

**Speech by the head of the Japanese delegation
MEXT State Minister UENO Michiko
at the 40th Session of the UNESCO General Conference
15 November 2019**

Mr. Ahmet Altay Cengizer, President of the General Conference,
Madame Director-General Ms. Audrey Azoulay,
Distinguished Delegates,

I would first like to congratulate Mr. Cengizer on your appointment as President of General Conference.

Protection of Cultural Heritage

Mr. President,

This year, the Japanese people were very pleased that the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group: Mounded Tombs of Ancient Japan was inscribed on the World Heritage List. At the same time, however, we should be reminded of disasters, including the tragedy that befell the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris and the recent fire that destroyed the Shuri Castle site in Okinawa.

With regard to the tragedy of Shuri Castle site, we were deeply appreciative of the heartfelt message of condolence Japan received from UNESCO. Japan will make all efforts to restore this symbol of Okinawa and promote international cooperation for the protection of cultural heritage in Japan and overseas.

Expectations for UNESCO within increasingly complex society

Mr. President,

UNESCO has been expected to implement projects for the achievement of the SDGs, and to play a leading role in the UN system.

Japan greatly welcomes the launching of the Futures of Education initiative by Director-General. Our 500,000 US dollar-assistance will be dispensed to the efforts to implement projects of the innovation in education for the future in regions in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.

Mr. President,

With the rapid advancement of technological innovation, particularly AI, it will be essential to create a human-centered society. Japan supports the formulation of normative instruments by UNESCO, regarding the development and utilization of AI.

Promotion of ESD and contributions to the achievement of the SDGs

Mr. President,

The efforts for education led by UNESCO not only aim at the achievement of SDG 4 but form the basis for realizing all 17 of the SDGs. Japan greatly welcomes the newly adopted framework of the “ESD for 2030”.

Ever since the UN Decade of ESD, we have been the pioneer of ESD. Japan’s new National Curriculum Standards put importance on activities enabling children to become “creators of a sustainable society.” In Japan, the opportunity to receive education is assured in an appropriate manner extensively not only for its nationals but also for foreign nationals, following provisions and purposes of relevant domestic and international laws and regulations. In collaboration with Germany and Kenya, the co-organizers for launching ESD for 2030, Japan keeps contributing to the promotion of ESD.

Climate change has become in recent years a major factor for disaster risks. The promotion of ESD will be very important for raising recognition of the disaster risks. Japan will contribute to the utilization of knowledge for disaster prevention education to heighten community resilience.

Initiatives for science, culture, communication, information, sports

Mr. President,

In the field of science, Japan will support the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. In the area of disaster risk reduction, great expectations are on cross-cutting initiatives across sectors that utilize Japan’s knowledge accumulated through our experience of large-scale natural disasters and UNESCO’s expertise and networks.

Next year in 2020, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo will be held. Japan will make all efforts to ensure the success of the Games, and also promote sports as one of the vice-chairs of UNESCO’s CIGEPS. Japan also intends to promote the attractiveness of Japanese culture and cultural exchange through the Japan Cultural Expo.

Mr. President,

The Memory of the World Programme is intended to promote friendship and mutual understanding among member states by preserving and increasing awareness of significance of documentary heritage. Achieving this goal without politicization requires establishment of a new mechanism, where member states are involved in the decision-making process and, accordingly, UNESCO and experts are protected from political confrontations. Japan will continue to contribute positively to discussions on the comprehensive review, and would like to play a role for a resumption of the Programme under a new system.

Japan will cooperate for the holding of the 2nd Global Policy Forum for the sustainable preservation of documentary heritage.

Reforms of UNESCO, including governance

Mr. President,

We believe that the strategic transformation proposed by Director-General Azoulay are indispensable for the future of UNESCO. Japan would like to continue to play a leading role so that UNESCO will be able to ensure and improve its capability to respond to the challenges it is facing today.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

Local and global issues are mutually connected, and stimulating the interest and pride of humankind, particularly the younger generation, in one's own and other cultures will lead to the fortifying of the "defenses of peace." I promise that Japan will spare no effort to contribute in any way we can to this end.

Thank you for your attention.