



NATIONAL STATEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE
201ST SESSION OF THE UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD
ROOM X: FONTENOY BUILDING
24 APRIL 2017

Chairperson of the Executive Board

Director-General of UNESCO

Distinguished Delegates

The Executive Board will consider during this current session, a Draft Programme and Budget for the 2018 – 2021, which will form a major part of our work. We will deliberate the draft budget within the context of financial austerity, and the ever changing and challenging geopolitical context. These challenges demand of us to be united in our vision for the Organization, given its role in realising the global development agenda. In this regard, we reiterate our support for the \$667 million regular budget expenditure plan. We join other delegations in commending the Secretariat for the development of the draft budget, and the Director-general for her leadership.

The Draft Budget, which for the first time integrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby aligning UNESCO's activities with Agenda 2030, is a good foundation on which to build. There are, however, areas which could be further improved. One such area is Global Priority Africa, which does not show the impact which proposed activities are supposed to have on the ground. South Africa, working within the African Group, looks forward to making improvements to the draft decision pertaining to the coordination and monitoring of action to benefit Africa, and would like to see the Operational Strategy for Africa reflected in the draft decision.

Another area of concern relates to the unintended consequences of the review of the Organisation's field presence, which has resulted in the loss of a critical mass of capacity that was present in field offices in the African region. This relates particularly to education capacity, which was negatively affected during the establishment of multi-sectoral teams. The right to education is a fundamental right, as good quality education is essential for breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty. It is therefore critical that efforts be sustained to ensure good quality education for all. Access to good quality education for persons with disabilities also still has to be realised, including the provision of appropriately skilled teachers and materials. In this regard we support the budget allocated to the Major Programme: Education.

The quest for gender equality and the promotion of women's empowerment is an issue which resonates deeply with the South African government. We acknowledge progress that has been made in a quest for gender balance within UNESCO, and urge more efforts in this regard, including using natural attrition to improve gender balance in UNESCO. We are pleased to note that the Draft Decision on Global Priority Gender Equality is action-oriented, and our delegation is fully supportive of this development, including in the context of empowering the girl child. South Africa continues to be one of the active participants in the STEAM Project, which includes the prevention of extremism.

Chairperson,

South Africa is supportive of the Natural Sciences Programme, including the IHP, of which we are a beneficiary. We commend the work done on the World Water Report published in March this year, which proposes innovative measures to recycle and re-use this valuable resource in mitigating one of the effects of climate change, namely, severe drought, which impacts our communities. While we support the adoption of the Final Draft Strategy for Climate Change, we are very concerned about the draft declaration on ethical principles related to climate change, which is completely divorced from Chapter 3 of the Paris Agreement. We reiterate that as a general principle, South Africa prefers addressing matters of climate change in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

UNESCO continues to do a lot of work in protecting and promoting cultural diversity, including against the illicit trafficking of cultural property and the destruction of cultural heritage. We therefore welcome the work undertaken on 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 Diversity in the Event of Armed Conflict. We are concerned though, that the proposal to add other emergencies related to natural disasters could inadvertently broaden the scope of the 1954 Hague Convention.

In furthering the objectives of the Culture Conventions, South Africa is pleased with the renewal of the agreement with UNESCO on the Category 2 status of the African World Heritage Fund. We encourage donors to contribute to the fund, in order for it to continue supporting Africa States in their quest to maintain and protect cultural heritage.

We note UNESCO's commendable effort to elaborate a policy on engaging indigenous peoples and would like to recall the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration has, as its core principle, free, prior and informed consent in terms of meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples. We are not convinced that adequate consultations have

taken place, including with Member States. It is also not clear to what extent this initiative is aligned to the ongoing process in New York, on the participation of indigenous peoples in UN meetings on issues affecting them. We would appreciate clarification from the Director-General in this regard.

Chairperson,

Our delegation would be amiss if we did not reiterate South Africa's support to UNESCO's efforts in Palestine. South Africa supports a two-state solution, with the Palestinian People co-existing in peace and security with the State of Israel, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the right of Palestinian Peoples to self-determination.

Finally Chairperson, the current session will be seized with interviews of candidates for the position of Director-General of our Organization. Our delegation will be actively involved in this process to select a visionary leader who will continue to build on the legacy of Ms Bokova, of sharpening the focus of UNESCO in the quest to make it more relevant in its mandate, within the global geo-strategic context. We support the modalities outlined for this process, and wish all the candidates well.

I thank you