

Head of Delegation - Kingdom of Belgium

**40th General Conference UNESCO
13 November 2019**

**Mr Jan Jambon
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders and
Flemish minister of Culture**

Dear President of the General Conference,
Dear Director-General,

Allow me to start by thanking you for the preparations of this session of the General Conference, with the valuable assistance of the secretariat.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world currently copes with a wide array of **global challenges**, ranging from armed conflicts, violent extremism and migration pressures, to the increasing impact of climate change, trade wars and digitalisation, affecting our societies and economies.

Belgium believes that an effective **multilateral system** is key to common, global solutions to tackle the multitude of challenges that have implications for all of us. Therefore, we need a strong and performing multilateral system, and a strong and performing UNESCO.

UNESCO acts as lead agency for the 2030 Education Agenda, protects our common heritage worldwide and supports scientific collaboration that can help us to deal with issues such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity. These ambitions merit an organisation that can effectively achieve them with its' partners.

When Director General Azoulay took office, you embarked on a **strategic transformation** of UNESCO to reform the organisation. Results have been achieved and the MOPAN assessment earlier this year was pretty positive. Nevertheless, UNESCO should always strive to do better, building on the in-house expertise, and liaising with relevant external partners.

We value the expertise and professionalism offered by UNESCO staff, yet we notice the **pressure** on the secretariats of several cultural conventions and committees. It is essential to maintain strong expertise within the secretariat in order to ensure UNESCO's credibility and performance. A deepened synergy and collaboration between the many conventions, programmes and initiatives, within and across the different sectors could help to alleviate some of the pressure.

We are happy to assist UNESCO and support the work of UNESCO by allocating extrabudgetary resources. Last May, the Government of Flanders and UNESCO signed an updated **trust fund agreement** for the support of UNESCO's work in the field of sciences, which has been going strong for 20 years. We aim to dedicate new financial resources to a selection of projects that is currently under evaluation in the areas of ocean science, freshwater management, biodiversity conservation and earth sciences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are convinced that **science** and innovation can contribute greatly to global challenges such as climate change. Yet, technological progress itself is also a transformative power that demands our attention.

We consider the integration of ethical aspects in **artificial intelligence** applications and technology from the design phase onwards as very important. Therefore, we welcome the proposal for a standard-setting instrument on the ethics of artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, we would like to warn against a "one regulation fits all" approach.

Furthermore, Belgium is committed to an **Open Science** approach, in which scientific research that is publicly funded should be publicly accessible as soon as possible according to the principle, 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'. We look forward to a new standard-setting instrument by UNESCO on open science, along those principles.

Science however would be non-existent without proper education. We particularly welcome UNESCO's endeavour to take the intellectual leadership in the global dialogue on the **Futures of education** in an increasingly interconnected world. In this open approach to the different futures – in plural – there should be no trade-off between equity and inclusion on the one hand and quality and relevance on the other. We cannot be ambitious enough in defending the right to *excellent* education!

Belgium acknowledges the guiding role of UNESCO's work, via the **Education 2030 Framework for Action** in pursuing more inclusive education policies. This was certainly illustrated at the Global Education Meeting, which our country hosted in December last year.

The meeting resulted in the Brussels Declaration, which clearly advocates **Education for Citizenship in a Global Perspective** – as a hallmark for the implementation of all SDGs. We were pleased to see how the outcomes of the Global Education Meeting inspired the 2019 High Level Political Forum in New York and the United Nations General Assembly.

We equally look forward to the further progress made on the **Global Recognition Convention**.

In addition to the ministerial education meeting during this General Conference, a **Forum of Ministers of Culture** will gather. We welcome this initiative that emphasises the relevance of culture for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the use of UNESCO's conventions and cultural programmes. For this event we

would like to focus on two main priorities: **cultural education** and a broad **participation** in cultural life, including broad access to culture and digitalisation.

Heritage represents another major part in UNESCO's cultural activities and has a high visibility among the public. Heritage constitutes a source of identity, enables intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and is an asset for local development and tourism, which in turn could help its preservation if managed sustainably. We remain concerned about the challenges heritage conservation faces such as wilful destruction (for instance, the countless destructions by ISIS), illegal trafficking and climate change. Therefore, we must continue our efforts to address them, through the work done by UNESCO and in partnership with other relevant partners.

By protecting and providing access to documentary heritages, the Memory of the World Programme is also important for sharing knowledge to enhance mutual understanding. In this regard, Belgium hopes to be able to play its part in the comprehensive review as a responsible Member of the Organization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I conclude by supporting the statement that will be made on behalf of the European Union. I will be looking forward to the progress made during this session of the General Conference, setting out the future path for UNESCO.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all a pleasant and interesting series of meetings, in this setting for international collaboration and mutual understanding.