

Remarks by the Head of the Georgian Delegation

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Ms. Khatuna Totladze

to the 38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Madame Director General,

Distinguished Delegates to UNESCO,

It is my honor to address you today from this high tribune and to highlight UNESCO's 7 achievements in building peace and sustainable development.

UNESCO's founding principles are more than relevant today, but the challenges that we are facing need even more ambitious steps for implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which strongly emphasizes the role of culture, education, and women empowerment.

Distinguished Delegates,

We share the vision that each country has its own approaches, visions and tools according to their national circumstances to reach sustainable development goals.

At the same time, it is more than obvious that we can effectively move forward only through close international collaboration and enhancing of global and regional partnerships.

In this regard, let me stress the historical importance of the Silk Road that throughout centuries played crucial role not only in economic development of the countries involved, but it also had a great impact on the establishing of cultural exchanges and intercultural dialogue.

We mostly welcome the creation of the UNESCO Silk Road Online Platform that will be great opportunity for global audience to know more about diversity of cultures and peoples along these routes.

“Silk Road Forum”, held in Georgia, in 2015, on the initiative and high patronage of the Prime Minister, was a brilliant opportunity to launch new international initiatives which have the potential to become a resource for development and sustainability that determines well-being of the people.

Empowering women and promoting **gender equality** is one of the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Georgia is particularly committed to this very issue. 2015 has been declared as the Year of Women by the President of Georgia. Furthermore, nearly in two days, International High-Level Conference “Achieving Gender Equality - Challenges and Opportunities in the European Neighborhood” , organized in cooperation with the EU and UN, will start in the capital of Georgia. The Conference will adopt the Tbilisi Declaration with explicit commitment towards advancement of gender equality and women’s rights as an integral part of sustainable development.

We deeply believe that **education** really empowers people, promotes democracy and development. Education can play a crucial role in overcoming violent extremism, the main challenge the Global community is facing today.

Georgia's Government sees **culture** as a driving force for social cohesion and economic prosperity. I am confident, that UNESCO 2005 Convention is a key instrument for developing policies in support of culture. Effective implementation of the Convention is particularly important for us, inter alia, due to the fact that, according EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the Cultural Diversity Convention creates the main framework of cooperation in the sphere of culture between Georgia and the European Union.

UNESCO's Cultural Conventions provide a unique platform not only for safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage of humanity, but for intercultural dialogue and cooperation. Georgia has achieved impressive progress in implementation of Intangible Heritage Convention on national level in terms of improving legislation, launching country-wide inventory and awareness raising activities. We hope that the Intangible heritage list will be further enriched by the new Georgian nominations.

Georgian Government has fostered its collaboration with the World Heritage Center and intensified its efforts to meet all the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee.

Distinguished Delegates,

We firmly condemn the recent barbaric acts of destruction of the cultural heritage sites and welcome the new strategy for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict.

As Madame Director General, has absolutely rightly mentioned in her address to the high-level meeting, held in New York in the frames of the UN General Assembly, “ cultural cleansing seeks to destroy the past, present and future of humanity as a single community.” I am confident that we should stand together to overcome the challenge and I believe that UNESCO can play the crucial role in this regard.

The issue is of utmost importance for my Country, as the Georgian Government is deprived of possibility to preserve the cultural heritage monuments located in Georgia`s occupied territories -Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia. This situation underlines the urgent need for dispatching UNESCO expert mission for the purpose of evaluation the condition of monuments on the occupied territories and prevention of their further destruction.

Convinced in the need to further strengthen the international efforts for protection of cultural properties, Georgia reconfirms its strong commitment to the principles of 1954 Hague Convention and, as a member of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, expresses its readiness to contribute to relevant multilateral cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the end, let me congratulate all of you on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of UNESCO.

Let me assure you that the Georgian Government will spare no effort to further promote the values upon which the Organization was created.

Thank you very much for the attention.

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