

Madame la Présidente de la Conférence Générale,  
Madame Director General,  
Mr President of the Executive Board,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow participants,

It is great a pleasure and honour for me to be here to represent Albania and address this distinguished audience.

Let me start by expressing my Government's and personal support to all those countries, peoples **and individuals that have suffered from violence and/or natural disasters**. Human and nature's violence is rising in troubling levels and I firmly believe that UNESCO, the forum where we build the peace in the minds of men and women and find ways to develop sustainable science, is more relevant and needed than ever.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Madame Irina Bokova, the outgoing Director General, who expertly led UNESCO during the last 8 years of financial difficulties for the organisation. I also express our gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Michael Worbs, the outgoing President of the Executive Board, who distinguished himself with the polite and diplomatic way to chair the Executive Board during the last 2 years.

I also welcome the new Director General that will be confirmed in a couple of days, Madame Audrey Azoulay, and wish her full success in her new endeavours. Our expectations are very high. The challenges UNESCO faces are numerous and difficult. We need the new DG to complete the reform of the organisation, to prioritise the programs by selecting fewer but most relevant for UNESCO's mandate, without overlapping and duplications with other UN bodies, to invigorate and inspire the staff and to conduct a deeper and wider dialogue with Member States. We expect that UNESCO provides a substantial and decisive contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in its fields of competence and, most importantly, to leave no one behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Albania aligns itself with the EU Statement.

I am delighted to see that this year education has been one of the most important topics of the debate and action of the whole UN system.

Through assessments of progress and gaps, and making recommendations for improving delivery, the UN contributed to making education more inclusive. UNESCO has the leading role in the implementation of the SDG4 – Education for All – and we are strongly committed to work closely with UNESCO to fulfil this objective. Education is the foundation of dynamic societies. A sustainable, just, fair, inclusive, and democratic values-oriented education is the foundation of peaceful societies.

Commending national efforts towards achievement of Agenda2030, recently, 25 Albanian Universities signed a Declaration of Commitment to play an active role in advancing the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the country. This follows United Nations in Albania ongoing efforts with the Government to establish partnerships with academics, parliament, private sector, civil society and others to support the country achieve the global goals. Through their work, Universities can advance strategic areas of development, inform good policies as well as propose sustainable solutions to social, economic, environmental and other issues in the country. Universities are in the most favourable position to lead innovation and become best example for both public and private sectors in the country.

Our country's education sector has greatly benefited from UNESCO's education policy review, assessing both strengths and weaknesses of the system focused on three national priority policy areas—teachers, curriculum development and use of information technology.

Albania commends UNESCO and especially Education Sector for its outstanding work on the Prevention of Violence and Extremism through Education, but also through sustainable science, culture and communication. This program is an example of how we should timely respond to a major concern and need of the Member States to tackle one of the most serious and widespreding threats and violation of human rights.

Science is an important field for sustainable development of each country. UNESCO's role in promoting Biosphere reserves, Geoparcs, Hydrology programme, disasters risks reduction and resilience are all important tools for Member States. But we need science to become affordable for all countries, regardless of their economic growth and level. UNESCO should be able to accompany and assist member States to achieve their scientific development and use of the most advanced technologies.

Culture and its World Heritage list is now the programme that makes UNESCO worldwide known and appreciated. Its tireless efforts to protect cultural expressions and cultural heritage in the context of armed conflict, not only has gathered international recognition and support as the historic United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 of March 2017 testimonies, but has also advanced the international criminal law with its tireless efforts that led to the International Criminal Court sentence condemning the perpetrators of the destruction of the World Heritage site in Tombuktu, Mali, in 2016.

UNESCO's role in promoting freedom of expression, safety for journalists and safe and healthy media and communication environment is essential. Albania commends the efforts of UNESCO and several Member States in promoting media literacy, congratulate Madame Albana Shala, Chairwoman of IPDC, for revitalising this important programme, unique in the UN system, and is contributing in the Group of Friends for the safety of journalists and the question of impunity.

Albania considers cooperation and especially regional cooperation an important tool to reach sustainable peace and development. Responding positively to UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez appeal to all of us "to strive to overcome our differences" because "peace depends on us", I invite Serbian politicians and governments leaders to work within a Euroean spirit and good negbourly policy for a sistainable developed

region. Kosovo is one of the countries of the region, which contributes to the stability, peace and progress in the whole region and has nothing in common with Catalonia.

I wish to assure all Member States that all heritages, cultural and natural, are not endangered in Kosova.

Albania, together with many countries throughout the world, supports Kosova's efforts to join UNESCO whenever they will decide to apply, because it will be on the benefit of Kosovo, on heritages in the country, about which Serbs pretend, and on UNESCO, itself.

Dear colleagues,

Albania is running for election to the Executive Board of UNESCO for the term 2017-2021 during the elections that will take place in a couple of days. My country and my government are committed to contribute to the fulfilment of UNESCO's mandate in all its fields of competence in our country and worldwide. My Government is committed to strengthen and widen the cooperation with UNESCO that is already growing steadily. We are convinced that Albania, country of tolerance to cultural diversity and religious beliefs and in a dynamic and vibrant economic development, has a lot to offer to UNESCO as well as a lot to benefit from.

I invite all Member States to cast their vote for the election of my country to the Executive Board, next Tuesday.

Thank you