

Statement of the Republic of Latvia
at the 39th session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Madam President of the General Conference,

Madam Director General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

My experience working with and for UNESCO this year has reached adulthood. I started working as a newly appointed Secretary General of the National Commission 18 years ago. Today being a minister for Culture of Latvia and the President of the National Commission for UNESCO I see this organization as a major international safeguard of the world diversity and the leading global player which changes the sustainable development paradigm embracing value-based dimension, recognizing that culture and education influences our choices, attitudes, life models and ways of living together.

Shortly before leaving for Paris I participated in the assessment of the National Development Plan of Latvia where discussions brought us to one of the most important questions nowadays - how people can become happy. The pace of living, constant changes in everything and for everyone, fragility and uncertainty as never before have facilitated the loss of trust in oneself and in own community. The extensive debate has led us to the essential conclusion - everyone should learn how to develop his/her own personality proactively and it cannot be delegated to anybody else – state, politicians, teachers or others. But how to

develop such capacity for every individual? Here we come to the mandate of UNESCO to build the peace and harmony in the minds of men through education, culture, science, information and communication. These are the core instruments that help people to take more and more responsibility about their own lives.

We fully support that only through education we can learn how to live in diversity and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Education highlights eventual solutions. In Latvia we have just elaborated the new competence based curriculum project which defines that each child should achieve the level of competence for living in the contemporary society. It is not enough to reach only the level of practise and life skills, but it should be the competence level of active participation to foster personal development at the level of proactivity. In this regard, we highly appreciate very important work of the International Bureau of Education, as well as value-oriented and active citizenship education as a backbone for reaching truly democratic countries with well-motivated civil societies and, in particular, NGO sector.

Latvia strongly believes that only through culture and cultural diversity we can acknowledge how to fulfil the potential of everyone, strengthen personal and community self-esteem. In fact, any investment in culture becomes the investment in the security policy, both at local and global level. In the changing world where everyone needs to find how to identify his/her unique way of living and true self, culture is irreplaceable. In order not to feel threatened or suppressed by surrounding realities, we can only build the personal, community and

global identities through heritage, artistic expressions and cultural relations between people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

Furthermore, we recognize that only through science we can accumulate, study and distribute all the knowledge for peaceful living together, and not only among the peoples, but also learning how to respect and responsibly live on our planet. In this regard, the programmes on biodiversity and bioethics are significant tools to mobilize knowledge and embedding rights to foster inclusive and equitable societies.

Latvia also believes that well-targeted information and communication programme and, especially, critical thinking and media literacy, become the precondition for peaceful living together where skills how to manage your life in the era of constantly growing amount of information play crucial role. It is therefore that Latvia has established UNESCO Media Literacy Chair at the University of Latvia and organized the 2nd Media and Information Literacy Forum which brought together more than 100 experts who adopted Riga recommendations. Additionally, we also believe that UNESCO could intensify its work to prevent and eliminate fake news and hate speech globally. With regards to the Memory of the World Programme Latvia would like to express some strong concerns about the recent developments which weaken the programme as such. However, what is more alarming is the effect of the growing overcautious attitudes and internal culture of self-censorship, namely, it gives an impression that nominations are being assessed not by their narratives but by certain keywords which if

perceived as politically sensitive might lead to overrule the intent of the nomination.

Being at the forefront of the centenary of Latvia, which we celebrate the next year, we feel privileged to be among the creators of the international agenda and our active participation in the work of UNESCO is the acknowledgement of solidarity of the Latvian people to the international community. We are confident that UNESCO is one of the major collaboration platforms where Latvia's unique experience to share and at the same time the place where to continue to learn from others.

Thank you!