

DELEGATION OF FINLAND

The 39th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

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Madam President

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board

Madam Director-General

Distinguished Delegates,

Congratulations on your election as President of the General Conference. We also wish to thank the outgoing President and the Chair of the Board. Finland concurs with the EU statement.

As this is our last Conference with the outgoing Director-General, I would like to warmly thank you, Madam Bokova, for all your efforts and dedication to the ideals of UNESCO. Finland looks forward to working as closely with your successor, Madam Azoulay, and wishes her the best of success.

Excellencies,

Finland sees a great deal of positive development since the last General Conference. We fully agree with the main threads of the four-year Draft Programme. It is well aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda.

We believe that UNESCO, a normative actor with convening power and rights based approach, has an important role to play. UNESCO offers unique added value for the 2030 Agenda.

Today, when more cooperation between more Member States is needed, not less, Finland deeply regrets the decisions by the US and Israel to withdraw from UNESCO. We recall the ambitions of UNESCO's founding fathers and the need to overcome confrontations with dialogue and constructive outcomes. It goes without saying, that we look forward to continuing cooperation with both the US and Israel, and to seeing them as Member States soon again.

Finland strongly supports UNESCO's leading role in coordinating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education. Access to quality education throughout life is a remedy for poverty, and is linked to other crucial goals as well, such as gender equality, health, water and ocean sustainability.

We underline the need to empower women and girls. No girl or boy should be denied the right to education. The role of qualified, motivated and supported teachers in learning processes is vital. UNESCO is well placed to give policy advice on ensuring the right conditions for teaching, learning, academic freedom and scientific integrity.

Providing quality education for the whole population has been the cornerstone of Finnish society. We believe in equity. Learning is for everybody. Learning is a lifelong journey. That should be a guiding principle on the global way to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.

To respond to changes, it takes not only resources but also policy coherence, stronger governance, follow-up of evaluations and inter-sectoral work. These elements are essential for UNESCO to meet all relevant SDGs.

Therefore, we need cooperation beyond governments – partnerships with the broader NGO community and the private sector are a necessity. Finland is currently undertaking final discussions with the UN about the establishment in Finland of a new UN Technology and Innovation Lab to meet the needs of the SDGs. This highly UNESCO relevant UN initiative will benefit the whole of the UN system.

UNESCO's role onwards is unique in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions and protecting cultural goods from destruction, looting and trafficking. Finland is one of the proud co-sponsors of the historic UN Security Council Resolution 2347.

Finland points in particular to equal and open access to information, freedom of expression and safety of journalists. As to press freedom, we are happy to see, after 27 years, the return of the World Press Freedom Day to Africa.

Excellencies,

Finland's 4-year term as a Member of the World Heritage Committee comes to an end this month. It has been an honor for us to serve the universal world heritage ideals. In that same spirit, Finland would be proud to serve on the Executive Board. It is 16 years since we last held a seat. Finland is the joint and only Nordic candidate after the expiry of Sweden's term. We greatly appreciate and count on your support.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, Finland celebrates 100 years of independence. The theme of our Centennial is "Together". Since the beginning of our independence, Finland has supported an international order based on rules and on working together. Global challenges, like achieving the SDGs, need to be addressed together, not in isolation or only by unilateral action. Peace and security, human rights and development belong to all of us, from the smallest islands states to the biggest countries. Only together we are strong enough to make a change.

Thank you for your attention.