

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Mr President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

We join other Member States in emphasizing the necessity and importance of this Special Session. In this spirit, we sincerely thank you, Mr. Chairperson, for your initiative to convene this session in such a difficult time.

We also thank Madame Director-General and the Secretariat for the efforts and measures taken to ensure business continuity throughout UNESCO during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Chairperson,

This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of UNESCO.

The founders of our Organization did an incredible work by drafting UNESCO's Constitution from scratch in only a few months after the 2nd World War. This Constitution and the Rules of Procedures have been the most important foundation of our intergovernmental work for the last 75 years. And they remain so.

Over the past weeks, we have been debating intensively on UNESCO's response to the crisis caused by Covid-19 pandemic. As Members of the Executive Board, we are mandated to ensure proper and effective functioning of this Governing Body even in difficult and uncertain times. We must take all the necessary measures to continue our work seriously under any circumstances.

We are of the opinion that there must be lessons learned and a response to COVID-19 by us, the Executive Board. The most important lesson learned in our view is that unfortunately we are not able to continue our work as Executive Board if a meeting in praesentia is not possible due to extraordinary circumstances.

Therefore, we need to develop immediate solutions and take necessary decisions since we do not know how the situation caused by the pandemic will evolve. We need to have this arrangement for the smooth and uninterrupted functioning of the Organization in the future, as we cannot rule out the possibility of new crisis situations in the period ahead. As such, we will be doing an important work for our Organization by developing and putting in place a sound basis for holding virtual meetings as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of UNESCO.

With these thoughts in mind, we have examined carefully the documents issued by the Secretariat and by the facilitators, the distinguished Permanent Delegates of Morocco and Switzerland. We shared our suggestions and sought amendments. In this process our guiding principle was to ensure that UNESCO can proceed even in exceptional times. We thank the facilitators very much for their valuable efforts. Unfortunately, a consensus could not be achieved.

At this point, we still wish and hope that during this Special Session we will be able to generate meaningful results which will be remembered as good examples of useful contributions to the effective functioning of the Organization. While we understand the reasoning which lie behind several viewpoints, we have to identify better the imperative, what forces us to do what. UNESCO cannot remain behind other UN agencies and international organizations in terms of working methods under exceptional circumstances.

We believe that the Executive Board can still agree on a reasonable way forward if and when there is a will and willingness.

Thank you for your attention.