

Statement of H.E. Leonor Magtolis Briones
Minister of Education
Republic of the Philippines (6 mins.)
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Madame President,
Madame Director-General,
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

The Philippines joins other Member States in reaffirming our faith in UNESCO.

Since the end of the Second World War, we have seen millions lifted out of poverty, and witnessed how education and technology spurred progress.

Still, we continue to struggle against inequality, poverty, hunger, ignorance, drugs, crime, xenophobia, terrorism, violent extremism and injustice. Lasting peace—the very basis of sustainable development—continues to elude us.

Thus, UNESCO's role and objectives remain critical.

Madame President,

The Philippines is weaving the goals, targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda into the Philippine Development Plan.

Our government is investing heavily in education. Our constitution commands the government to “assign the highest budgetary priority to education”. We have modernized our basic education system through our K to 12 program, making Kindergarten compulsory and adding two years of Senior High School. The program involved the overhaul of our curriculum to make every learner ready for higher education or work, equipped with 21st century skills.

We have been getting our school-age children in school not only by expanding free public education, but also by providing financial subsidy to secondary level students in private schools. Another big program for keeping learners in school is our School-Based Feeding Program, which provides undernourished elementary students nutritious meals.

As a result, in the elementary level, the dropout rate has significantly gone down from 6.24% in 2013, to 1.43% in 2017.

In the secondary level, the dropout rate went down from 8.1% in 2013 to 5.6% in 2017.

At the tertiary level, President Duterte signed into law the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, which grants tuition-free education to over 100 state universities

and colleges. We are evolving our Philippines Qualifications Framework that adopts standards for outcomes of education, and aligns them to international qualifications for recognition.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority has improved the delivery of technical and vocational education. It has mapped skills, renovated training institutions, implemented qualification standards for learners, and expanded its scholarship programs to reach the disadvantaged.

As we modernize our education system and bring our school-aged children into formal education, we must not lose sight of the need to reach out to those who cannot access the formal education system. Under my term, the Department of Education is determined to intensify and expand our Alternative Learning Systems for out-of-school youth.

On gender, the Philippines is committed to fully implement the Magna Carta of Women.

To protect the environment, the Philippines uses the Integrated Environmental Management approach. It establishes safeguards; conserves the biodiversity and rich natural heritage of the Philippines; manages forest lands, coastal and marine resources; and improves the resilience of ecosystems and communities. We strongly support the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, especially in tsunami-warning systems, and its crucial role in promoting the International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

The Duterte Administration's 10-point economic agenda promotes science, technology and the creative arts in its bid to enhance inclusive development. We are strengthening our research and innovation capacity, and are implementing technological interventions to boost the competitiveness of our local industries. The Department of Information and Communications Technology has opened up the free flow of information to remote areas by setting up WIFI points in strategic locations.

Madame President,

As a strong advocate of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines emphasizes friendly dialogue and cooperation. As Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year—the Philippines leads efforts to continue building an integrated, peaceful and vibrant community as the main driving force in the Asia-Pacific region.

We believe we can play a significant role in the UNESCO Executive Board and we humbly request your valuable support. If elected, the Philippines shall build bridges and be an active, balanced, and constructive voice. We pledge to work closely with all Member States and the Secretariat, and shall be a responsible and trustworthy member of the Executive Board, should we be given this opportunity.

We hope to help:

1. Prevent violent extremism through inclusive and quality education, especially peace and global citizenship education, as well as through inter-religious dialogue and cooperation;
2. Increase public and private sector investments on climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction; and
3. Respect cultural diversity, conserve cultural and natural heritage, and safeguard intangible cultural heritage.

We continue working fervently for positive change in our country and our region. Like all of you, the Philippines wants to play its part in UNESCO: to be a catalyst for change, for solidarity, for sustainable development, for peace in our hearts and minds, for our world and our children, for all of us.

Thank you.