

**Speech by Ethiopia at 6<sup>th</sup> Special session of the Executive Board**  
**8 and 9 June 2020**

**Excellency Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board;**

**Excellency the Chairperson of the General Conference;**

**Excellencies and Colleagues, Ambassadors;**

**Madame Director-General;**

The Delegation of Ethiopia thanks you, Mr. Chairperson, for your invaluable work to ensure the holding and success of our Board session. You may count on our Delegation and on Africa Group to leave no stone unturned so that our Special session is crowned with success.

As Vice-chair for Group V (a), we have endeavoured, to the extent possible, to secure a level of consensus among Africa Group on the two items of the session, the working methods and impact of COVID-19.

**I. On Working Method:**

- As Africa, we are of the view that the 209<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board must take place as planned, with physical presence ideally or virtually if need be.
- In this regard, we thank our colleagues, the ambassadors of Switzerland and Morocco, designated as facilitators for their work in trying to help us reach a consensus on the decisions.
- Unfortunately, this consensus could not be reached at this time.
- However, adapting our rules and being ready for an eventual virtual session in the fall is more critical than ever, especially in view of the risks of a return of the pandemic.
- Therefore, as Africa, we reiterate our call for the establishment of an **inter-sessional working group** in order to examine in detail the working methods, composed of member States and the Secretariat and submit proposals for 209<sup>th</sup> session.

**II. On Impact of COVID-19:**

1. We are highly satisfied with both the quality of the report prepared by the Secretariat and the actions undertaken by it in a proactive matter to ensure the continuity of the work of the organization.
2. We commend the Director-General and the Secretariat for its high impactful activities in Africa, in support of member states with a view to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic in UNESCO's areas of competence.

3. In particular, I thank UNESCO for the support availed to Ethiopia based on our government's assessment in open science, cultural asset protection and in education sector.
4. We count on the Secretariat to strengthen its support in the education area thru capacity building for teachers, adapting curricula for distance learning and when the time comes in effecting a successful back to school program, in particular towards disadvantaged kids, especially girls, refugees, kids with disabilities and those leaving in remote and pastoralist areas.
5. Ethiopia's economy is heavily reliant on tourism and the cultural industry. The virtual complete stop of air travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly and durably impacted Ethiopia, with loss of livelihood for low income earners, increased unemployment and loss of critical foreign currency.
6. As the virus recedes in many parts of the world, it is on the increase with the peak of the pandemic yet to come in Africa. If multilateralism has a meaning, African countries need to be supported and supported NOW at the very least thru debt cancellation so that governments don't have to choose between honouring their debt obligations and saving lives or availing essential services such as education.
7. At UNESCO, this means putting Africa as a PRIORITY in the organization's programming and budgeting.
8. As Africa, we believe it is incumbent upon this session of the Board to adopt a Decision on COVID-19. This decision can get the adherence of all countries if it is short and focuses exclusively on the need for multilateralism, international solidarity, and the importance of UNESCO more than ever to carry out its mandate during and in the post-COVID-19 environment.
9. We, therefore, call upon the Board to task the Secretariat with the drafting of a short consensual decision and to circulate it for adoption by member states thru the silence procedure before the end of our current session.

Thank you