



**Statement by**  
**The Minister of Basic Education of South Africa,**  
**Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP,**  
**38<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference**  
**4 November 2015, Paris, France**

Mr President, Mr Stanley Simataa

Chairperson of the Executive Board, Mr Mohamed Sameh Amr

Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova,

Honourable Colleagues and Delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the General Policy Debate of 38<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The Republic of South Africa remains fully committed to the principle of multilateralism, international law, advancement of human rights, including gender equality, and the promotion of international peace and security. We are convinced that these are necessary pre-conditions for achieving the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be advanced through the promotion of education and science in UNESCO.

Mr President,

Today, the big question before us is how to position UNESCO to address the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges which we face, including the Organisation's global priorities, Africa and gender equality. We have to ask ourselves, to what extent we as member states of UNESCO are currently able to respond to the rapidly evolving technologically driven globalised World? Do we have the necessary technical knowledge and skills to accelerate the global work of UNESCO in the context of the recently adopted United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Among others, the 2030 Agenda sets new targets in the education, scientific and cultural spheres which require the collective wisdom of multilateral agencies such as UNESCO, to achieve them. We believe that by effectively addressing the underperformance of education systems in the developing World, we will be in a better position to fight the twin evils of poverty and inequality, thus contributing to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

We strongly support the promotion of quality lifelong learning opportunities for all. We need to improve our responses to global skills shortages, and ensure that this goal is met through the establishment of appropriate learning pathways. There is also little doubt that the ongoing development of new technologies can contribute in this regard, including through the enhanced recognition of qualifications across borders.

The inclusion of equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training as well as higher education and research in the SDG's is therefore extremely important.

Mr President,

My delegation is of a view that our combined efforts are needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. We believe that UNESCO should play an important role in its areas competence. This requires the active engagement of Member States that are committed to driving the

process of change. To this end, we as South Africa have presented our candidature for the UNESCO Executive Board. We believe we can contribute in a meaningful way and with the necessary political will and expertise to the attainment of UNESCO's global mandate.

If elected, we stand ready to work with Member States and Director-General Bokova in the Executive Board to strengthen international cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture and communications.

As part of the interventions needed to recalibrate UNESCO in-order for it to fulfil its mandate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we urge all Member States to pay their assessed contributions on time, in full and without preconditions.

We believe going forward that engineering should be elevated as one of the focus areas of UNESCO as it can be used as a springboard to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, we wish to appeal to all Member States to prioritise Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics (STEM), including the increased participation of women and girls in these fields. We therefore urge the developed World to commit sufficient resources for STEM in order to make it a reality in the developing World.

Mr. President,

My Country is proud to once again be at the epicentre of getting to understand human evolution and our common humanity following the latest ground-breaking discovery of a new hominin species named Homo Naledi. The discovery of Homo Naledi will help us to better understand who we are and how we evolved. We appeal to UNESCO to support research in this area, not only to better understand human evolution, but to inspire the next generation of scientists.

We also urge UNESCO to profile the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) and to see it as an instrument that can assist in promoting science diplomacy, which is an important element in our quest to overcome global challenges.

I am pleased to report that the Government of South Africa, in cooperation with Botswana and Namibia in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region, is implementing the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System study, the only UNESCO Pilot Case Study of its kind in Africa. In view of its success, we look forward to more projects on the Continent that would enhance cooperation among States on this essential life-giving resource.

Lastly Mr. President,

South Africa commends the efforts by UNESCO to assist the Palestinian people. We call on UNESCO and the international community at large to continue to assist the Palestinian people and we call on Israel to end all actions that contribute to damaging heritage sites, schools and other education facilities and the limitation of the free movement of people.

I thank you!