

**34<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO**  
**PARIS, 16 OCTOBER-3 NOVEMBER 2007**  
**ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION**  
**OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS, MR AKIS CLEANTHOUS**  
**MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

**UNESCO HQ**

**Monday, 22 of October 2007, Morning Session**

Mr President of the General Conference

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board

Mr Director General

Distinguished delegates,

I would like to begin my address by congratulating the new President of the General Conference, Ambassador George Anastassopoulos upon his election. I am confident that under his wise direction the 34<sup>th</sup> General Conference will have a successful outcome. I would also like to express my congratulations to Mr Burnett on his recent appointment as UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education and wish him all the best in his new post. I extend a warm welcome to Montenegro on its joining and to Singapore on its rejoining our Organization.

Mr President, having passed the threshold into the new millennium, the modern world is facing numerous challenges related to human, social, scientific and environmental concerns. The critical issues of sustainable development, and wise management of the earth's natural resources, to name but a few, are marked as "high priority" on the global agenda.

Cyprus has been strongly supporting UNESCO's initiatives since it became a member-state of the organization in 1961. It has been actively participating in the organization's programmes with strong commitment and will.

With reference to the education sector, our government fully agrees with UNESCO's assertion that education is the key to social and economic development. According to

UNESCO's "Education For All" Global Monitoring Report for 2007, Cyprus figures among the countries which have achieved most of the goals of the EFA Program.

Despite of that, we are currently implementing a coherent and consistent set of reforms, which embrace all stages, from pre-primary to higher education. Our objective is to establish an educational system which will provide all the necessary knowledge and skills to tomorrow's citizens and which will enable them to survive and succeed in today's demanding world.

Furthermore, some important steps in the domain of higher education were recently taken with the establishment of the first private universities in Cyprus and the inauguration of the Cyprus University of Technology. These initiatives fall within the government's goals, of improving opportunities for higher education, both for Cypriots and for overseas students and of making Cyprus a regional center for academic and scientific research.

We consider of particular importance, not only for Cyprus but for the entire Eastern Mediterranean region and the Middle East, the establishment of the Cyprus Institute, a technology oriented, non-governmental, non-profit Research and Educational Institution. The Cyprus Institute which has been established by an extraordinary illustrious Board of International personalities aspires to address regional problems of global significance. Of particular importance to UNESCO, is its Science and Technology for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage research Center which has been recently launched in collaboration with a leading French Institution.

It is important to mention also the funds-in-trust project on "Fighting Against Poverty through Human Rights Education" which is co-sponsored by the governments of Andorra, Cyprus, Luxemburg, Monaco, and San Marino. These countries have united their efforts and surpassed any differences in internal procedures in a mutual effort in favour of Niger, within the framework of UNESCO's Africa programme.

In the field of culture, Cyprus has ratified the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and has set a new strategy, which aims to ensure that the right conditions are present for cultural diversity in Cyprus to flourish and to enhance the status of cultural industries as a significant source of revenue and jobs.

In addition, as Minister of Education and Culture, I strongly believe that the respect for cultural diversity and, consequently, the promotion of intercultural dialogue should be established and encouraged, first and foremost, among young people. With this in mind Cyprus hosted the first UNESCO Euro-Mediterranean Youth Forum on "Young People and the Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures, and People". The Forum took place in November 2006 and brought together young delegates from 34 countries from Europe, Africa and the Middle-East. The Forum provided an excellent opportunity for the delegates to exchange ideas, interact and to recognize and accept cultural diversity.

Mr President, our government's interest and sensitivity is on the matter of the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage is indeed of the highest order.

Cyprus ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2006 and has been actively participating in the relevant meetings. The government is currently working on an inventory of Cyprus' intangible cultural heritage.

Several of its archaeological sites and monuments are on the World Heritage list as well as on the European Heritage Label list and our efforts are continuous in endeavouring to protect and preserve as much as possible of our ancestors' legacy. We have achieved high standards in conservation of cultural properties as evidenced by the restoration of the medieval fortifications of Nicosia and a number of churches, mosques, water mills, olive-presses, bridges and houses of traditional architecture.

Through the ratification in 1979 of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) and the ratification, in 2001, of the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1999), our government is trying to re-gain access to the archaeological sites and monuments that are in the occupied area in northern Cyprus. Today, due to the military occupation, our government does not have access to these sites and monuments, leaving them at the mercy of nature's elements or worse, at risk of being deliberately destroyed. There are numerous examples of illegal archaeological excavations as well as trafficking of masterpieces such as Byzantine icons, mosaics, frescoes and other priceless antiquities.

Mr President, our Government is committed to the final settlement of the Cyprus problem. We constantly trying to find a solution and we hope that through the mutual efforts of both communities in the island we can set an example of peace and recotiliation in order to build new and harmonious relations. In this regard, UNESCO's role is of great importance.

Cyprus, already a signatory country of the Copenhagen Declaration on Anti-Doping in Sport, is still working on the text of the International Convention against Doping in Sport in order to ratify it as soon as possible.

May I end by reaffirming my country's strong commitment to the task of building, along with other member-states, a common foundation for cooperation, progress and mutual respect. Let us all strive together under the auspices of UNESCO to pave the way to peace and international security.

Thank you.