

Mr. Chairperson, Madame Director General, distinguished representatives,

Before I begin, considering the time constraints, please allow me to cut short some of the contents of my speech. The full text will be circulated at a later time.

The COVID-19 epidemic has affected people's life in many ways, and we are facing serious challenges in the fields of UNESCO. In these fields, it has been clear that there are challenges for humankind in trying to overcome the COVID-19 and in pursuing for the common welfare of people while constraining further infection. While the world is at the crossroad, UNESCO needs to present workable solutions to the challenges and implement them and further promote its activities with a view to the post-crisis era. It is also critical to proceed with the reforms on relevant conditions that will enable the Organization to advance its steps strongly and steadily in its inherent mandate. From that standpoint, Japan, as a responsible Member State and one of the major donors, is determined to contribute to discussions at the 209 session of the Executive Board.

Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, Japan would like to associate itself with the position of ASPAC as expressed by Indonesia on behalf of the Group.

In the field of education, where the impact of COVID-19 has been and is being directly felt, Japan highly appreciates that, on the initiative of the Secretariat, relevant information have been integrated from and shared among Member States by such measures as collecting and publishing the data on school closures, holding Ministerial meetings, and arranging webinars making full use of relevant networks such as ASPnet. The establishment of the Global Education Coalition, which seeks to ensure learning opportunities for children and students in cooperation with other intergovernmental organisations and businesses, is also highly valued as apt and timely.

In attempting to improve and ensure the quality and opportunity of education in a way that is adapted to the new era, it is required for us to address challenges in relation to "distance learning", i.e. ensuring students' and their family's access to it, improvement of varied resources and infrastructures, and provision of capacity building, amongst others. In this regard, it is imperative for UNESCO to play a coordinative role so that the active support provided by Global Education Coalition will be fully put in place. It also needs to be underlined that the "face-to-face" education remains to be essential, and we therefore should explore effective ways to utilise distance learning in combination with it.

The Futures of Education initiative is of critical importance in envisaging a vision of education in the new era in the aftermath of COVID-19 epidemic. Japan will actively support the initiative including by making use of the Strategic Funds in Trust for

Education, which we expressed its establishment last year. Also, Education for Sustainable Development or ESD is a key concept for the international society in inter-disciplinarily addressing varied challenges that it faces, not just infectious diseases but also others including the climate change, towards the achievement of the SDGs. Japan, as a long-time advocate for ESD, and on the basis of the adoption of ESD for 2030 at the General Conference last year, is determined to cooperate even more vigorously so that the competencies to create a sustainable future will be nurtured.

For UNESCO, who expresses in the Constitution 'the wide diffusion of culture is indispensable to the dignity of man and constitutes a sacred duty which must be fulfilled in the spirit of mutual assistance and concern', the substantial difficulties that artists in the world face are an issue to address now. It is appropriate to continue and further develop measures to promote the arts and to protect artists on the basis of initiatives by the Secretariat such as holding the meetings of cultural ministers and the ResiliArt.

The COVID-19 epidemic poses considerable challenges to the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritages as well as natural heritages. Industries such as tourism that have developed in close relation to such heritages are also in struggle. UNESCO needs to further strengthen its support for them by such measure as sharing good practices that are collected from Member States and providing policy advice and technical assistance. As regards safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, we expect that the experts meeting for a comprehensive review of the inscription mechanisms, which was postponed due to COVID-19, will be held at an appropriate timing. Since Japan was deeply engaged in the establishment of the 2003 Convention, we will contribute to the undertaking both intellectually and financially.

In this connection, as stated earlier by a Member State, it is essential that any Member State implements in good faith the relevant Decisions and Recommendations of the World Heritage Committee. Japan has been doing this and will continue to do so including undertaking dialogues with parties concerned.

As to our fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property, such illegal activities taking advantage of current world-wide crisis should be appropriately dealt with in accordance with the 1970 Convention, of which we celebrate the 50th anniversary this year.

As to large-scale natural disasters that occur in different parts of the world including Asia and Africa, with the climate change being their causal factor, they are a common challenge that the international society should address in unity, just as the pandemic caused by COVID-19. Further efforts should be made for the disaster risk reduction making full use of UNESCO's expertise and networks across sectors. Japan, with its abundant experience and knowledge, will continue to play a central role in this field including capacity building assistance for Africa and SIDS.

Towards the achievement of SDGs, it is pivotal for us to make sure the development of ocean sciences under the collaboration between varied stakeholders. To that end, Japan is ready to cooperate even further in the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development which starts next year.

The concept of Open Science and efforts based on it will be crucial for humankind in trying to overcome COVID-19 and to shape the future beyond. Steady work is required towards the adoption of a Recommendation at the General Conference next year. Japan will not spare any contribution towards that end.

At the General Conference next year, the adoption of a Recommendation for international standard-setting on the ethics of artificial intelligence or AI will also be an extremely important agenda. Japan will continue to contribute both in intellectual and in financial terms.

The current epidemic of COVID-19 has brought to light issues surrounding communication and information, especially in times of crisis. Japan will continue to be supportive of and to cooperate for efforts towards the improvement of accessibility to correct information and ICT as well as information literacy, and the initiative to ensure the safety of journalists. We also support and contribute to the Global Policy Forum, which addresses a variety of disasters the humans and documentary heritage face.

Mr. Chairperson,

As humanity embarks to surmount the disasters of the virus and to carve out a new era, we are at the pivotal moment to present our strategy to make sure that UNESCO further contributes to the international peace and common welfare of humankind by performing its inherent mandate. It is also required to ensure an appropriate form of governance, or the embodiment of multilateralism under an appropriate framework. From such perspective, Japan strongly supports and cooperates for the initiative by the Director General towards the Strategic Transformation and institutional modifications that bolster it.

Furthermore, reforms towards the depoliticisation of UNESCO need to be further propelled. As regards the Memory of the World, we should maintain and accelerate our momentum towards the achievement of the comprehensive review of the programme, while making sure that non-contested nominations are expeditiously inscribed based on the outcome of the review. Only then are we able to fulfil the original objectives of the programme to ensure the preservation of and the access to the common documentary heritage of humankind. It should be emphasised that there is a need to strictly refrain from bringing in with political intention disputes between specific Member States, especially to the programmes that entail nominations. In addition, for restraining such political use, it is crucial to make sure that any process

should not go further in contested items when there is no consent of concerned parties. Japan is determined to contribute to such discussions even further.

As we continue to be facing the worst crisis in the postwar world and exceptional challenge to human beings, we need to demonstrate the true value of UNESCO now. It is high time for us to fully exercise our capability and Japan will cooperate to the fullest extent possible to that end.

[END]