

INDIA

India's Statement at the Plenary of the 204th Session
of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Statement by Prof. J.S. Rajput on 9 April, 2018

Madam President of the General Conference;

Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board;

Madam Director General;

Distinguished Delegates,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be present here at this august gathering for the very first time as India's Representative.

At the outset, I would like to offer my felicitations and best wishes to the Director-General and the Chairman of the Executive Board. As you seek to provide direction and pursue attainment of UNESCO's core mandate, you can count on my delegation's full constructive support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India has been committed to the core values of UNESCO since its very inception. And, for a country that is home to one sixth of humanity; with 53.7 percent of its population below the age of 25; with 22 constitutionally recognized languages, 700 other languages and over 1500 dialects; a country where all the world religions are followed and has always believed 'cultural rapprochement' to be the only way of life, it cannot be any other way.

In December 2017, the festival of Kumbh Mela, celebrated in 4 cities across India, became the Intangible Heritage of Mankind for being the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims in the world.

Re-affirming India's support to science is its decision to double the prize money for the Kalinga Award for Science from \$20,000 to \$40,000. India has been sponsoring this prize since 1951.

Our International Training Centre on Operational Oceanography at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), a UNESCO category 2 centre is set to play a larger role in Asia-Pacific region as a center for training and ocean research.

Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, headquartered in New Delhi, is an excellent resource, fully funded by the extra-budgetary resources contributed by the Government of India, taking on newer challenges that face UNESCO such as education to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. I congratulate UNESCO in playing a pro-active role in this ongoing discourse.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The SDGs are a national priority for us. A 3-year Action Agenda already prepared; the 7-year strategy and 15-year vision which are being finalised by the NITI Aayog, that is 'The National Institution for Transforming India', which takes into account the priorities and orientation reflected in the SDGs.

We have special programmes targeting attainment of primary, secondary, higher and adult education. India has had a law to ensure 'Free and Compulsory Education' for children since 2009.

In 2015, the Government of India launched the National Skill Development Mission with an aim to skill a majority of the 700 million youth in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The agenda before this session of the Executive Board is substantive. It is important that our approach to it be purposeful.

In this context, new ideas and thought streams are welcome. We are happy to note that in their pursuit, and the associated resource allocation, the DG's proposes to remain sharply focused and relevant to UNESCO's central tasks and we support her constructive agenda whole-heartedly.

We also offer our support, to her efforts to mitigate the upward curve of polarization and politicization faced by the organization.

It is also imperative that while we try to structure a 'fit for purpose' organization, UNESCO's inter-governmental nature, which to us amounts to first principles, and enshrined in its constitution, must be protected and preserved.

It is with these principles in mind, that we look forward to participating in the deliberations of the Board, including in particular, the agenda related to structured financing dialogue, Revision of the Memory of the World Programme, Working of the Category 1 and 2 Centers and other items.

We are also encouraged by DG's report on the proposed strategy for Transformation of UNESCO. We now look forward to seeing its specific elements, its detailed substantive provisions in order give it the proper consideration it so richly deserves.

Ladies and Gentlemen

All 193 Member States of UN have signed Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The UN Secretary-General at the time of its adoption had said that "The true test of commitment to Agenda 2030 will be implementation. We need action from everyone, everywhere. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals are our guide. They are a to-do list for people and planet, and a blueprint for success".

I urge the Member States present here to preserve the fundamental strength of UNESCO and make their best efforts towards the fulfillment of its core mandate.

Thank you very much.
