

India's Statement at the Plenary of the 201st Session
of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Statement by Ambassador / PR on 24 April, 2017

The President of the General Conference;

The Director General;

The Chair of the Executive Board;

Distinguished Ambassadors & Colleagues.

India is pleased to speak at the Plenary of the 201st Session of the Executive Board of UNESCO.

We are aware that the agenda is loaded with key issues of common concern, and that there are some among us, who for this reason, favour a circulation of National Statements, which is a position that India does not share. We see value in the time-tested traditions and conventions of UNESCO. The Executive Board is a UNESCO constitutional organ, and actions the main lines of work of the Organization. Through National Statements at its Plenary, member-states set the tone and pace of proceedings, affording a

vista-view of what is to follow in the Commissions . While we can certainly appreciate that brevity in National Statements is warranted, we strongly believe that this cannot be at the expense of the framework to which we are wedded, and where we see a clear value and benefit.

That said, and for brevity's sake, our intervention will focus on two key issues that confront UNESCO.

One, the increasing politicization of the Organisation, which takes up valuable space and time to the detriment of the principal agenda, when this is neither UNESCO's mission nor mandate. And while we do realise that de-politicization is easier said than done, it is also incumbent on us as member States and the Secretariat to "halt" the issue through the setting up of a suitable mechanism that could discourse the matter, the details of which could be discussed, as the situation will demand. The esteemed members of the Board will perhaps agree with India that it is one of the objectives of UNESCO to have ".... a free exchange of ideas in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth". It is this that must pre-occupy us, not issues that diminish UNESCO's ability to fulfill its mandate to the benefit of its member States.

Our second point is not un-linked to the first: a 'fit-for-purpose' UNESCO with maximum delivery and impact. We have been made painfully aware that the budgetary situation of the Organization is far from optimal. At the same time, the ambitions of member States remain high. Taken together, this calls for a prioritization of programmes and activities, sun-setting some of those which over time have lost pertinence and importance, and eliminating those that seek to duplicate or re-make. This is particularly germane as we will adopt a fresh Programme and Budget for 2018-21 in this year's General Conference, and as we will also transition to a new leadership, which calls for a fresh look and a renewed effort. The choice may be tough, but if we are to transition to a new and able bodied UNESCO, we can only do so if we change what is 'lacking' in ourselves. India will support any constructive effort that will resolve UNESCO's dilemma.

Our emphasis on these two issues ties in with India's vision of a UNESCO in the forefront of efforts to forge a sustainable peace through its programmes on education, the sciences and culture, a mission and mandate that has never been more vital nor exigent. Prime Minister Nehru had spoken of UNESCO as the "conscience" of the world community, President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had pointed to the "healing power" of the principles of

UNESCO and most lately Prime Minister Modi had observed that UNESCO's responsibilities to the future had become bigger and "... so our resolves must be stronger". This is the extraordinary legacy of our partnership with UNESCO from the time of its birth and this where we would like to see the Organization headed.

Mr Chair,

Our Statement will not be complete without congratulating UNESCO and its Director-General for the creditable leadership on cultural diplomacy this past year, culminating in the successful adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 for the protection of heritage. UNESCO has a sterling record in preserving priceless treasures of human heritage, and it must continue this vital and inspiring lead. Culture must connect and not divide the world. Speaking at UNESCO Prime Minister Modi had spoken of an introspection into our different cultures, traditions and religions to overcome the rising tide of extremism, violence and divisions that plague our world. For this reason we, in India, were delighted that Yoga, an ancient Indian tradition, now belongs to humanity, a historic global acknowledgement in 2016 at UNESCO, for which we thank both the

Secretariat and member-States for their fulsome support. "Yoga awakens a sense of oneness and harmony with self, society and nature". It is this peace and this balance that is assigned to the Organization by its very character; UNESCO must continue to build not only defenses against war in the minds of men and women but defenses against déhumanisation and abasement on our collective Road to Dignity by 2030.

I thank you for your attention.
