

ADDRESS

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REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
TO UNESCO

38th session of the GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO

PARIS, FRANCE, November 6, 2015

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Madam Director-General, Mister President of the General Conference, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the 38th Session of the General Conference and share with you some views regarding the important challenges that stand before UNESCO today. Distinguished Mister President, allow me on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Slovenia to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Conference.

Slovenia fully associates itself with the statements made on behalf of the EU. As a strong supporter of UNESCO, Slovenia expects a lot – in areas upon which so much of our well-being and societies depend and thrive: from building Education for All to advancing freedom of speech, the free exchange of ideas as well as free and independent media. The human rights perspective is invaluable, as is gender equality.

UNESCO needs reforms and the organization needs to return to its basic mandate. This is also why Slovenia is a candidate for the Executive Board. We urge UNESCO to stop spreading its resources too widely and to streamline its efforts to a limited number of tasks that it can perform well. It is the results that count and not the number of activities.

We want UNESCO to become once again an organization with the focus to meet global challenges in education, science and culture by reaching wide consensus among member states and not – as it is often the case today – being a place where member states are divided because of political issues.

In difficult economic circumstances, Slovenia compliments the DG for the effort embedded in the Zero Nominal Growth programme and budget. The still ambitious programme calls for innovative funding and a clear roadmap for strategic partnerships, but above all, for the member states to fulfill their obligations towards UNESCO on time.

We are pleased to see very substantial increases in funds allocated for Africa and gender equality that correspond to their priority status across the organization.

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We are here to determine the common interests to prevail over national priorities and to respond to the real concerns of mankind. Our strong common interest is the Sustainable Development Goals' agenda, where some progress has been made, but we cannot be satisfied. SDGs and the Agenda 2030 must be the axis of UNESCO's operations already within the activities in the second biennium of the 2014 -2017 programme and budget.

We are pleased that UNESCO has endorsed a new Strategy on Youth. Youth must be empowered through inclusion, schooling and job creation. I am proud to inform you about an example of good practice in Slovenia where the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO has established a UNESCO youth platform in the end of 2012. This network brings together youth from all over Slovenia who actively participate in a range of different activities, lectures, presentations, sport and cultural events in the framework of UNESCO's goals. We fully support UNESCO's cooperation with young people who met at UNESCO's Youth Forum last week here at Headquarters and when three young representatives from Slovenia presented our youth activities. When more than half of the world's population is under 20, their clear voices have to be heard. Youth are not just the next generation; they are the leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators of today. Slovenia believes in empowering youth and providing them with the education and skills needed to build peace and thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

Despite efforts as to uproot all forms of racism, intolerance has increased. Slovenia calls on UNESCO to work for global and human rights education, the most important pillars of the Culture for Peace Programme.

We welcome the new International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), which would among other things establish Global Geoparks as a formal, recognized label. I am pleased to confirm that the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO has prepared a letter of endorsement for the transition of two of the Slovenian current Global Geoparks into UNESCO Global Geoparks, recognizing that they will continue to be subject to the established and ongoing revalidation process against the agreed criteria.

Education must remain at the forefront in the post-2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Education for All Programme must stay a priority and focus not only on quantity but on quality of education as well. The Incheon Declaration, adopted at the World Education Forum 2015, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted at the High Level Meeting here at UNESCO two days ago as well as the Global Action Programme for Education for Sustainable Development are very important contributions to this process.

Education for All worldwide is still a long way off, as UNESCO regularly reveals in its monitoring reports. It is above all in the states which find themselves in conflict and transitional situations – but not only there – that we find countless young people without appropriate education, especially in the developing countries. Slovenia itself faces a severe crisis while hundreds of young migrants are coming to our country. If the flood of migrants will continue, these young people will have to be included into our schooling system as well as adult migrants will have to be integrated into our society. Education is a human right that demands fulfillment even in situations of danger and deprivation. Peace begins not only in the minds of men but already in the minds of children. Therefore, we stress the importance of education for children in conflict situations, as quality education can play an important role in protecting children during ongoing crisis and restoring countries to peace and development.

Slovenia shares the opinion that we have to focus on Africa and on the issue of gender equality. Improvement of the quality of education requires more attention of the politicians and everybody involved in creating more favorable conditions for life and education.

Access to educational opportunities for all is a right, not a privilege. UNESCO's Education for All agenda should be based on quality, equity and inclusion, and a refined EFA structure. Education of women and girls is of top priority. Gender equality calls for bolder benchmarks and indicators. Let us turn our time to an era of opportunity for all.

New Technologies, above all ICT, bring further challenges for education. Profit from their utilization is conditioned by new knowledge, new information and multimedia literacy. The virtual platform "VideoLectures.Net", run by the Slovenian Jožef Stefan Institute, host of the

UNESCO Chair on Open Technologies for Open Educational Resources and Open Learning is ready to contribute towards world – wide development of creative and innovative e-content.

Communication and Information Programmes are rooted in UNESCO's Constitution, which requires the Organization to promote the "free flow of ideas by word and image". We are convinced that the main objective for UNESCO is to build a knowledge-based society based on the sharing of knowledge and incorporating all the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of sustainable development.

We are looking forward to contributing to the debates on internet related issues: including access to information and knowledge, freedom of opinion and expression, privacy and ethical dimensions of the information society.

Culture and its diversity are pillars of the nation, its maturity and advancement. Their respect and promotion, hand in hand with tolerance and trust among civilizations, are set as UNESCO's goals. In this context, we note with satisfaction the work done by the Member States and the World Heritage Committee in protecting and promoting the unique world cultural and natural heritage. Slovenia is firmly supporting professionalism and independence as a basis of the World Heritage Committee's work.

The preservation and protection of World Cultural Heritage becomes of utmost importance in the case of armed conflicts. We fully welcome UNESCO's proposal as to send UN peacekeepers to protect heritage sites around the world from various threats, primarily from terrorist attacks and destruction by militants, especially in the light of the recent destruction of cultural sites and welcome the support for the "Cultural Blue Helmets" initiative and the United4Heritage project. Slovenia held a seminar celebrating the 60th anniversary of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict in December last year. The seminar was organized by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO and one of the topics was the training on heritage issues of members of the Slovenian Armed Forces in International Peacekeeping operations.

Distinguished Director General, Slovenia welcomes reforms you have engaged in UNESCO's organization and management leading to its higher quality, efficiency and visibility. Slovenia will be supporting you and your staff and we are encouraging you to persist in your efforts and to fully make use of the intellectual and operational capacities of National Commissions representing our great wish that UNESCO will play its given and important role also in the next 70 years.

Thank you!

