

**Swedish National Statement, 38<sup>th</sup> session of UNESCO General Conference, 5 November 2015**

*Check against delivery*

Mr President of the General Conference, Mr Chair of the Executive Board, Madame Director-General, Distinguished Delegates,

It's an honour for me to address the 38th General Conference of UNESCO. Sweden fully aligns itself with the EU statement.

We live in a time of huge transformation. The defining challenge is countering **climate change**. We need a course of action to **create a low-carbon and climate-resilient world economy**. The escalating conflicts stemming from draught and climate change shows clearly that the world must reach a fair, ambitious and legally binding agreement in **Paris in December**. It's not a choice, but a necessity for the survival of our civilisations as we know them. UNESCO's work with regards to the Ocean and freshwater is crucial. Sweden supports the **Small Island Developing States or more appropriately Large Ocean States** in addressing the specific challenges they are faced with.

The new **Agenda 2030** for Sustainable Development is a milestone. It is universal and we all have a responsibility for its realisation. **UNESCO** has an important role in translating the goals into concrete action. We look forward to engaging with all of you in the work ahead of us.

A sustainable future is impossible without ensuring **gender equality**. It is time to once and for all get rid of the oppressing structures that hinder women from the right to decide over themselves and to participate in political and economic life. Anything else is an immoral waste of human talents. Equal rights and the right to education is a priority for the Swedish **Government's feminist foreign policy**. **Inclusive and equitable quality education for all girls and boys** features prominently in the Agenda 2030. **Education for all is a key driver for change** and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education are key components. **Comprehensive sexuality education**, as shown by UNESCO's programme, is essential in the work towards both gender equality and sustainable development.

In order to achieve fair and equal societies, UNESCO also has a vital role in promoting **access to information and press freedom**. Sweden will continue to engage on the **Safety of Journalists** and the **Issue of Impunity**. The upcoming conference with news organisations in February will provide a unique platform for dialogue on journalists' safety. We also welcome **UNESCO's recent report on**

**World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development** and we invite more countries to contribute to this. UNESCO must continue to promote human rights, including freedom of expression, **on-line as well as off-line.**

It is unacceptable that **journalists are killed and threatened** when they do their job. We must speak up on behalf of those who have had their own voices silenced, like the Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak. Our aim is that he should be released.

Mr President,

While we need joint efforts in building a more sustainable future, we **also need collective action for the challenges of today.** The **current refugee situation** is a global crisis. Sweden is proud that many refugees over the years have made Sweden a second home country. They have contributed to build Sweden richer. Sweden will continue to take its responsibility. In this situation more countries need to give help to those in need. It is a human right to seek and if in need enjoy asylum. Sweden has a clear stand: no state can flee its legal or international obligations. Global crisis demands global responsibility.

To solve the crisis, **the horrors in Syria must be stopped.** Addressing the root causes of the conflict in Syria is key. That is why all actors – regional as well as international - must intensify their efforts in support of the UN-led political track and a political solution. The fabric of entire civilizations is torn apart. When artists and journalists cannot work, books are burnt and cultural heritage is destroyed it is a sign of **repressive, dark times.** It is also the **moment when UNESCO's mandate** is more important than ever.

Sweden strongly supports the implementation of the cultural conventions and the actions undertaken by UNESCO and the global community to counter-act the demolition and the illicit trafficking in cultural objects. A **Nordic initiative** for enhanced international collaboration will start in Oslo in December this year.

Distinguished Delegates,

Sweden has always been a **strong supporter of the UN**, both politically and financially. And, over the years, **Sweden has stood by those** in the world who fight **against** repression and inequality and **for** independence and dignity. We now seek your confidence for a **non-permanent seat** in the Security Council for the period 2017-2018. We will work towards a more representative, transparent and effective Council that can respond swiftly to the security challenges of our time.

Mr President,

We would also like to **acknowledge** all the hard work carried out by the **UNESCO staff** and the **Director-General**, Madam Bokova. Sweden fully supports the Director General's work for **reform of UNESCO** and we are actively engaged for **better governance** of the Organisation. Through further

reform UNESCO will be even more relevant and more focused on its mandate, which will deliver more results. In order to do this, the **budget level** must match the goals we have set up for the Organisation.

As I said at the outset, we live in a time of huge transformation and the founding **ideas and principles of UNESCO are as vibrantly urgent as ever**. Sweden stands ready to continue our important joint work ahead to create a sustainable, equal and peaceful development for all women and men.

Thank you.