

**39<sup>th</sup> UNESCO General Conference**

**A U S T R I A N N A T I O N A L S T A T E M E N T**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!**

Madame President of the General Conference,

Mister Chair of the Executive Board,

Madame Director-General,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

It's an honor for me to address the 39th General Conference of UNESCO on behalf of Austria. We fully align ourselves with the EU statement.

At the outset, allow me to thank Madame Bokova for her unwavering commitment to UNESCO and her leadership in the past 8 years during difficult times. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate Madame Azoulay for her nomination. Rest assured, Madame Azoulay, you can count on Austria's full support to make UNESCO great again.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

We are witnessing huge transformation, and the world can seem to be, at times, a messy place. UNESCO comes into play where today's transformations touch upon the very essence of what makes us human: the ways we interact, forge our identities, build communities and distinguish truth from fabrications. Its mission and vision are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Hence, our commitment to UNESCO today is a matter of interests as much as of principles and values.

Since the adoption of the Agenda 2030, the world is no longer separated between developed and developing countries. We came to realize that we can only develop together, face our challenges together and solve our problems together. Our work is

not a zero-sum game. Only together, we can ultimately be stronger. We believe: there is no other way.

SDG 4 on education has today one of the clearest follow-up mechanism of all goals, a demonstration of UNESCO asserting its leadership and living up to its mandate. It cannot be achieved without education, education on global citizenship, including human rights.

The importance of culture for the achievement of many of the SDGs, such as safe and resilient cities, decent work and economic growth, gender equality as well as peaceful and inclusive societies, cannot be understated. In messy times, we need UNESCO more than ever as a lighthouse, opposing old and new communitarian narratives with the redeeming vision of a shared cultural heritage of humanity that must be protected.

We need UNESCO to promote the diversity of cultural expressions, also through the International Fund for Cultural Diversity that supports cultural industries and innovative cultural business models at a local and regional level, contributing directly to strengthening communities. And we need UNESCO to mitigate some of the side effects of urbanization and migration by promoting traditional knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.

UNESCO needs to do the right things and assume leadership where it can make a difference. It is safe to say that UNESCO has made a pivotal contribution on issues of freshwater and sustainable water resources, championing the view that science, knowledge and innovation should be put to the service of policy makers to achieve the 2030 agenda. We think that there is a clear need for UNESCO to raise its profile and take the lead within the UN water architecture.

Technological, economic and political transformations are inexorably reshaping the whole communications landscape. We need UNESCO to be in the fore and promote freedom of opinion and expression, underpinning a free media, and the safety of journalists. UNESCO is uniquely positioned to ensure that technological progress serves the people, reaches the marginalized and allows for the progress of democratic values around the world. Only by doing all this, UNESCO will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our commitment to UNESCO comes with a fierce commitment to multilateralism and dialogue. This is not a choice, but a necessity.

Here in UNESCO, this means we need to take a step back. We need to stop thinking in terms of winners and losers, introduce an “open door policy” and talk more to each other. The extraordinary challenges the organization faces at this moment require a new style of cooperation and dialogue between member states, as well as between member states and the secretariat.

We encourage the new Director General, and her whole management team, to proactively propose to us how to best position UNESCO in the light of the broader UN reform, how to make UNESCO stronger and more effective. We encourage you to make bold propositions, share your expertise and assert leadership. Programme must always come first and define structures.

Madame la Présidente! Distinguished delegates!

UNESCO needs leadership - of all of us - to protect it from harmful politization and allow it to focus on bringing tangible value to the people. This is not the place to take out bilateral conflicts. UNESCO, at that moment in time, simply does not have any capacities, resources or purpose to provide the arena for controversies. The rule should be: if it can't be solved by dialogue, then UNESCO is not the right place.

Austria will continue to be a strong partner in support of UNESCO, multilateralism, dialogue and reform. We stand ready to be with UNESCO, without reserve and conditions.