

Mr President, fellow members of the Executive Board, it gives me great pleasure to address this 204th session on behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am particularly pleased to be working with you, Mr President, as Chair of the Executive Board, with Director General Madame Azoulay, and with President of the General Conference Madame Alaoui. Allow me also to welcome all those Member States who have recently joined the Executive Board.

Mr President, as the Director General herself said yesterday, UNESCO faces many challenges. In recent years its reputation has been damaged and, principally but not solely through financial difficulties, UNESCO's ability to work with certainty and to deliver on its mandate has been constrained. And this matters - because UNESCO's mandate is unique, and deserves to be protected. Just as the spirit of multilateral cooperation that UNESCO should embody deserves not only to be protected, but to be championed.

It is encouraging to see the positive new dynamic that has been underway since the General Conference - and to note the extent to which UNESCO's finances are on a more sustainable footing. We welcome in particular the energy and determination that our new Director General is displaying as she builds her team, sets out her vision, engages with UNESCO's stakeholders, partners and supporters and identifies new areas where UNESCO can make a difference.

She and the Secretariat face a considerable task, but in doing so, they will enjoy strong support from the United Kingdom. Strong support for a UNESCO that seeks to deliver its mandate through partnership and dialogue. Steadfast support for keeping political discussions that should more properly be conducted elsewhere out of UNESCO. Determined support for reforms that will help UNESCO focus its efforts where it can make the most impact, for an organisation that is led, administered and financed in an exemplary manner, promoting accountability and demonstrating appropriate transparency. And unwavering support for the highest standards of leadership, integrity and ethical behaviour including a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Mr President, these are tasks that will not be achieved overnight. Nor will they be delivered easily. We look to the Director General to provide leadership. But we, as Member States and particularly as Members of the Executive Board must also take our share of the responsibility. We share an interest in UNESCO's future success, we should share the burden of working to ensure that success. UNESCO and we as member States should align ourselves fully behind UN Secretary General Guterres' reform agenda so that we can deliver a step change in leadership, efficiency, accountability and performance.

Mr President, the United Kingdom applauds the Director General's ambitions, we welcome the initiative for Mosul, we look forward to playing our full part in discussions on digitalisation and artificial intelligence. On heritage issues, the UK's National Commission and our Department for Culture Media and Sport are actively engaged - and we are delighted that UK designations continue to expand. This plays an important role in ensuring public visibility of UNESCO. We welcome the Director General's initiative to host a Conference this summer on the Permanent Restitution of Cultural Property. The UK remains supportive of this agenda and will continue to work in a spirit of constructive partnership with the ICPRCP. We are proud of the recognition given to UK prize winners in the L'Oreal Women in Science awards, the Japan Prize for Education for Sustainable Development and the Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum Prize for Enhancing Effectiveness of Teachers. We strongly endorse the determination to push forward UNESCO's work on education in order to "create a reinforced cultural dialogue with our younger generations".

The United Kingdom will continue to engage across the breadth of UNESCO's mandate. As part of this engagement, a particular focus on education is, and will remain, a central concern. Promoting education for all, in line with the SDGs, is a top priority for the UK Government. In February, DFID

published a new strategy with a focus on helping countries reform their education sectors, train their teachers better and prioritize the needs of their most hard-to-reach communities. In line with SDG4 our focus is to help all children have access to 12 years of quality education and learning by 2030. Our Foreign Secretary has made this a personal priority and will be pursuing it at next week's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London. As we pursue this vision, it is vital that we have the data we need so that we can monitor progress and hold each other to account. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report plays an important part in enabling us to do this.

In conclusion Mr President, allow me to echo your own words yesterday: we must all look to what we can do to play our part. UNESCO cannot simply take on everything so we must focus on the mandate and where UNESCO is uniquely placed to deliver - now and in the future. The United Kingdom looks forward to being part of that journey and supporting UNESCO's efforts.