

Plenary statement of Finland

H.E. Mr Tuomas Tapio, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Finland to UNESCO

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chairperson, Madam Director-General,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Excellencies, Colleagues,

Finland aligns itself with the EU statement.

This Executive Board session is the second one taking place during the COVID crisis. As we have stated previously, it is important that the Board continues to work effectively despite these exceptional circumstances. We reiterate our appreciation for the *working methods for a virtual session* that were agreed at the last Board session. These methods allow us to maintain the integrity of the Agenda, and to organize virtual meetings also in the future, if needed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank UNESCO, on behalf of my Delegation, for its continued and active engagement during the COVID crisis.

One example of that engagement was the recent Global Education Meeting. The GEM was an important effort to strengthen the global commitment for education. The meeting produced a strong outcome document, which highlighted the need to build more resilient, inclusive and gender-responsive societies and education systems.

These are really important questions: Even before the pandemic, the world was facing significant challenges in fulfilling the promise of education as a basic human right. Added to that, it is now estimated that the cost of learning losses due to the COVID pandemic may rise up to 10 percent of the global GDP.

It is essential to ensure that learning continues in all circumstances. Education is not only a universal human right. It is an enabling right for just, equal, and inclusive societies and a key driver of sustainable development.

UNESCO's next Medium Term Strategy has a central role in increasing the organization's impact and global visibility. We are quite pleased with the first outline of the strategy, and think it is a promising basis on which to build. Looking at the document, one can clearly see that the strategic transformation is starting to produce results. We appreciate the fact that the proposal is focused, and is based on an increasingly intersectoral approach.

During these challenging times, we would also like to underline that it is more crucial than ever to implement a Human Rights Based Approach throughout UNESCO's sectors and programmes. Gender Equality -- including the gender diversity approach -- must also remain a transversal Global priority of the Organization.

Furthermore, we welcome that Youth is proposed as a priority group, and that more emphasis has been placed on environmental sustainability and climate action.

Finally, it is highly important that UNESCO continues to actively take part in reforms in the UN system, building on robust Results-Based Management.

Dear colleagues,

Last week, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of UNESCO's IPDC programme, which has a distinct role in the UN system to promote media development, freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

Given the crucial mandate that UNESCO has within the UN system in respect to SDG 16, we expect to hear the clear and determined voice of this Organization in defending freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. Free, independent and pluralistic media is absolutely essential in informing the public and in allowing their access to reliable and verified information. This has been very evident also during the COVID crisis.

Along with journalists and media workers, freedom of expression touches other important areas of UNESCO's mandate. These include artistic freedom and the right to share and enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. We fully support the processes for the recommendation on Open Science and on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

In the COVID situation and in its aftermath, UNESCO must remain at the forefront in its support of open societies, based on democracy and rule of law. Finland, also as the Chair of the Freedom Online Coalition in 2021, strongly supports UNESCO's work in this area.

We wish to thank, once again, the Secretariat for the continued commitment and dedication, and we look forward to fruitful discussions during this session.

Thank you.