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**NATIONAL STATEMENT BY MS GRACE FU  
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH  
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE  
40<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL  
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13 NOVEMBER 2019**

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President of the General Conference,  
Director-General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

2019 is a special year for Singapore as we commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of modern Singapore, even as our history goes back 700 years. As a trading port in Southeast Asia enjoying a strategic location along the trade routes plying between Europe and the Far East, Singapore thrived on the principles of openness and building connectivity and found independence on the values of multiculturalism and self-determination.

2. These values and our long-standing belief in the importance of international dialogue and cooperation are aligned with UNESCO's mandate. I would like to provide an update on the work that Singapore has undertaken in this regard.

*Education*

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3. Singapore strongly supports UNESCO's vision to transform lives through education. To support our economic and social progress, we have scaled up vocational training and general education to equip Singaporeans with current skills and knowledge. More than 95% of our student cohort progresses to post-secondary education. This is a significant increase from the 22% in the 1940s! We ensure that all Singaporeans have access to opportunities regardless of their starting points in life. Our national SkillsFuture movement encourages Singaporeans, across all age groups, to embrace lifelong learning. Individuals in all stages of their career journeys can tap on multiple programmes to develop their skillsets, and achieve personal aspirations.

4. Our own developmental experience has made us strong believers of education as an enabler to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Our institutes of higher learning play an active role in UNESCO's regional efforts. For example, Temasek Polytechnic was recently accepted as a member of the UNEVOC (Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training) Network. This allows Singapore to play an active role in strengthening international and regional cooperation in skills development and lifelong learning.

*Science/ Bioethics*

5. On the scientific front, Singapore continues to have a keen interest in the field of bioethics. We consider the responsive and responsible management of bioethical issues to be integral in enabling the safe growth of our emerging scientific developments and technologies. Singapore

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established the Bioethics Advisory Committee (BAC), an independent national committee, to examine the ethical, legal and social issues arising from human biomedical research. BAC's work has protected the rights and welfare of individuals in Singapore, while allowing biomedical sciences to advance and realise their full potential to benefit humankind.

6. Singapore has been an active participant in the UNESCO Bioethics Programme. As a member state of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee since 2014 and Rapporteur since 2016, Singapore has been keenly involved in the discussions and deliberations on emerging bioethical issues and has contributed to the development of international standard-setting frameworks in the field of bioethics, such as the 2017 report on Big Data and Health. Singapore's involvement demonstrates our strong support of UNESCO's agenda on standard setting in bioethics, and encourages others to similarly establish robust bioethics governance structures and frameworks. We appreciate the opportunity to participate actively in global deliberations on pertinent bioethical issues, and we hope to continue to contribute to UNESCO's important work in this area. To this end, we have nominated an expert to serve on the International Bioethics Committee for the 2020-2023 term, for the Director-General's consideration.

7. Recognising the potential ethical and social issues that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) may bring, Singapore has taken a balanced and pragmatic approach in building trust in the ecosystem, balancing the twin goals of innovation and consumer protection. We have developed the Model AI Governance Framework that translates existing ethical principles in AI into implementable practices for industry. Singapore has

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also participated in developing ethics principles in expert-level platforms of the OECD. We hope that we have made useful contributions to UNESCO in this area, and offer our full support and future substantive participation.

*Culture*

8. Another important component in sustainable development and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda is culture. Since joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2015, Singapore has built strong relations with fellow cities that see creativity as a strategic part of sustainable development.

9. The Singapore Botanic Gardens, a key part of our tangible heritage, is our first World Heritage site. It has given generations of Singaporeans and visitors a sense of place, and serves as a marker of our history. We are committed to preserving and enhancing the universal value of the Gardens, and have adopted innovative approaches to the restoration and management of the landscape to ensure that it remains relevant to the changing needs of the communities it serves.

10. In 2018, Singapore ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). We established our ICH inventory, which we will update in partnership with our communities. We have organised conferences to facilitate sharing and learning of best practices and build capacity.

11. In March this year, Singapore submitted our nomination of the Hawker Culture in Singapore for inscription on UNESCO's Representative

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List of the ICH of Humanity. Hawker culture in Singapore is not just about the food, it is also about the place and people. It reflects Singapore's journey as a nation – how early migrants toiled to make a livelihood through street hawking, and later generations of hawkers progressed to sheltered, clean, hawker centres, perfecting their culinary techniques, and infusing their offerings with ingredients and flavours from other ethnicities.

12. Today, the hawker culture of Singapore reflects our multicultural identity as a nation of immigrants, with stalls selling foods from various ethnic groups, patronised by Singaporeans of all professions and trades, rich and poor. In fact, dining at hawker centres has become our way of life that evokes a sense of home and belonging.

13. Little surprise therefore that Singaporeans, regardless of race, religion and background, resoundingly support nominating Hawker Culture as our first inscription. Many communities, groups and individuals have participated in the preparation of our UNESCO bid. A successful listing will further raise awareness and appreciation among Singaporeans of the importance of safeguarding and transmitting this intangible cultural heritage. It will signal that an ICH element can evolve and thrive in an environment that is highly urbanised and globally-connected.

## **Conclusion**

14. Many countries today face multi-faceted challenges in these uncertain and dynamic times. These include demographic changes, shifts in geopolitics, economic uncertainties, climate change, and technological disruption. Against such a backdrop, UNESCO's work in education, the

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sciences, and culture is more critical than ever to guide the development of sustainable frameworks for future generations not only to manage these challenges, but to thrive.

Thank you.

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