

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ahmad Jalali
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the
Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO
General Policy Debate, 39th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO
Paris, 6 November 2017**

Madam President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

May I start by congratulating H.E. Madam Alaoui on her election as President of the General Conference. Your opening speech was very inspiring on UNESCO's mission, as well as your orientation to help its realization.

Also, my profound gratitude goes to our esteemed outgoing President of the General Conference, H.E. Mr. Simataa, for his unsparing efforts during his tenure.

Dear Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board, you have succeeded in conducting the Board with an agenda which was not very easy, illustrated by your comprehensive report. You well conducted the election of our incoming Director-General, Madam Audrey Azoulay, whom I would like to congratulate and assure of our full support.

Madam Irina Bokova, as Director-General, you launched your reform upon your election in 2009. As a member of the Senior Expert Group for Reform I can attest to your determination in proceeding with it. In six of your eight years, one of the most difficult periods of budgetary shortfall has seriously affected your reform trend. I appreciated your comprehensive report on 30 October, which I hope to see separately published, illustrating UNESCO's unique irreplaceable soft power in action as a map for peace, rather than a map of political borders.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

This is my tenth General Conference. Numerous conventions, resolutions, programmes and documents have been approved here for the realization of UNESCO's ideals. However, why have so many of them - the outcome of thousands of hours of the deliberations - remained underutilized? Shall we add to them, or should we instead try to find modalities to better utilize them? I think a pathological survey is needed.

In my experience, politicization is deforming UNESCO's DNA. Well, politics is part and parcel of an intergovernmental organization; however, politics differs from politicization, which is injecting politics into a subject matter which is not political by nature. This will culminate in a negative paradigm shift. UNESCO was supposed

to embrace a politics of the mind in a transparent universal form. It is needed for a lasting productive multilateralism with its own chemistry and prerequisites, as it is greater than the dry sum of elements of bilateralism, a modality which is not supposed to represent special interests or ideologies. However, the trend of depoliticization itself requires political will. This wish is not paradoxical at all; it is an art which UNESCO was supposed to perform, for which we are bound to design a standing spirit for dialogue. It is for this reason that the title of laboratory of ideas suits UNESCO; but producing ideas is not necessarily the outcome of producing technical documents.

I have a lot to say, but there is no time. However, I would like here to recognize the importance of the expertise in the Secretariat to advise Member States how to prioritize, contextualize and nationalize the application of SDG 4.

Madam Director-General, if you recall when in spring 2014 you visited my country, there were about half a million documented Afghan refugee children in school. However, there was a procedural problem in enrolling about 400,000 undocumented Afghan children, as identity papers are required even for Iranian citizens. Now all schools are required to enroll any Afghan children, whether or not they are documented, and altogether nearly 900,000 are studying in Iranian schools. I mention this point as I believe that the best practices of countries should be shared, especially in the field of Education.

Dear colleagues,

It is my wish that the key concepts of multilateralism, depoliticization, and dialogue shall not be overshadowed if we sincerely apply ourselves to making this House flourish.

And finally, let me conclude with a poem by Rumi:

The unique light of the sun in heaven
Becomes a hundred lights in the courtyards.
But, when walls are removed,
There will be no light but one.¹

Thank you.

¹ Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, The Mathnawi, Book IV