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GENERAL POLICY DEBATE OF THE 38th GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO
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Mister President of the General Conference, Madam Director-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Estonia would like to align itself with the EU statement.

The recently adopted **2030 Agenda** is universal and reflects many of UNESCO's priorities. Estonia welcomes the fact that the SDGs commit to realizing the **human rights of all**, to mainstreaming **gender equality** and the **empowerment of women** across all goals and targets. These important values are among development cooperation priorities for Estonia.

It's clear that in realizing the 2030 Agenda UNESCO can offer valuable support to Member States in capacity development, policy advice and normative support but in the end it all comes down to **national ownership**. We would also like to underline the vital importance of monitoring and innovative financing of the SDGs combining different sources.

The World Education Forum in Incheon was a clear milestone to mark UNESCO's success in positioning **education** high on the new agenda. We believe that UNESCO's role as the global coordinator of the education goal offers excellent opportunities to further strengthen UNESCO's position in the UN family. Estonia welcomes the comprehensive Framework for Action that was adopted and launched in this house just a couple of days ago. The framework is universal and applicable for all Member States, but at the same time enables to take into account different national realities.

The education goal puts emphasis on lifelong learning, including higher education. Estonia fully supports the proposal of a **global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications** that will be examined during this General Conference. We consider this initiative to be very timely and relevant as the academic and professional mobility is growing and the world of study and research is no longer limited by national boundaries. The elaboration of this new normative instrument requires adequate human and financial resources. Our experts have contributed to the preparation of the global convention and we are also ready to support the process financially.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Estonia is a strong advocate of opportunities that **information and communication technology** can provide for development. We are also convinced that the **freedom of expression** and access to **independent media**, including **social media and Internet** are essential for fostering citizen participation in the 2030 Agenda. Everyone needs to be able to speak without fear and to be freely informed about public affairs. UNESCO has been a strong promoter of the **safety of journalists** but as confirmed by the recent report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development numerous threats still remain.

The armed conflicts and ongoing crises in the world have put to test UNESCO's ability to respond to **intentional destruction of cultural heritage**, including organized looting and illicit trafficking. UNESCO has been strong and visible in its global efforts **to advocate for the protection of cultural heritage**, to provide **technical expertise**, and to facilitate a **coordinated international response**. We support the strategy for reinforcing UNESCO's action in this field that builds on strategic partnerships and allows necessary flexibility in changing circumstances.

Distinguished delegates,

A lot has been done by UNESCO in order to increase efficiency and to reduce administrative costs. This needs to be duly recognized. A lot remains to be done in strengthening accountability, streamlining management, improving performance and the ways to measure it.

We are looking forward to the follow-up on the **governance audit** that will be discussed during this session of the General Conference. The audit also highlighted a wide gap between the limited resources and the high expectations of the Member States in the framework of the 2030 Agenda. A heavy reliance on extra budgetary resources for meeting regular programme objectives and unsustainable workload for the reduced staff is a reality we face. Therefore Estonia supports the **ZNG Plus budget**. It definitely would not address all the issues, but the situation would be more favourable, especially for Major Programmes.

Thank you for attention!