

National Statement
delivered by
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at the 39th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Madame President of the General Conference,
Mr President of the Executive Board,
Mrs. Director General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to express our congratulations to you Madame President on your election as the President of the 39th General Conference. Let me also thank to H.E. Stanley Mutumba Simataa as well for his excellent leadership that he has shown in the last two years and in particular for his dedication to the governance process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turkey strongly believes in the mission of this Organization to “build peace in the minds of men and women”. UNESCO has done a lot and I would like to acknowledge some of the major achievements of the Organization.

UNESCO has not only spearheaded the formulation of SDG 4-Education 2030, but also has been promoting prioritization of girls' education, quality education, education for all and global citizenship.

UNESCO has asserted itself as the world authority in the field of culture through the adoption of international instruments and their implementation. It has also been a driving force for the protection and reconstruction of destroyed cultural heritage and has been fighting against the illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts.

Being party to all major international legal instruments, Turkey cooperates with all relevant actors for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage in Turkey and beyond its borders.

UNESCO's achievements are broader than this. Unfortunately, we are still witnessing extremism and terrorism, phobias of all sorts, discrimination and racism, religious and ethnic intolerance, destruction of cultural heritage sites, limited access to basic education, gender inequality, low quality education, climate change and limited access to drinking water.

We need UNESCO more than ever. Though UNESCO has the mandate and the capacity to address these challenges, it is regretful that our Organisation is going through a crucial phase with dwindling financial resources.

The time has come to evaluate its core programs and consider its priorities to focus on those areas where UNESCO has comparative advantage. While being more confident about

UNESCO's impact on the global, national and local levels, we must avoid the risk of marginalization, especially in the core areas of UNESCO's competences.

This is our expectation from the new Director General: to look into this matter in consultation with the Member States, to reform the Organization and to reposition UNESCO to fulfill its core mandate to be able to serve better to its Member States and to make it more relevant and focused.

We appreciate the governance process launched two years ago. We seek a real change as we move towards more coherence, efficiency, and accountability. Turkey is committed to this process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a founding member and a strong advocate of this Organization, we believe that UNESCO is best suited to address some of today's challenges. To further support UNESCO's efforts, we have decided to put our candidacy to its Executive Board for the period of 2017-2021.

Although we had not been a member of the Executive Board since 2005, we remained a very active member through our work in the relevant intergovernmental programs and important committees of UNESCO. We have also financially supported the Organization during a critical period and seconded experts.

In education sector, we had been realizing a set of domestic reforms in this respect in order to cope better with modern challenges in the field of education.

Let me share with you some of our achievements:

In the course of just eight years, we have increased the enrollment of 7 to 17 year-olds from 81% to 90%. We are making tremendous efforts, to provide good-quality schools for the lower income segments of our population, while focusing especially on girls.

We have developed a new curriculum that goes beyond traditional approaches and employs active learning methods to develop analytic and creative thinking skills with problem solving approaches. We have also attracted private sector to invest into the physical and software infrastructure of the sector.

These were part of our efforts to increasingly connect our education system with the global community. We believe this experience sets a good example, an experience that we are prepared to share through UNESCO.

We have opened our doors to the victims of war torn apart from their homeland since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. Today, we host over 3 million displaced persons from Syria. Turkey has not only been providing shelter, security and healthcare from her own resources, but also education to those who are in need of schooling.

Actually, there are nine hundred seventy six thousand and two hundred (976.200) Syrians and Iraqis in Turkey who are of school age. We are proud to say that we have achieved to take six hundred nineteen thousand (619.000) children into the school system. We have done our fair share and we will continue to fulfil this humanitarian responsibility. In order to provide

quality education for Syrian students, we are also pleased to cooperate with UNESCO in this field.

Furthermore, I am glad to announce that we have completed the internal ratification process to be a party to the “*Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*”. We have already delivered the official notification to the UNESCO secretariat.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turkey is ready to take the responsibility as an Executive Board member. For the challenges ahead we are committed and we are willing to work with all of you under the guidance of our new Director General. Together, we want to build on the strengths of UNESCO.

Taking the opportunity, I would like to express Turkey’s readiness to support Madame Azoulay for her future efforts to further strengthen UNESCO and wish her the best on this mission.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Irina Bokova who has excellently managed this Organization at these troubled and demanding times. She never lost hope and continued to work very hard to keep the Organization standing. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Thank you.