

**Statement of Zimbabwe to the 209<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board presented by H.E Madam Abigail Shonhiwa, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Zimbabwe to UNESCO**

Chairperson of the General Conference,

Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Madam Director General

Excellencies, and dear Colleagues,

Let me from the outset associate my delegation with the statement of Group V(a) presented by the distinguished Ambassador of Ethiopia and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO.

Mr. Chairman, I want to start by expressing my delegation's appreciation and admiration for your relentless efforts and leadership in organizing this unique session of the Executive Board during challenging times. This session is historic in the sense that it is the first time that we are meeting in partly virtual and partly presential settings. We believe that this could be the beginning of the future normal which requires to think outside the box.

I also want to recognize the efforts of the Director General in ensuring UNESCO's co-ordination role during this crisis period. The creation of the Global Coalition for Education which brought key agencies of the United Nations and education partners in the private sector to support national efforts in the Member States is highly commendable. We also appreciate the Sectoral responses to the challenges that COVID-19 has brought on all the areas of UNESCO's mandate.

Mr. Chairman, my delegation has taken note of the reports prepared by the Secretariat for this session.

The achievements reported in the Education sector during the 2018-2019 implementation period are noted. The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis has exposed the inequalities and unpreparedness in our current education systems, raising questions on whether we are on track towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) Education 2030 on time. The lessons that we have learnt

so far from the impacts of the COVID-19 on education require us to consider reconfiguration of our strategies for education in the next Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4). This calls for UNESCO to invest more in programmes on ICTs for Education, capacity building for teachers and innovative materials and methods for distance learning among other things.

Mr. Chairman, the current programme for Natural Sciences resonates very well with our national aspirations to develop a strong scientific research and innovation a base for industrialisation and transformation of our economies. Our education systems are emphasizing the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) at all levels of education. We are concerned however with the low level of funding for the Natural Sciences Sector and would urge UNESCO to deepen resource mobilisation efforts for this important area.

In Culture, we acknowledge the central role that UNESCO plays in the protection of cultural heritage through the cultural conventions. It is very clear that some conventions by their nature, are popular and attract extrabudgetary resources while others struggle to get funding. My delegation is concerned with the increase in illicit trafficking of cultural property and proposes that the secretariat should consider strengthening national capacities for the implementation of the 1970 Convention for the protection of cultural property against illicit trafficking.

We are pleased with the Roadmap for implementing the 2005 Convention in digital environment as this will allow our Creative Cultural Industries to thrive. I am happy to share with you that during this crisis period of COVID-19 there is ongoing collaboration between Zimbabwe and the Regional Office for Southern Africa on the UNESCO *Resiliart* project which is presented every week during the lockdown on the online digital platforms. On its part, the Government of Zimbabwe launched an Arts Development Fund facility aligned to the new Cultural and Creative Industries Strategy, whose thrust is to stimulate production in the CCIs during after the COVID era. Virtual commemorations of National

Culture Week which celebrates the diversity of cultural expressions in Zimbabwe were held from 18 to 23 May 2020 during which arts and culture activities such as photographic exhibitions and musical concerts were live-streamed on social media platforms.

Mr. Chairman, with regards to consideration of item 32 on our present agenda concerning the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa, my delegation urges this session to take into account the recommendations presented by the Africa Group which we have co-sponsored.

Finally, Chairman we believe that the lessons that we are learning from the current health crisis will be used to guide the elaboration of the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4) which is still underway.

I thank you