

## **National statement of Lithuania at the 201<sup>st</sup> session of the Executive Board of UNESCO**

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Madam Director General,  
Excellencies, dear colleagues,

Lithuania expresses its fullest alignment with the statement of the EU.

In aggregate, humanity tends towards progress. Free and peaceful societies, where the rule of law and respect for the fundamental human rights of every individual, both men and women, are the building blocks of collective living, have for long been a reality in many parts of the world. Elsewhere, this achievement of empowering people is under way or still to be desired.

Everywhere, however, challenges to progress persist. Diverse but also common, as we have most recently seen in London, Saint Petersburg, Stockholm, Tanta and Alexandria, as well as Paris. Lithuania takes this opportunity to once again strongly condemn these horrendous terrorist attacks and extends its profound regrets to the people of the United Kingdom, Russia, Sweden, Egypt and France.

Common challenges which inevitably contribute to shaping the shared vision of our future have always been at the heart of **our Organisation**, which **remains a great force of collective progress**.

To refer to Malala Yousafzai, who once suggested that **education** is a solution to all the problems, UNESCO finds itself at the forefront of meeting the existing challenges, be it in preventing violent extremism or promoting sustainable development. The idea of education as premising a sustainable future is solidly enshrined in SDG4 of the 2030 Agenda, where education is not limited to its primary and secondary levels but also includes fostering possibilities for lifelong learning.

Consequently, education, in which UNESCO has unrivalled expertise within the UN system, connects all the basic dots leading to the ultimate celebration of human life and potential. Consider for example the following: the fact that almost one in five women aged 15 or older is still illiterate worldwide results in the annual mortality of children under the age of five amounting to almost half of the population of Lithuania. Even in developed parts of the world such as Europe, public efforts in terms of investment in education have been identified as one of the factors accounting for differences in economic development at the regional level. Much is still to be achieved and we count on UNESCO's leadership and convening power.

The recent political re-commitment by the UN Security Council resolution 2347(2017) to **protecting the heritage** is yet another testimony to the relevance of UNESCO and its

valuable work being done in the field. As a co-sponsor of this resolution, Lithuania cannot but recognise the importance of the implementation of the Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO's Action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict.

Another area where common challenges are pressing and UNESCO is Lithuania's natural partner is the **safety of journalists**. We remain strongly committed to promoting and defending the safety of journalists, be it regionally or internationally, online or offline, including with regard to specific threats faced by women journalists. On the occasion of the upcoming World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, Lithuania will contribute, as a co-founder of the informal Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists at the United Nations, to organising a discussion on the security of women journalists. Furthermore, at the national level competent Lithuanian institutions are ever more involved in organising trainings for journalists working in conflict zones and are guided in this field by international standards.

Multi-level initiatives constitute a natural consequence of the multi-stakeholder approach which underpins the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Lithuania commends UNESCO's active and regionally sensitive efforts to pursue this approach through an array of normative, monitoring and reporting as well as capacity-building activities, including thanks to its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and with a special emphasis on **gender equality**.

Efforts to **empower women** should know no limits, as they are an integral and indispensable part of those to build ever more peaceful and inclusive societies. Inherently, these are also efforts aimed at prosperity of our own generation but also of those to come. Lithuania appreciates and strongly supports UNESCO's Sectors in pursuing gender equality in their programme activities.

Achievements of progress are not irreversible. Since 2014, we have been witnessing deteriorating human rights situation in **Crimea (Ukraine)** with systemic violations—be it in the domain of freedom of expression, independent media, or minority rights—, when international commitments are disregarded and impunity prevails. Lithuania would like to see a more active involvement of UNESCO in its fields of competence in Crimea (Ukraine) and expresses its fullest support for the Director-General's efforts in this regard.

Last but not least, to reassert UNESCO's leadership in its fields of competence, we have to help the Organisation deliver based on a well-balanced **budget**. We commend the Secretariat's hard efforts to prepare, for the very first time, 39 C/5 based on an integrated-budget approach, which promises a significant change in the institutional culture of UNESCO. Our collective task is to attend to this change carefully and strategically, in order to build a more transparent, effective and efficient UNESCO, strengthened by its diverse and smart partnerships.