

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Arayik Harutyunyan, Minister of Education, Science,
Culture and Sport of the Republic of Armenia
at General Policy Debate of the 40th Session of the UNESCO General
Conference**

Mister President of the General Conference,

Mister Chair of the Executive Board,

Madame Director-General,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honor for me to address for the first time the General Conference of UNESCO.

Since the last General Conference, my country has undergone tremendous political changes.

The Armenian Velvet Revolution - exclusively peaceful democratic transition based on universal and national values is the best example of the unity, culture of peace, democracy and respect for fundamental human rights.

At this critical juncture in my country's history, women and youth played unprecedented active role and helped to bring about that peaceful political change. Further advancing the role of women and youth is of critical importance for Armenia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Preserving the values of multilateralism and international cooperation, is fundamental to protecting cultural heritage, restoring humanity, sustaining peace and respecting cultural diversity.

Due to the recent wars and armed conflicts great number of people is deprived from opportunity to exercise their fundamental rights. Unfortunately, my region is not an exception.

Our joint commitment to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a pledge that no one will be left behind and our future actions to reach this objective should be consistent with this obligation.

Armenia firmly supports the inalienable rights of the people of Artsakh to freely pursue their political, economic, social, educational and cultural development and to determine their own destiny to ensure a better future for generations to come.

Mr. President,

Education is a driving force behind the development of each society.

We believe that education is also a strong instrument of prevention of crime of genocide and crimes against humanity. The education is one of the core elements of Armenia-initiated UN resolutions on Genocide Prevention adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. In 2015, the year of commemoration of centennial of Armenian Genocide, upon the initiative of Armenia UN General Assembly

unanimously adopted resolution establishing December 9 as the “International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of the Republic of Armenia attaches big importance to development of innovative technologies in education. Just recently Armenia hosted the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT). A number of organizations operating in Armenia have great achievements in the field of information technology and Artificial Intelligence. We welcome UNESCO’s initiatives in the field of Artificial intelligence and stand ready to contribute to their implementation by sharing our profound experience.

Mr. President,

Being situated on the crossroads of different civilizations Armenia has cultivated deeply rooted traditions of coexistence and respect towards other cultures and religions. That is why Armenia preserves a rich cultural heritage that includes among others the Hellenistic era temple, some of the oldest churches of different Christian denominations in the world, medieval Jewish cemetery, 18th century Iranian mosque and the world’s largest Yazidi temple which has been inaugurated recently.

Being committed to safeguarding and protecting the cultural heritage, Armenia is continuously making its own contribution to the restoration of damaged cultural heritage in conflict affected areas. Armenia has immediately responded to the flagship initiative “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” launched by the Madame Director-General by offering its assistance in the field of restoration of manuscripts.

Unfortunately, due to ethnic or religious intolerance, numerous cultural heritage sites have been destroyed even at peace time, including those belonging to my People. The well documented complete annihilation of thousands of Armenian medieval Jugha cross-stones in Nakhijevan, is a stark case in point.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the times of unprecedented raise of extremism and intolerance, we should more than ever realize the essential role UNESCO must play in promoting tolerance, mutual respect and the dialogue of cultures.

The Republic of Armenia strongly believes in the unique mission of UNESCO and stands ready to be further engaged with all its faith, knowledge and innovative ideas in the realization of its noble goals.

I do thank you for your attention.