

**Statement by Shri Prakash Javadekar, Minister for Human Resource Development,
Government of India**

**On the occasion of the General Policy Debate during the 39th General Conference of
UNESCO**

Excellencies, Madam President of the General Conference, Mr. Chair of the Executive Board, Madam Director General, Dear friends.

As I approached the UNESCO Headquarters this morning, I was greeted by the commanding sight of the flags of 195 countries fluttering in the wind. As I watched them, I was struck by the thought that though all of us here stand proud beneath our flags, we also stand divided by them. The one that unites us, the one under which we have all gathered here today as the people of the world, is a short distance away, the one in light blue. Over the last 70 years or so, we have become habituated to the existence of international institutions where nations can communicate with each other, as equals, directly and openly, without fear or favour. The importance of these institutions, their extraordinariness and their value in the historical context, always needs fortification. Multi-lateralism needs to succeed. For this, we need to stick to our original agenda. We should maintain line & length and should not divert. It is not confrontational but cooperative federalism. Every member state is sovereign but will come together for common good.

I would like to offer a short prayer in Sanskrit taken from the Vedas to this great assembly of nations:-

Om sahana vavatu

Sah nau bhunaktu

Sah veeryam karvavahai

Tejasvi navadhitamastu

Ma vidvishavahai

Om shanti, shanti, shanti

It means that may we all be protected, may we all be nourished, may we work together with great energy, may our intellect be sharpened, may there be no animosity amongst us, Om, peace, peace, peace. This is our original agenda, education, culture, science and communication. In this, we learn from each other. We share best practices. This is UNESCO's agenda. We must promote it.

I would like to add that the tradition of vedic chanting had been inscribed as intangible cultural heritage of India in 2008.

We stand here today when there will also be a significant change at the UNESCO. As we bid goodbye to Ms. Irina Bokova we must applaud the contribution she has made in leading this organization for 8 long years.

I would also like to offer my felicitations and my best wishes to Ms. Audrey Azoulay who has been chosen to lead this organization into the future.

There can be no greater need and no greater opportunity to come together and strengthen this organization from within. There is so much good that this organization can do for the world. No nation can argue against the urgent need to act on education, communications and information, culture and science irrespective of their different needs and interpretations. Going forward, the UNESCO agenda should be such that it can be agreed upon by consensus. India will fully support any constructive approach that seeks to strengthen UNESCO's mandate.

India has taken very seriously its commitments to the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in all the fields including education. The strategic thrusts of the education development efforts in India focus on five important pillars: Accessibility, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability. One of the priority areas of action relates to the task of expanding opportunities for technical and vocational education and skills development with a view to equipping the youth with the skills required for enhancing their employability and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship. The Skill India mission launched in 2015 aims at skilling 400 million youth by 2022. New Education Policy is under preparation, which will serve next 20 years.

Another priority areas of action has been to enhance the use of information and communication technologies to improve access to education, enhancing the quality of teaching-learning process and teacher development programmes, strengthening educational planning and management, and improving monitoring systems. The potential of ICT is also being harnessed to build capacity and improve access in the field of culture and science. The latest is India's own MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Since its launch on 9th July 2017, 400 courses have been made available and more than 18,00,000 students and citizens have registered.

In the field of culture, over the course of the last two years, India has dedicated ‘the walled city of Ahmedabad’, ‘Khangchendzonga national park’ and ‘the architectural works of Le Corbusier’ in co-ordination with partner countries, to the Heritage of the World. It has also added the discipline of ‘yoga’ to the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for the benefit of all mankind.

With regard to natural sciences, I am happy to inform that a proposal for establishment of International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography in Hyderabad, India, as category-2 Centre of UNESCO is placed before the General Conference for consideration. The primary objective of this centre is to promote capacity building among the countries of Indian Ocean Rim including East African region. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO and Member States for extending support during the 29th Assembly held in June 2017.

I am indeed happy to note that Dr. Ashutosh Sharma, founding coordinator of the nano science unit within the Department of Science and Technology of India won the UNESCO Medal for contributions to the development of nano science and nano technologies. India has also increased the quantum of prize money of the Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science from the current cycle.

In the end, I would like to recall that, recently , Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken to UNESCO of ‘an introspection into our different cultures, traditions and religions to overcome the rising tide of extremism, violence and divisions that plague our world’. He observed that UNESCO’s responsibilities to the future had become bigger and “... so our resolves must be stronger”. This is the extraordinary legacy of our partnership with UNESCO from the time of its birth and we would like to see it continue.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.
