

Statement by Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Representative of Bangladesh to the UNESCO Executive Board & Principal Secretary to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh at the Plenary Debate of the 201st Session of the UNESCO Executive Board, Paris, 25 April 2017.

Mr. Chairperson,
President of the General Conference,
Madam Director General,
Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to join my fellow colleagues once again on the occasion of 201st Session of the Executive Board.

Bangladesh has been making every effort to transform itself into a knowledge-based, inclusive and tolerant society -- a society that upholds human dignity of every citizen irrespective of their gender, race, religion, language and culture. The similarity of our national aspirations and the objectives and purposes of UNESCO forms the basis of our strong partnership with this organization. In particular, Bangladesh has been collaborating closely with UNESCO in promoting literacy, gender parity in education, women empowerment, protection of mother languages and fostering intercultural and interfaith harmony.

Mr. Chairperson,

As we look at the Program Implementation Report, we note that UNESCO has accomplished some important tasks during the past three years.

UNESCO has led the formulation of the Education 2030 agenda, and has convened two meetings of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to strengthen global coordination on the implementation of SDG4. Education sector extended all-out support to Bangladesh in hosting the first E9 Ministerial Meeting after the adoption of Education 2030 agenda in Dhaka from 5 to 7 February 2017. This Ministerial level meeting adopted Dhaka Declaration, stressing the need to realign national educational policies of E9 countries with the SDG-4 commitments.

We believe that sharing best practices and experience among Member States can help us in attaining uniform progress to meet SDG-4. For instance, Bangladesh has a unique success story in girl's education and women empowerment. Bangladesh has been designated as the lead country in attaining gender parity in education within the E9 Group. To ensure that our education system is truly inclusive, we have undertaken various priority programs to address the needs of physically and mentally challenged students, especially autistic children. Recently, Saima Wazed Hossain, daughter of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, has been designated as "champion for autism" by the World Health Organization for her outstanding role in developing autism awareness in South-East Asia Region.

The role of science, technology and innovation (STI) has never been more important in transforming the lives of millions in the developing world. In Bangladesh, the government has launched a special program for encouraging all the sectors to

bring about innovative ideas to implement the sustainable development goals. We find the launching of "UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030" as an important accomplishment. Likewise, we note with satisfaction that the new IOC Guidelines for Marine Spatial Planning has been helping many countries to plan sustainable economic development and ecosystem resilience in their national waters.

Bangladesh deems it important to strengthen UNESCO's role in fighting terrorism and violent extremism, one of the major global challenges of our times. Bangladesh pursues a policy of "zero tolerance" in respect of terrorism and violent extremism. We encourage UNESCO to sharpen its focus in using education as a tool to prevent radicalization and bolster intercultural dialogue to foster peace and mutual respect.

We commend UNESCO for the elaboration of a draft text of a declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change. As a climate vulnerable country, and a believer in the virtues of equity and justice, Bangladesh has long been supportive of this declaration, and hopes that the Board will unanimously adopt it.

Bangladesh would like to flag that the issues of migration and refugee are vitally important for promoting global peace and prosperity. Bangladesh hosted the 9th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Dhaka from 10-12 December 2016, on the theme of "Migration that works for Sustainable Development for all". We would encourage

UNESCO to work on migration and refugees to advance sustainable development and peace.

We welcome the progress made to finalize the Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO's Actions for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict. We are pleased that the dimension of natural disaster has been incorporated in the action plan in addition to armed conflicts.

Mr. Chair:

SDG-10 calls upon the international community to “reduce inequalities within and among countries”. At the recently held 136th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union in Bangladesh, Parliamentarians from 132 countries declared their resolve to end social, economic and political dimensions of inequality. In this spirit, we note with appreciation that UNESCO has been paying special attention to Africa, SIDS, LDCs and women and youths.

In spite of these successes, we have collectively failed to resolve the longstanding problem of financial difficulty emanating from the non-payment of assessed contributions by Member States, and the resultant over-dependence on extra-budgetary resources. This has negatively impacted not just on the service delivery capacity of the organization, but it has also the potential to undermine integrity and professionalism of International Civil Servants working at UNESCO Secretariat. It would be a matter of grave concern if the Secretariat staff were to be swayed by donor driven considerations rather than guided by the Constitution of

UNESCO. Predictable and regular budgetary provision is needed to uphold efficiency and professionalism of UNESCO Secretariat.

Mr. Chair,

We often talk about a lack of visibility of UNESCO's work. In this context, Bangladesh delegation wants to put forward a proposal whereby UNESCO would convene World Cultural Forum annually, something akin to the World Economic Forum held in Davos. The proposed World Cultural Forum will harness the powers of not just political leaders, but would bring together cultural activists, religious leaders, writers, poets, artists from around the world to discuss ways and means to foster peace and harmony in the world.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, and I thank you all.