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**National Policy Statement on behalf of Ireland at the 38th UNESCO General
Conference**

**Delivered by the Permanent Delegate of Ireland, Ambassador Michael
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Opening Remarks

President, Director General, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I begin by offering my congratulations to you Mr President on your election.

UNESCO celebrates its 70th anniversary this year. As we mark this anniversary, it is clear that the UNESCO mission is more relevant than ever.

While the challenges are enormous and the principles of the Organisation are being attacked from many quarters, there is still reason for hope.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Sustainable Development Goals - Agenda 2030 - endorsed by all member states of the UN and individually by their leaders on 25 September, are unique. They represent a contract for all of humanity. The world is no longer separated between developed and developing. We all have goals to achieve and the effort is truly universal for our humanity, our planet and shared sustainable peace.

Ireland was privileged to be a co-facilitator for the 2030 Agenda negotiations at the UN in New York along with Kenya. The constructive nature of those negotiations, which involved not only all nations of the world, but also engaged stakeholders and NGOs, is our reason for hope.

We all have our roles to play in achieving the 2030 agenda with its 17 goals. UNESCO is central to so much of the agenda. Henceforth, all of the work of UNESCO will be seen through the prism of the 2030 agenda.

Over the past number of years UNESCO has reformed and refocused its efforts and methods of working, making it now much better suited to take on the challenges of the 2030 agenda - much more fit for purpose than it was at the beginning of this decade. I congratulate the Organisation on that achievement – its indefatigable Director General, Irina Bokova, and its dedicated staff. To all of the staff of UNESCO, I would like, on behalf of my Government, to pay particular tribute.

The three pillars of UNESCO – Education, Science and Culture are fundamental to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. More broadly, UNESCO ethical and cultural vocation provides the sustainable thread to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

And yet the principles of UNESCO, the principles of humanism, remain under threat by self-appointed extremist, who set themselves beyond the global discourse. This expresses itself in many ways:

- the threat and even attacks on children, especially girls, going to school
- the destruction of the world's cultural monuments as a weapon of war and enslavement
- the setting of one religion or one culture against another
- the undermining of freedom of speech directly and through the agents of that freedom, our journalists

An attack on one culture is an attack on all civilization. An attack on one religion is an attack on all. An attack on one journalist, is an attack on the freedom of speech of us all. An attack on one girl going to school is an attack on all education and all children.

UNESCO, through the leadership of its Director General and in close cooperation with member states is fighting back against these threats. The Organisation, with its ethical principles and mandate, is fighting back with the sustainable weapons of argument, reason and even helping physically to rebuild what extremists thought they had destroyed - thus restoring to communities their dignity and feeling of self-worth.

Education for Sustainable Development

In Ireland, the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014 to 2020, has been developed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), in consultation with key stakeholders.

It provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a more sustainable future at a number of levels: individual, community, local, national and international. This strategy has also been informed by previous work that was undertaken in this area by our Department of Education and Skills, supported by ECO-UNESCO in Ireland which promotes the ideals of UNESCO through youth, education and training programmes. Its recommendations encompass all areas of the education system, from pre-school through to further and higher education, as well as non-formal and community education and the Youth sector.

The publication of the Strategy was a significant development and ensured that the Department of Education and Skills took a leadership role in the area of Education for Sustainable Development. Our education strategy is a key pillar of the Government's overarching *Our sustainable future*, which was launched in 2012.

The Department hosted a Forum on Education for Sustainable Development recently to raise awareness, take stock and plan for the future.

Global Monitoring Report on Education

I am very pleased to remind delegates that the programme of Irish Aid, which provides humanitarian assistance and supports long term development on behalf of the Irish people, has consistently financed the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on Education.

Education and Literacy

I am also happy to inform delegates of Ireland's 2014 *Right to Read* Literacy Campaign which aims to greatly enhance literacy levels throughout our country. It will be delivered in all local authorities in Ireland through a nationally coordinated framework for literacy support and development.

Dublin was also the venue for the International Literacy Conference in September 2015, with a keynote address by H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development.

It is a matter of great importance to Ireland that Dublin and Galway are UNESCO designated as Cities of Literature and Film respectively. These designations grant membership to a worldwide network of cities, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), in which creativity is valued and used as an economic driver and in which creativity is embedded in city plans for sustainable development. The international cooperation which ensues from membership of the Network benefits all citizens in the member cities and also ensures opportunities for mentoring.

Geoparks

Ireland would like to endorse the Executive Board's recommendation to the General Conference to establish a new International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), which would give UNESCO Global Geoparks a formal, recognised label.

To this end, the Irish National Commission for UNESCO has officially confirmed its support for the transition of the three current Irish Global Geoparks, at the Copper Coast, the Marble Arch Caves, the Burren and Cliffs of Moher, into 'UNESCO Global Geoparks', on the introduction of the new Programme.

Ireland is delighted to have been involved in the Geoparks initiative for many years. We believe that the new clarified status of UNESCO Global Geoparks will significantly raise their profile and broaden their geographic cover.

UNESCO Designations

I welcome the designation in June of this year of Dublin Bay's Bull Island as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge

UNESCO's excellent work in promoting and maintaining this important programme. This is a living and dynamic programme and since its inception in the early 1970's, its objectives and qualifying criteria have changed to reflect the changed thinking about people's interaction with their environment. Safeguarding the integrity of such a dynamic programme is very important and UNESCO's review of historical biosphere designations has rightly presented significant challenges for those who wish to retain the coveted biosphere status.

UNESCO Chairs

In Ireland, our UNESCO Chair at the National University of Ireland in Galway, in cooperation with other chairs on the island of Ireland, in the United States and beyond, is working with young people to address the sources of extremism. The aim must be to give our young people the tools and the confidence to stand up to the forces of extremism from wherever they come – directly, locally or online. We must assist and prepare our young in ways we never thought of before to make them resilient in the face of extremism. We must build in them the understanding and strength of shared humanism, which is at the core of UNESCO. I am particularly heartened by the enthusiastic welcome given to our Galway University Chair's work at last month's Youth Forum.

In our work we must ensure that the issue of gender discrimination can be removed from our agenda within a generation. Excluding half of our populations as we struggle to achieve our sustainable development goals make us less than half as likely to achieve them. This is essential if we are to achieve so many other goals, including the eradication of poverty and hunger.

Nobody must be left behind in our agenda for sustainable humanity. This includes minorities and persons with disabilities.

I am happy to report that since we last met, a UNESCO Chair for Transforming the Lives of People with Disabilities, their Families and Communities, through Physical Education, Sport, Recreation and Fitness has been established at the Tralee Institute of Technology in Ireland. I was delighted to participate in a conference organised by the

Tralee Chair in Marseille last month. It gave me a sense of the vital work the Chair is doing.

The Chair was inaugurated by Ireland's President, Michael D Higgins, a great friend of UNESCO, in February this year. It is all about empowerment and in doing so addressing our misunderstandings and misplaced fears.

When we remove fear, we begin to remove prejudice and discrimination.

On that note I wish to commend UNESCO for its work and look forward to future cooperation in building a sustainable world.

Thank you

Ends.