

National Statement, United States of America
to the 204th Executive Board of UNESCO
Delivered by Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Hegadorn
April 10, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board, Madam Director-General and staff, distinguished representatives and colleagues:

It is with a certain degree of optimism that I address this Executive Board session, my last before departing the U.S. Mission to UNESCO later this year. With a **new leadership team at UNESCO** and a clear vision and commitment by the Director-General to reshaping and reinvigorating this organization befitting its ambitious mandate, we hope the initiatives she has described and commenced will contribute to the broad **UN system reform effort** underway, focused squarely on transparency, accountability, and results.

For any international organization and its leadership team, this will be no easy task, including for a new DG and a newly created Assistant Director General for Management. We welcome their commitment to driving systemic change, and look forward to supporting their efforts.

Though this is our final year as a member of UNESCO, the United States will remain active and a strong player globally on all issues where UNESCO works – including education, science, culture, and information. We intend to work with UNESCO to advance these shared goals, and alignment of our respective efforts will remain our priority.

In fact, we will continue to look for concrete, tangible ways in which we can support and collaborate with UNESCO. For example, we were pleased to finalize arrangements with UNESCO earlier this year to establish a “Fellows” program to bring college and graduate students from U.S. UNESCO Chair institutions to UNESCO, as

volunteers, to work in key mandate areas. We will also continue the Laura W. Bush travelling Fellowship to fund American university students to conduct brief work in a foreign country on topics related to UNESCO's mandate.

And, the public-private partnerships we initiated recently – one on girls' education in STEAM (“TeachHer”); the other on preventing violent extremism (PVE) through education (PeaceWorX) – continue to have positive impacts in the countries and communities where they have been piloted. The models we used in their design will hopefully be used by others as a template for future partnerships. Also, we continue to collaborate and meet our responsibilities under the 1970 and 1972 UNESCO Conventions concerning the looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property and world heritage, respectively.

Preventing violent extremism via education is even more critical now. With ISIS largely militarily defeated, and the threat more dispersed than ever, preventing youth from being radicalized to violence is the longer-term challenge. Reaching youth in and out of schools – raising their awareness and building their resilience – is key to blunting the appeal of terrorist ideology – online and offline. UNESCO’s nascent “digital literacy” initiative is particularly important, as it has the potential to address online radicalization by equipping students with the knowledge and skills to recognize and refute terrorist content. Looking ahead, this may be one of the most important areas of PVE via education efforts.

That said, we are still deeply dismayed that some in this Organization continue to foment politicization and exploit regional tensions on issues beyond the remit of UNESCO. Such actions distract from the positive work being done here, and incorrectly cast

such disputes as conflicts with zero-sum outcomes only. It is part of the reason why the United States ultimately decided to leave UNESCO. We urge all member states to safeguard the principles, ideals, and commitment to peace upon which the United Nations was originally founded in the days after World War II.

In particular, we hope that member states will commit to defending the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations, UNESCO's primary human rights body, from being systematically attacked and weakened by enemies of human rights, freedom, and liberty. The CR is a vital part of the core mandate of UNESCO, shining a spotlight on human rights abuses, illegal detentions, and attacks on freedom of expression and journalist safety. Its work complements and reinforces efforts in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council.

We urge member states and the DG to make every effort to promote the CR's important role and its work. – We must defend against efforts to diminish the CR, including the increased frequency of unwarranted dismissals and rulings of inadmissibility which have in the past been highly unusual.

Likewise, the Director-General and member states must speak regularly to condemn vigorously all cases of violence perpetrated against journalists and end impunity against its perpetrators. Freedom of expression is crucial to functioning democracy and to genuine economic prosperity; we must support a stronger role for UNESCO in this sphere.

In the area of culture, whether theft and destruction by terror groups like ISIS in Iraq or abuses perpetrated by **Russian occupation authorities** against Crimean Tatars in occupied Ukraine, UNESCO has a key role to play and should be supported. Accordingly, we look forward to a rapid

and successful launch of UNESCO's direct monitoring activities in Crimea, in strict accordance with UNGA Resolution 68/262.

On **reform**, we had been disappointed at the slow pace and lack of earlier progress. In particular, we want to see more attention on Fifth Committee recommendations, such as dispensing with first class travel by agency heads and transparency into Human Resources decision-making. A robust Ethics Office, with a longer mandate and jurisdiction over HR decisions, should be pursued.. We hope these and other Fifth Committee and JCIU recommendations are seriously addressed in future sessions.

As I said at the outset, however, we have great hopes for the new leadership team here at UNESCO. I remain optimistic that they will bring new ideas and new energy to this organization, and help it and the member states to put aside politicization, rediscover its path, and continue to work on its mission for the benefit of mankind.

Thank you for your attention.