also like to express sincere condolences to the Permanent Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Congo following the death of Professor Kizabi Manda. He will fondly be missed.

I wish to express Zambia's support for the issues to be raised in the Africa Group statement to be delivered by Ethiopia.

Mr Chairperson, I would like to thank you for your untiring efforts and persistence. We are able to have this meeting largely due to your unrelenting resolve in engaging Members of the Board to ensure UNESCO continues to play its role despite the challenges in the past months.

This Executive Board is coming at a time when the world is going through one of the worst experiences ever. COVID 19 has devastated the world; disrupting billion lives across the globe and

threatening the social and economic fabric of communities, nations, institutions and organisations, UNESCO included.

Mr chairperson, as you stated “ the world post COVID 19 is not the world pre COVID” indeed the world has to readjust focus, programmes and budgets to successfully move forward.

UNESCO, as a laboratory of ideas, is best placed to bring answers to many challenges being faced by its Member States in its fields of competence.

The Education sector is experiencing a huge share of challenges of COVID-19. In my country, many schools are still closed and I know this scenario is not only unique to Zambia.

Mr Chairperson, as we consider the education impacts of COVID 19, special consideration should be made for the vulnerable and disadvantaged communities especially the poor girl child in rural areas who may be forced out of school and traded into early marriage to cushion against the family hardships arising from this emergency .

It is highly likely that this pandemic will widen the already existing inequalities between girls and boys.

We thank the Director-General for initiatives put in place so far, the partnerships developed and the support UNESCO is giving to member countries. We appeal to the Global Education Coalition not to leave the out of school girl child behind as they seek to facilitate inclusive remote learning opportunities for the children and youth during this unprecedented education disruption.

Zambia is grateful to UNESCO-China Funds- in -Trust for building ICT capacity for teachers but in as much as the country had capacity to develop a COVID 19 response and recovery plan including distance learning curricula, delivering the education materials to all affected learners was a challenge.

Mr Chairperson, there is unfortunately a large digital divide with learners from Low Income Countries suffering the most. Countries that have managed to ensure learning takes place are those that have well developed digital tools which can be accessed by learners.

As we explore solutions, there is need to leave no teacher behind as they form the backbone of the education system. Teachers need to be motivated and empowered with appropriate knowledge and skills to use technology for the benefit of pupils.

Mr Chairperson, COVID-19 is also a wake-up call to put science on the top of our agenda. UNESCO is the only United Nations Agency with a science in its name.

My country thus wishes to emphasise the need to increase the budget of the Natural Sciences Sector for improved programmes

It is gratifying to note that in the current global emergency, open science has facilitated scientific discovery more rapidly than before. The COVID 19 full genome was published barely a month after the first patient was admitted compared to the five months it took during the SARS epidemic in 2002. UNESCO thus needs to be the lead voice in advocating for open access to scientific knowledge, data sharing and evidence- based policy and also work with Governments to ensure adequate data governance models, standards and sustainable data sharing agreements.

On culture, Zambia wishes to stress the importance of repatriation of stolen culture, heritage and artifacts as formulated in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

Although This year marks the 50th anniversary of this standard setting instrument, cultural property continues to be lost.

In Zambia we believe that our heritage is the heart of our identity and we therefore urge the Secretariat to strengthen the

implementation of the 1970 Convention to curtail looting of national identities.

Mr Chairman, the issue of sustainability of the field network needs deeper reflections. As UNESCO tries to align to the UN reform and make progress in its Strategic transformation, it should not be forgotten that UNESCO's visibility on the ground largely depends on the field architecture. This understanding should inform debate on this item and the best option is one that effectively positions UNESCO closer to country needs, resources and partners.

Mr, Chairperson, let me end by wishing you success as you guide our discussions.

I thank you.