



*Intervention by Mr. Jenis av Rana, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture,
at the UNESCO 40th General Conference on 13 November 2019.*

Mr. President of the General Conference

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board

Madam Director-General

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Attending the 40th General Conference this year, the Faroe Islands are also pleased to be celebrating our 10-year anniversary as an associate member of UNESCO.

Over the past decade the challenges facing the world have only increased. Climate change, war, poverty and the loss of biodiversity are among the threats that continue to call for the world to act.

The development and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals over the same decade has also marked a positive turning point in the way we want to live our lives and manage our global resources.

And we greatly appreciate that UNESCO has set the Sustainable Development Goals at the forefront of all its activities – not only Goal number 4 on *quality education*, but also the 16 other Goals.



Representing an island nation heavily dependent on the resources of the ocean, I must highlight the importance of Goal number 14 on *life below water*. I want to underline the important work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in this regard. If I can make a pledge for the next decade of Faroese participation in UNESCO, it will be for the Faroes to contribute directly to the work of UNESCO and IOC in the upcoming *Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development*.

Fourteen hundred square kilometers of land over 18 islands in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean makes the Faroe Islands a small island nation - *and the tiny rocky shore is to the vast ocean just about the same as a grain of sand to the floor of a ballroom* - as our renowned writer, William Heinesen put it. But with an ocean area of close to three hundred thousand square kilometers, we prefer to call ourselves a Large Ocean Nation.

As well as its obvious economic importance, the ocean also has an intangible value to the people of the Faroe Islands. The ocean can be heard in our music and seen in our art - and especially the ocean is present in our language – “*he must have been born in the surf*” is said about a person speaking rather loudly.



The first decade of associate membership in UNESCO is not the only anniversary we are celebrating this year.

Two hundred years ago, the orthography of the Faroese Language was created, providing a firm basis for the development of Faroese ever since. One of our important tasks today is to develop educational material for foreigners learning Faroese as a second language. This is quite a commitment in a country with only fifty-two thousand inhabitants. For us, education is the key to sustainable development, and we believe in an education system that *leaves no one behind*.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into force in the Faroe Islands in 2018 and implementation is well under way. I must say that it is a great pleasure for us to be working alongside our neighboring Nordic Countries on this matter.

Although the orthography of the Faroese Language was only created two hundred years ago, for more than a millennium Faroese has been a living oral language going back to its old Norse origins. It has been safeguarded by the unbroken culture of the ancient ballad dancing that has been passed on from generation to generation – with a total of more than seventy thousand verses that were first recorded in written form centuries later.



The ancient tradition of ballad dancing that originates in medieval Europe is still very much alive in the Faroe Islands. It is nowadays referred to as *the Faroese dance*. You can say that instead of being preserved in libraries, European culture and history has been present in the minds of the Faroese people through the places, actions and characters kept alive in the storytelling and rhythm of the ballads. In this way, the stories of Charles le Magne and the battle of Roncesvalles are still learnt by heart and chanted together around the Faroe Islands - also by children in primary schools.

We are proud that this European tradition from the early middle ages is still alive - and we will do our best to safeguard it – for all of us to celebrate in the decades and the centuries to come. We believe that the safeguarding of language and culture in all their diversity is fundamental to reaching our Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank you for your attention.