

Statement by Lithuania at the 204 session of the Executive Board

9 April 2018

Mr President,

Madam Director-General,

Lithuania aligns itself with the EU statement.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and support the efforts of the Director General to **improve the functioning and efficiency of UNESCO**. We look forward to the dashboard of the implementation of the strategical transformation, including concrete goals and objectives.

Today we face new and inherited challenges. We are witnessing the highest levels of displacement ever recorded. We are surrounded by manifestations of violence, including crimes against humanity, destruction of cultural monuments, and barriers towards inclusive education for young women. Freedoms of information and expression are in great danger in a growing number of countries. While entire regions are plagued by wars or frozen and armed conflicts, the stability of their social and political systems is threatened to an unprecedented degree.

Cooperation to solve common challenges has always been at the heart of UNESCO, which shapes our shared vision of the future. For decades, this Organization has been committed to the core values of freedom and democracy through defence of human rights, especially the freedom of expression, and has been a consistent supporter of the civil society and the rule of law, as well as the promotion of an inclusive vision for humanity.

Education is undeniably one of the essential sources of social and professional development, economic growth, as well as the awakening of human consciousness. Education does not imply only the preparation for examinations or means for better employment. It also means constant learning. The idea of education as premising a sustainable future is enshrined in SDG4 of the 2030 Agenda, which addresses the need to promote inclusive education, especially for vulnerable groups. Therefore, we support the efforts and specific expertise of UNESCO in education, and continue to ensure that its work serves as an indispensable tool for other actors, international and national, regional as well as local.

The recent political re-commitment of the UN Security Council, by way of resolution 2347(2017), to **protect cultural heritage** is yet another recognition of the importance of UNESCO and its essential work. As a co-sponsor of this resolution, Lithuania wishes to emphasise once again the relevance of the implementation of the Strategy

for the reinforcement of UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict.

We welcome the active engagement of UNESCO in the fields of freedom of speech online and offline, as well as the **safety of journalists**. Lithuania remains firmly committed to promoting international norms concerning the safety of journalists, including with regard to specific threats faced by **women journalists**. We would like to encourage further multilateral initiatives with involvement of regional organizations, aimed at the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Lithuania also welcomes the active and regionally sensitive efforts to approach these issues through an array of normative, monitoring, reporting, and capacity-building activities.

Efforts to **empower women** should remain at the heart of UNESCO's every activity, as they are an integral part of those that build ever more peaceful and inclusive societies, which, in turn, provide an equal access to justice, education and information. These efforts aim to ensure prosperity not only of our own generation, but also of those to come. Lithuania supports UNESCO in pursuing and enhancing gender equality, as well as the empowerment of girls and women.

We appreciate the goal to **engage more actively in the international fora**. We support the direction of making our Organisation more visible. Therefore, it is profoundly regrettable that the United States and Israel decided to withdraw from UNESCO at a time when international support for this Organization is crucial. We hope the two states will re-join the UNESCO community in the future.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, let me reiterate the need to seek alignment of our discussions with those at the United Nations – there is a danger of duplicating the processes taking place in New York and elsewhere, as well as reopening texts that have already been agreed upon. UNESCO activities must be carried out in close cooperation and coordination among all actors involved.