

Remarks by the Head of the Georgian Delegation
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia
Ms. Khatuna Totladze
to the 39th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Madamme President of the General Conference,

Madame Director General,

Distinguished Delegates to UNESCO,

It is my honor to address you today from this high tribune and on behalf of my Government, express our appreciation to Ms. Irina Bokova, the Director General of UNESCO for her commitment to the goals of the Organization and her consistent support to Member States.

Let me express my sincere congratulation to Ms. Audrey Azoulay nominated by the Executive Board to the post of the Director General and wish her success in meeting effectively the challenges the Organization is facing, continuing and intensifying the reform process with the aim to uplift the credibility of UNESCO, make it more efficient and result-driven.

2017 is the 25th anniversary of the solid ties of cooperation that exist between Georgia and UNESCO in all fields of competence of the Organization. Through these years, we have had the firm support of UNESCO in advancing innovative policies in education, science and culture and at the same time, spared no effort to promote image and core values of the Organization.

Distinguished Delegates,

We fully share new approaches and ambitious steps towards implementation of 2030 Global Agenda and acknowledge UNESCO's paramount role in this regard.

Guided by the global level of ambition, Georgia has incorporated the SDGs into national goals, aligning them with country's strategic priorities.

Georgia's commitment to ensure implementation of the SDG Goals, its tangible efforts towards promoting just, peaceful, equitable and inclusive societies with a special focus on collaboration between the Government and civil society, determined the successful involvement of the country in the Open Government Partnership. Moreover Georgia's chairmanship of the OGP since October 2017, is the clear expression of appreciation of Country's achievements, reforms and its future plans. In this context we are proud to host the OGP Global Summit in 2018.

We believe that SDG 4 is at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

According to Georgian Government's 4 Point Plan and objectives of SDG 4 the modernization of education system is declared as one of the main priorities. Our commitment to make the education system flexible, modern, inclusive and accessible for all, oriented on quality, and equality, is ensured by the increased state budget and continued support of EU and partner countries.

The reform includes development and internationalization of higher education system and science, improvement of quality of preschool and secondary education and transformation of vocational education to bridge the labor market supply demand, to support professional and personal competencies development.

Cultural diversity and protection of cultural heritage are among clear priorities for my Country. International cooperation and in particular, UNESCO's active and direct involvement in this process is of outmost importance.

I cannot avoid mentioning the exceptional cooperation between Georgia and the World Heritage Center. Let me take this opportunity and thank the Center for its continued support and recognition of our efforts towards the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Georgia, as a country of rich and diverse culture focuses its efforts on implementing the Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Moreover, the safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage is the one of the significant directions of the "Culture Strategy of Georgia 2025" approved by the Government of Georgia in 2016.

While recognizing the importance to fulfill the provisions of the Convention, we have improved the legal frame and established the effective inventory and management system on the national level. These efforts enabled Georgia to gain a solid experience through decades in this regard. Today, based on this knowledge, we are ready to share our experience, to provide expertise and assistance on the international level. Having this in mind, Georgia is currently a candidate for the membership to the Intergovernmental Committee for the period 2018-2022 and we very much hope for the valuable support of the Convention Member States.

Distinguished Delegates,

We express the grave concern over the deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage and violent extremism, which targets the cultural inheritances of the humankind as a part of strategy for cultural cleansing.

We further encourage efforts and even more efficient activities to be undertaken by UNESCO towards safeguarding cultural heritage under attack and emergencies. This issue is of utmost importance for my country. The facts of deliberate destruction of cultural heritage in occupied territories, looting and illicit trade of cultural artefacts as well as the grave violation of rights of ethnic Georgians residing on the occupied territories, who are deprived of the right to receive education in their native language, has been the issue of our deep concern for many years already.

Acknowledging UNESCO's paramount role and its commitment to mitigate threats to cultural heritage worldwide, we once again underline the need that more effective measures are to be taken for preserving cultural heritage in occupied regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding, allow me to express my firm confidence that, with our joint efforts, UNESCO will become the most efficient platform for building sustainable, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Thank you very much for the attention.