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**Address by Hon'ble Girirajmani Pokharel, Minister for Education and Leader of
the Delegation of Nepal to the 38th Session of the General Conference of
UNESCO on 6th November 2015**

Mr. President,
Madam Director-General Irina Bokova
Excellencies, Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I express my sincere thanks to Director General, Madam Irina Bokova, for the excellent arrangement of the thirty-eighth General Conference of UNESCO. I convey the best wishes of the Government and the people of Nepal for its success.

Nepal's new Constitution establishes state-provided free primary and secondary education as a fundamental right. It mandates progressive steps toward free higher education for all, and makes special provisions for women, Dalits, minorities, poor, and physically challenged citizens.

Mr. President,

Nepal has made a courageous constitutional commitment to Education for All. But we do not begin from scratch. Net enrollment rates have increased and the gender ratio has equalized. The "Literate Nepal Mission", UNESCO's "Capacity Building for EFA" programme, and Nepali teachers have contributed to our campaign to end illiteracy.

With UNESCO support, we have strengthened our Education Management Information System. A comprehensive M&E Framework is being developed. Our School Sector Development Plan addresses Nepal's commitment to the Incheon Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals. We have created a Technical Education and Vocational Training stream within secondary education, and continue to enhance ICT.

UNESCO and external development partners have provided important support to the education sector. Our goal is unfettered access to quality public education. To this end, rights-based reorganization of the education sector under federalism is a priority. We aim to make progressive teaching methods the norm, schools a safe haven for learning,

and learning a life-long endeavour. We look forward to continued collaboration in keeping with our national priorities.

I commend UNESCO for its capacity-building assistance to member states, and for its solidarity as Nepal rebuilds its earthquake damaged world heritage sites. This year, a statue of Buddha has been installed here at UNESCO, a gift from Nepal, the birth place of Buddha, in appreciation of UNESCO's role in preserving cultural heritage and world peace. In the same spirit, I invite UNESCO to look into the educational benefits of the Buddha's vipasyana method of preparing the mind for knowledge.

Mr. President,

Despite remarkable achievements, Nepal still faces great challenges. Illiteracy persists. Poor children, especially the girls, face barriers to education. Qualitative improvements are essential.

Public investment in education reached 4.2% of GDP in 2014—better, but still too low. Foreign aid averages 22% of the total education budget, but declined this year to just 13%. Investment in basic education has met MDG and EFA targets, but has resulted in underfunding of higher education.

Our public university system has undergone necessary expansion. However, resources are stretched too thin. In the for-profit sector, cost and quality control is necessary. We now have a constitutional mandate to address these matters. The creation of an Open University is also in the final stages.

Nepal faces severe consequences from global climate change. In energy, agriculture, transportation and industry, ecologically sound, culturally sensitive, sustainable solutions are needed. Curricular reform is required to meet these pressing national needs.

Mr. President,

I have discussed challenges shared by many nations. Our educational efforts in Nepal currently face two extraordinary challenges as well, one natural, one man-made.

Earthquakes have destroyed over 8000 educational facilities. A million children are earthquake-affected. We aim for school rebuilding to be completed within two years. Our people and the world rallied to create

make-shift classrooms, but winter is descending upon the mountains and better temporary solutions are essential.

The second extraordinary challenge we face is the obstruction ^{of} ~~in~~ our southern border. ~~As our foreign minister has remarked in Geneva,~~ “schools bear the brunt ... the future of our children is at stake”. We trust that *all* UNESCO members stand with us in our post-disaster reconstruction efforts. Restoration of normal supplies, in accord with the rights of landlocked countries, will let us return to the serious business of implementing our constitutional commitments to education for all and child development.

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to state that the Government of the Federal Republic of Nepal is fully committed to implementation of the decisions mutually agreed upon in this important conference.

Thank you for your attention.