

## **DELEGATION OF FINLAND**

The 40th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

**Intervention by Ms Li ANDERSSON**

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**Head of Delegation**

14 November 2019, am

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Mr. President

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board

Madam Director-General

Distinguished Delegates,

Excellencies,

As international community, we are currently facing shared global challenges at an unforeseen scale. As we are striving towards carbon-neutrality, and witness the freedom of expression being challenged globally, we need ensure that UNESCO is well equipped to provide solutions to the challenges at hand.

An extremely worrying trend towards shrinking democratic and civic space is taking place as we speak. Freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists are being challenged in many parts of the world. Journalists are murdered and artists and scholars detained. Hate speech, both online and offline, is proliferating. Shockingly as many as nine in ten journalist murders remain unsolved globally. Freedom of expression is pivotal to free and open societies. To meet the global challenges ahead of us, we need the voices of vibrant civil societies and principled journalists to echo strongly around the world.

No country, big or small, is able to address these global challenges alone. We can solve the common problems, such as the climate crisis and the global learning crisis only with determined multilateral cooperation. Finland believes that UNESCO, as a normative actor with strong convening power and with a rights-based approach, is in a unique position to help Member States find solutions to the global crises.

We need cooperation beyond governments too – partnerships with NGOs, academia, cities, and the private sector are crucial. Finland welcomes UNESCO's renewed strategies on partnerships and resource mobilization. We welcome the inclusion of youth in decision-making, as they are the ones that ultimately have to bear the responsibility of our decisions.

Distinguished delegates,

UNESCO is more relevant than ever.

Illiteracy is a persistent challenge in many parts of the world. It is most common among women in poorest households, as illiteracy is a root cause, which leads to other hardships such as unemployment and social exclusion. Therefore, we need to step up our efforts to ensure that every child learns adequate skills in

reading and mathematics. However, today it is not enough that everyone learn to read. In the midst of so called fake news and misinformation, we need to also ensure everyone has the chance to acquire strong skills in media literacy and critical thinking.

Finland supports UNESCO's leading role in reaching the Sustainable Development Goal number four on Education. As we are adapting to quick technological change and transition to a carbon-free world, learning needs to be a lifelong journey. Quality education throughout life is an efficient way to combat poverty. It is also a powerful tool to reach other crucial goals, such as gender equality, better health as well as water and ocean sustainability.

UNESCO's role is unique in promoting the diversity of cultural expressions and protecting cultural heritage. This includes defending shared heritage from destruction, looting and trafficking. Finland welcomes the Culture Forum at this Conference and hopes it will push the global agenda on cultural policies forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO, too, is at its crossroads. We are starting the preparations of the Medium-Term Strategy. Simultaneously, we are accelerating towards the critical stage in our determined efforts to reach the goals of the Agenda 2030. UNESCO's Strategy needs to be a part of the UN's system-wide efforts to tackle the global challenges, and therefore it needs to be fully adjusted to Agenda 2030. It is also vital that the human rights-based approach is integrated in the strategy. The work of UNESCO's Institute of Statistics is paramount. We need to ensure we have data available to devise inclusive evidence-based development strategies. This requires special emphasis on issues such as gender and socio-economic factors.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO is currently stepping up its strategic transformation. Finland strongly supports this process and we express our full support to the implementation of the comprehensive reform package of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. We encourage UNESCO to continue its efforts to bring the reform forward. When conducted successfully, it will also increase the transparency, accountability and efficient communication of UNESCO's work. Assessments show that UNESCO is moving in the right direction.

As Member States, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that there is a match between ambition, expectations and resources. To meet the extremely urgent and ambitious objectives we are setting for UNESCO, the organization needs to be funded properly. This calls for the budget scenario of 534.6 million USD.

Finland and the other Nordic countries are longstanding supporters of UNESCO's important mandate. This partnership is grounded on shared values that we uphold throughout the UN system: Human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. It is crucial that UNESCO remains a key actor and strengthens its position in effective and rules-based multilateralism. This way we can overcome the global challenges that we are currently facing.

Finland aligns itself with the EU statement.

Thank you for your attention.