

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Edward NALBANDIAN**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia,**  
**General Policy Debate of the 39th Session of the UNESCO General Conference**  
**1 November, 2017**

Honorable Madame President of the General Conference  
Madame Director General  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate Mrs. Audrey Azoulay for the nomination by the Executive Board for the post of the next Director-General of UNESCO.

Madame President,

The strong leadership of UNESCO is essential in guiding our joint efforts for meeting the objectives of this organisation. Education plays a crucial role in this regard. Armenia has co-authored and supported several education-related initiatives both within the UN and UNESCO. We also closely cooperate with the UNESCO Education Sector in developing our Higher Education Strategy for 2017-2030.

Education, science and search for knowledge have deep roots in the Armenian society. In two years the State University of our capital Yerevan will mark its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, already 800 years ago the capital of the Cilician Armenian kingdom used to have a secular higher education institute, the University of Sis. Armenians have carried out these traditions throughout the centuries, including by founding schools in many places worldwide. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the Armenian monastery of San Lazzaro in Venice that was recognized as an academy by Emperor Napoleon. More than 200 years ago another famous school - the Lazarian Seminary opened its doors in Moscow and later became one of the two founding institutions of Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The education is a strongest tool for boosting the values that this Organization adheres to. It is regrettable that some states abuse the education for contrary objectives, exploiting it for dissemination of nationalist hatred especially among the youth. There are many such examples in the textbooks of Azerbaijan, one of them teaching the children that Armenians are their genetic enemies. The 2016 report of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance states: “Political leaders, educational institutions and media have continued using hate speech against Armenians; an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric”. It is rightly described in the Constitution of UNESCO that “wars begin in the minds of

men”. The societies will not be prepared for reconciliation unless the defense of peace is constructed in their minds.

As great German writer Heinrich Heine wrote “Where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people”. The books of the renowned Azerbaijani novelist were burnt on the streets of Baku just for speaking the truth about Armenian massacres and calling for reconciliation. He wrote a story about his home village in Nakhijevan that during his childhood used to have twelve churches. All of them, together with numerous other Armenian sacred sites and cemeteries in Nakhijevan and all over Azerbaijan were wiped out in 1990s and 2000s. In the same manner thousands delicately carved medieval cross-stones of the Armenian cemetery in Jugha were bulldozed under the watchful eyes of the Azerbaijani authorities. The site was transformed to a shooting range.

After ethnically cleansing the Armenian population of Azerbaijan, now Baku aims at wiping out even the memory of several millennia old Armenian presence, every traces of the indigenous Armenian culture and history of the region. Baku erases the past merely because it does not fit the present day self-portrayed image of Azerbaijan, probably following George Orwell’s famous words on “who controls the present, controls the past”. Those who control Azerbaijan today think they can rewrite the history to legitimize their present xenophobic policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Historically being situated on the crossroads of different civilizations Armenia has cultivated deeply rooted traditions of tolerance, coexistence and respect towards other cultures and religions. That is why Armenia preserves a rich cultural heritage that includes among others the Hellenistic era temple, some of the oldest churches in the world, medieval Jewish cemetery, 18th century mosque and soon will host the world’s largest Yazidi temple.

The cooperation on preservation of the cultural heritage, that has been among the main pillars proclaimed by UNESCO. It has a very special meaning for the Armenian nation, since we have monuments all over the world build by the Armenians communities in about one hundred countries and particularly many in the countries of the region.

Our neighbors have displayed different approaches towards the preservation of Armenian historical heritage. There is a good cooperation with Iran that takes proper care of the Armenian monuments situated on its territory in a sharp contrast with neighboring Azerbaijan, but also Turkey, where numerous cultural monuments that were of universal value, have been lost forever. In this regard I would like to reiterate Armenia’s interest for the participation of our experts in the excavation and restoration of archaeological sites in Turkey, in such places as Ani, the Armenian medieval capital.

We are also very much concerned of the attacks on the Armenian monuments and sacred sites in war-torn Syria. We strongly believe that the post conflict rehabilitation in Syria should reaffirm the rights of ethnic minorities, including Armenians, on their religious and cultural heritage.

This year the UN Security Council unanimously adopted the resolution 2347, which deplores and condemns the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, including of religious sites notably by terrorist groups. We hope that the international community will continue to vigorously pursue such efforts.

Madame President,

I would also like to draw the attention on two anniversaries proposed by Armenia to the UNESCO calendar.

For 2016 with the support of France and Netherlands we have nominated 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first printed Bible in Armenian. This is indeed a remarkable event not just for the 500 years long history of the Armenian book printing, but also it is symbolic for a nation that was first adopted Christianity as a state religion more than 1700 years ago and whose translation of the Holy Bible was one of the first in the world.

For 2017 jointly with Russian Federation and supported by Italy we have nominated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Hovhannes (Ivan) Aivazovsky, the world famous marine artist.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nowadays there is a higher demand of such efforts that build and consolidate peace in the minds of people, that turn our differences into our strengths, that preserve and use our common heritage as a bridge between generations, cultures and peoples. Armenia strongly believes in this mission of UNESCO and stands ready to continue its contribution to the realization of these goals.

Thank you.