

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Greek delegation, allow me to congratulate you, on your election. We should be remiss if we did not express sincere appreciation to Director General Ms Azoulay for her important contribution in promoting, inter alia, education for all, and in placing culture at the heart of development policy.

Greece, as an elected member of the Executive Board from 2015 to 2019 and as the Chair of the APX Commission of the General Conference, has actively taken part to this journey and the execution of the programmes adopted by the General Conference. Greece now stands for election in three Committees and looks forward to the support of Member States: a) the ICPRCP, b) the Committee on the protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict and c) the World Heritage Committee for the term 2021-2025.

My country fully aligns with the EU statement to be delivered in the coming days and I would wish to additionally focus on the following:

### **1. Education for Sustainable Development**

The Ministry of Education has ensured that its actions and policies are faithful to SDG4 and Framework for Action of “Education 2030”. We have already introduced two-year compulsory pre-school education, which we are seeking to expand and modernize in recognition of the immense pedagogical value of early childhood education on the healthy psychosocial and pedagogical development of children. We are increasing the autonomy of the school unit and placing more trust on our teaching staff. At the same time, we are taking concrete steps to enhance the education and educational tools that will enable our teachers to thrive. We also support the efforts made by UNESCO for implementing Education 2030 and the Framework for Action, which includes education for sustainable development, inclusive education and global

citizenship education. Under this umbrella Greece has implemented the Associated Schools Network, which numbers almost 200 participating schools across the country. In addition, UNESCO Chairs have been established in 13 Greek universities.

In the era of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, we are seeking to enrich school curricula to equip our students with the knowledge, skills and values to contribute to the creation of a sustainable society with active citizens. In this direction, we also promote the enhancement of soft and digital skills. Further, as we have noticed a significant gap between what our educational system produce in terms of skills and the labor market needs, we aim to bridge this gap through interventions in every level of educational system, including VET and lifelong learning. We also redesign the role of the school unit in the direction of more autonomy for the teaching and administrative staff and we are also seeking to enhance the function of our higher education institutions by granting them more autonomy over their decision-making and introducing the evaluative tools that will allow them to be competitive in the global labor market. Finally, we are exploring innovative ways to integrate the latest technological innovations within the classroom setting and to harness the power of AI to make education more accessible and more engaging.

## **2.Fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property**

Over the last decades, the rise of the cross border movement of objects, the increased accessibility to archaeological sites, coupled with international organized crime and armed conflicts, have resulted in the increase of illicit trafficking in cultural objects.

For several decades, Greece has strived for a concerted international action and played an active role in the combat against the illegal trade of antiquities by,

inter alia, organizing International Conferences, raising public awareness through the implementation of educational programs and establishing an international network through bilateral agreements.

Every three years, the UN General Assembly adopts a Resolution ‘on the Return or Restitution of Cultural Property to the Countries of Origin,’ which comes out upon the initiative and under the coordination of Greece. The said Resolution recognizes, among others, the leading role of UNESCO in the fight against the illicit trafficking in cultural property, reaffirms the importance of the 1970 Convention and takes note of the role of the Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of the State Parties. In this spirit, Greece also looks forward to the adoption in this session of the General Conference of the Resolution on strengthening the implementation of the 1970 Convention in view of the celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### **3.Climate Change and its impact on Cultural and Natural Heritage**

Recognizing that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and concerned about its impact on our heritage, Greece, aiming at raising awareness and encouraging global action on the issue, convened last June, in Athens, the International Conference “Impacts of Climate Change on Cultural Heritage: Facing the Challenge”.

In the framework of the 2019 Climate Action Summit, Greece, presented in the UN, with the supporting partnership of UNESCO and WMO a proposal entitled “Addressing climate change impacts on cultural and natural heritage”. In addition to the support provided by the UNSG and the Council of Europe, so far, more than 60 UN Member States are already committed to the Greek proposal. Furthermore, Prime Minister Mitsotakis, announced during the Climate Action Summit that, within 2020, Greece shall host a High Level Meeting, in order to send a strong political message, encouraging further action

on the matter. This High Level Meeting will precede the Official Ceremony for the adoption of the Declaration that includes the above mentioned proposal.

#### **4. Restitution of the Parthenon Sculptures and Melina Mercouri**

Next week, the UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri Prize will be awarded to an outstanding example of action that safeguards and enhances the world's cultural landscapes. The Prize, supported by the Greek Government, bears the name of Melina Mercouri, former Minister of Culture, who 37 years ago raised the issue of the return of the Parthenon Sculptures to Athens and initiated the campaign for their reunification.

As you may also know, the request for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures constitutes one of the most important agenda items of the ICPRCP, lodged with it in 1984 and still pending.

Between 1984 and 2018, the ICPRCP adopted *16 Recommendations* on the matter which, among others, call upon Greece and the UK to intensify their efforts with a view to reaching a satisfactory settlement of this long-standing issue, while at the same time taking into account its historical, cultural, legal and ethical dimensions.

Thank you