

Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

204 session of the Executive Board

President of the General Conference,

Chairman of the Executive Board,

Madam Director General,

Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am privileged to speak at the 204th Session of the Executive Board of UNESCO as on behalf of Hon. Akila Viraj Kariyawasam, Minister of Education and Sri Lanka's Representative.

At the outset, let me congratulate and express the warmest wishes of my Government to Madam Audrey Azoulay, on being elected as the Director General of UNESCO. I am confident that under your able guidance, UNESCO will face the global challenges with renewed vigour in order to realize its noble objectives.

Sri Lanka welcomes the vision of the Director General for Strategic Transformation of UNESCO presented very recently in

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order to realign and reinvigorate the organization effectively implement its mandate, particularly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Sri Lanka looks forward to working with you and other Member States jointly to drive the reform process in a very inclusive and transparent manner.

Sri Lanka, being a country that suffered due to 30 years of armed conflict, is firmly committed to focus more attention to prevent a recurrence of such situation. We are proud to be a nation of cultural diversity which enriches our country, where our government deploys Education, Culture, Sports and Communication to bring about intercultural dialog and harmony to erase hatred and mistrust from the minds of our people. We earnestly hope peace prevails throughout the world to make it a better place for our future generations to live. In this context, we welcome UNESCO's work on promoting peace and non-violence through education as well as on PVE (prevention of violent extremism) education.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to strengthen Democracy and Good Governance across all strata of the society.

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The amendments introduced to the Constitution and several enactments will contribute largely towards this end. The Right to Information Act has made all government proceedings transparent and as a result, the accountability of the government has improved. The Local Authorities Act with new amendments, has enhanced women's participation in governing and decision making process.

Sri Lanka considers achieving Sustainable Development Goals as a prime objective in the current development agenda. Subsequent to the enactment of Sustainable Development Act, a Presidential Expert Committee is formulating the "Vision 2030 for Sri Lanka" based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. Consultative committees have been appointed and SDGs have been mainstreamed into organizational plans in several sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Education is the foundation of peace and sustainable development. Without ensuring equitable and quality education for all and lifelong learning, a country cannot move ahead. In this

context, Sri Lanka is on the correct path towards achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal four. The Government of Sri Lanka has progressively increased the Educational Budget to enable achievement of the above targets in line with Incheon (en-chan) Declaration and Education 2030 Framework of Action. In this respect, Sri Lanka is happy to note the crucial role played by UNESCO in achieving Education 2030 agenda as the lead UN agency coordinating SDG 4.

Mr. Chairman,

The quality of education of a country depends largely on the quality of teachers. The new pre-service training as well as continuous professional development programmes for teachers are formulated including soft skills, language skills and ICT literacy in addition to traditional subjects. It is expected to produce more resourceful and competent teachers in near future. We have improved ICT infrastructure in schools and developed electronic materials to enhance accessibility to educational materials.

I also wish to acknowledge with gratitude, the UNESCO assistance to restore science labs and computer equipment destroyed by floods the previous years.

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The University system has planned to provide hundred doctoral degrees in STEM subjects and increase the number of Technological degrees by six hundred. UNESCO Bangkok provides technical assistance to formulate a National Policy on ICT in Education and to develop an ICT Master Plan to streamline education management and improve quality of education. It includes development of competency standards for ICT for teachers as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A Nation cannot exist without its own identity. Its identity is defined by the values, traditions, practices, rituals and traditional crafts. The Intangible Cultural Heritage plays a major role in shaping the social fabric of a country. Hence, Sri Lanka has made several policy and implementation level initiatives to preserve the rich tangible and intangible heritage of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Scientific research and innovation plays a major role in economic development of a country. Establishment of a Techno City in the Western Province of Sri Lanka including a National Science Centre is a major step towards promoting research and innovation and produces a conducive environment for collaborations. Such

initiatives contribute to poverty alleviation through creation of new job opportunities.

Distinguishes Delegates,

In conclusion, I would like to remind you that we need to re-commit ourselves to the Paris Agreement and Climate Change Initiatives. Sri Lanka has taken several initiatives to combat desertification and climate change including legislative changes and community forestry programmes. The National Man & the Biosphere Programme is working in collaboration with stakeholders to find solutions to issues related to forests, wildlife and humans to make it a better country.

Thank you.