

**Mr. President
Madam Director General
President of the Executive Board
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed an honour for me to address this esteemed assembly at the 40th session of UNESCO General Conference.

Let me first extend my sincere felicitations to you Mr. President for assuming this important position. You have our full support for the success of your two years term. We also thank Ms. Zahour Alaovi, former President of the General Conference for her able stewardship of the work of the General Conference.

I also take this opportunity to commend the Director General for her leadership and continued efforts to make UNESCO efficient and strong.

Mr. President,

The last century witnessed two horrifying global wars. The devastation and the bloodshed shook the entire world. Misperceived notions of power and superiority created intense levels of animosity and mistrust. We lost our dignity as human beings.

From the horrors of those wars, UNESCO emerged as a harbinger of peace, hope and optimism. A symbol of a renewed trust in humanity.

Fully aware of the underlying reasons which led to those wars, our founding fathers rightly noted in the UNESCO constitution that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be sincere and lasting. Therefore, they called for peace to be founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.

But unfortunately, Mr. President, today we are again witnessing return to the old destructive ways and flawed thinking. The intellectual, moral and legal basis for maintaining global peace is eroding. The multilateral and rule-based international order is being challenged by renunciation of existing treaties and rejection of agreed arrangements.

The very purpose of this organization to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms is under threat.

Mr. President, one place where we see the manifestation of these dangerous trends is the Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir. Today it is almost 100 days that the people there have been locked down under a curfew, with their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms being trampled with impunity.

**Pakistan's National Statement at the 40th General Conference by
Mr. Shafqat Mehmood, Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training
13 November 2019**

Over eight million Kashmiris have been virtually caged in the largest prison on this planet, with no access to basic amenities and means of communication.

The New York Times in its recent report noted that since the unilateral revocation of Kashmir's autonomy by India on August 5 "education has stood as one of the most glaring causalities of the crisis, and at least 1.5 million Kashmiri students remain out of school".

Kashmiris are now living in a state of fear and uncertainty. Their children's educational career is at stake. Their hopes and dreams for a life with dignity and respect have been shattered.

We hope that UNESCO's moral authority can be exercised to call upon the Indian Government to lift restrictions and restore the fundamental rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and to resolve this international dispute as per UN Security Council resolutions.

Mr. President

Religious freedom and protection of religious sites reflect the essence of UNESCO values. We are therefore also dismayed to see that the highest court in India has seen it fit to virtually condone the destruction of centuries old mosque sacred to Muslims. International community should take note of this travesty of justice.

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Mr. President,

Pakistan's commitment to UNESCO's mandate remains unwavering. Education figures high on our development agenda. We believe that through education, we could transform lives, eradicate poverty, build peaceful communities and achieve sustainable development. To deliver quality and equitable outcomes, we have devised a National Education Policy Framework, focusing on four key priorities; a uniform Education System, enrolment of Out of School Children, Teacher Quality Enhancement, and Technical and Vocational Training.

We value our partnership with UNESCO in the field of education. Provision of annual Masters and Ph.D scholarships to the students from Small Island and Developing States, and grant of US dollar 10 million to UNESCO's Malala Funds-in-Trust for Girls Right to Education are two concrete examples of this cooperation.

I am also honoured to announce that Pakistan is the Chair of the Education Commission in this General Conference. I look forward to working closely with all delegations to realize our common objectives.

Mr. President,

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Pakistan is home to rich cultural heritage and ancient civilizations. Besides Islam, it is also a land where three major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism flourished. The six UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Pakistan are the living examples of our cultural and religious diversity. The recent inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor between India and Pakistan last week, to facilitate followers of Sikh religion to visit their holy shrine, is a testimony of Pakistan's commitment to interfaith harmony, and also a symbol of peace and harmony in the region.

In the end, I would like to say that Pakistan would always stand by UNESCO and its member states for creating a just, peaceful and inclusive world. A world which is a better and safer place for our future generations.

I thank you all.