

Statement by. H.E. Ma. Theresa P. LAZARO
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Philippines
Special Session of the Executive Board
8 June 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madame Director-General,

At the outset, the Philippines wishes to extend its solidarity to all Member States and the Secretariat, and pays its profound respects to all those who have lost their lives during this crisis.

The COVID19 pandemic reveals how interconnected our societies are. What hurts one of us, can harm all of us. Our governments have been forced to learn and adapt to the situation as it evolves. The toll is vast and far-reaching. The pandemic is widening the gaps -- deepening divisions based on race and resources, fueling rage and instability. There is great risk of many more being left behind.

Only through enhanced international cooperation and multilateral approaches can we hope to achieve fair and inclusive solutions. In a post-pandemic environment, the global community must work to keep channels open, build trust and renew faith in the UN and UNESCO. At the same time, international organizations need to prove their efficiency and effectiveness by delivering concrete results where it matters the most.

In this regard, my delegation supported the convening of this virtual special session because we believe firmly that it is in times of crisis when governance is needed the most. In fact, we have already been quite delayed. If the Security Council, General Assembly, ECOSOC, the World Health Assembly, and IAEA Board of Governors can all continue their work under the current circumstances and make the appropriate decisions needed, then the UNESCO Executive Board should be no exception. At the end of the day, we are the same Member States serviced by secretariats that belong to one common UN system.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Secretariat to respond to the crisis in a timely manner, but the views and inputs of Member States should be sought before initiatives are launched, to ensure that they reflect the intergovernmental character of the Organization and all Member States clearly understand the objectives, parameters, composition, and programmatic and financial implications of the various initiatives. While we appreciate the information meetings being conducted, these are not substantive meetings that produce or amend decisions or guide implementation. We also do not see the online sectoral dialogues with Ministers replacing statutory meetings.

Hence, we thank you Chairperson, for convening this virtual special session, to ensure that the voices of Member States can be heard and the Constitutional prerogatives of the Executive Board fulfilled. We therefore hope that as outcomes of this session, the Board will agree on procedures to ensure continuity of its work and reaffirm the intergovernmental nature of the Organization. We thank the Facilitators for their tireless efforts in this regard.

While consensus has not yet been achieved on the draft decisions, we believe with extra effort, flexibility and good will on all sides, the adoption of meaningful draft decisions at this virtual special session is still possible. We support constructive attempts to bridge positions and call for enhanced mutual respect and trust among Member States and the Secretariat as a matter of urgency, in conformity with the lofty ideals and purpose of UNESCO.

Thank you, Chairperson.