

## **National Policy Statement on behalf of Ireland at the 39th UNESCO General Conference**

**To be delivered by Permanent Delegate of Ireland, Ambassador Dermot Nolan**

**6 November 2017**

### **Opening Remarks**

President, Director-General, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Madame la Présidente, je voudrais tout d'abord vous féliciter pour votre élection. Je saisis aussi l'occasion de féliciter Madame Azoulay pour sa nomination au poste de Directeur general par la deux cent-deuxième session du conseil exécutif. Irlande est certaine de travailler avec vous deux, afin de répondre aux défis auxquels l'UNESCO doit faire face. Je voudrais aussi remercier Irina Bokova pour son travail durant les 8 dernières années.

This current moment brings very considerable challenges for UNESCO.

Multilateralism itself faces threats and questions from many sides. The validity of multilateralism as an approach to solving common problems is called into doubt.

Confidence in the ability of multilateral bodies to act coherently to solve common challenges is at a low ebb.

But a moment of danger and challenge can be used as an opportunity to turn things around. UNESCO can resolve to rejuvenate itself and affirm the value of multilateralism. UNESCO must focus on its core mission:

- (i) the value of education in all its dimensions and its role in ending poverty and opening up a life of opportunity and dignity for all human beings;
- (ii) the imperative of setting our common planet on the way to a sustainable future;
- (iii) the value of humanity's cultural heritage and its potential to unite us rather than divide us if we endeavor to preserve cultural heritage in a tolerant and mutually respectful manner; and
- (iv) the value of freedom of expression where the right to speak the truth is needed like never before.

In recent years UNESCO has not had unlimited resources and nor will it have in the near future. So UNESCO must now concentrate on what it does best and where it can make the greatest impact. UNESCO should engage with its critics and their arguments in a constructive manner, showing a willingness to listen and a willingness to learn but also a confidence in its values and a commitment to fulfilling its mission, If over the next few years UNESCO can show progress in its key objectives, it can emerge strengthened and emboldened.

Ireland will be a committed and constructive partner to UNESCO in its endeavours. Since we gained our independence, Ireland has appreciated and supported multilateralism. We will continue to do so and we will sustain the values of multilateralism in UNESCO.

### **2030 SDG4 Agenda**

Ireland appreciates UNESCO's active role in implementing SDG-4 and its attendant targets as we work toward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across all UN entities. Improving access to quality education is a core priority of Ireland's international development cooperation programme, and in particular the provision of education for girls.

### **Education in Ireland**

Ireland greatly values the line in UNESCO's Constitution that refers to the building of peace in the minds of men, and women. Education is central to the building of that peace. As our President Michael D. Higgins stated in his address to UNESCO in 2013, "true peace requires a form of consciousness that not only eschews all forms of violence but which also envisages the rich fruits of peaceful life together in all its utopian diversity."

Ireland own education policies draw much inspiration from the work of UNESCO. We will soon hold our Third National Forum on Education for Sustainable Development. This annual meeting is an opportunity to evaluate progress made in line with the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014 to 2020. This Strategy was developed by the Department of Education and Skills and was supported by the work of ECO-UNESCO in Ireland which promotes the ideals of UNESCO through youth, education and training programmes

Only two months ago in September 2017 Ireland's second city, Cork, was selected as the host of the third UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities Conference. Cork city is one of

three Learning Cities in Europe which enjoy membership of a network of Learning Cities that have been recognised for the excellence of their education and learning services. Cork now joins two other Irish cities who are members of a similarly rich international network. Dublin and Galway are UNESCO Cities of Literature and Film respectively. These designations have granted both cities membership of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). The cities in this network value creativity and value its use as an economic driver, embedded in city plans for sustainable development.

I would also like to draw attention to the continuing work of the two UNESCO chairs programme in Ireland;

- (i) the UNESCO Chair for Children, Youth & Civic Engagement, at the National University of Ireland in Galway; and
- (ii) the UNESCO Chair for Transforming the Lives of People with Disabilities, their Families and Communities, through Physical Education, Sport, Recreation and Physics at the Tralee Institute of Technology in Kerry.

These Chairs work to ensure that development is truly inclusive, sustainable and longstanding. In their crosscutting approach they represent many of UNESCO's strengths when the organisation's competencies are focused, targeted and coordinated.

Ireland has consistently helped finance the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on Education, including the most recent report launched in Paris last Wednesday November 1st 2017.

Ireland has also recently agreed a joint programme between UNESCO and UNAIDS on Comprehensive Sexuality Education with the aim of accelerating the reduction in new HIV infections among young women and adolescent girls in east and Southern Africa, where the

majority of Ireland's key partner countries are located. The grant of almost €2 million over four years will focus on reducing new HIV infections, early and unintended pregnancy, gender based violence and child marriage in Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **Culture and Heritage**

In recent years, we have seen all too many attacks upon the common cultural heritage of mankind. Preserving mankind's heritage from nihilistic destruction is a key objective for UNESCO and we applaud the work done in the most difficult of circumstances. We also commend UNESCO's efforts to develop culture and heritage as a unifying force. There is much that UNESCO can do to assuage what are often intractable political disputes by emphasizing the mutual benefit of working together to preserve our common cultural heritage.

Ireland welcomes the recent recommendation of the International Advisory Committee of the Memory of the World Programme to inscribe the archive collections of the Irish Folklore Collection to the Memory of the World list. The Irish Folklore Collection will now join the Book of Kells, our most precious literary treasure, on the Memory of the World list

UNESCO is a key partner for Ireland in guiding the protection and promotion of the world's cultural heritage sites at a national and international level. Ireland further appreciates the successful work of UNESCO regarding:

(i) the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme, under which Ireland has three sites, and

(ii) the Man and the Biosphere Programme whose June International Co-ordinating Council meeting saw the successful extension and renaming of Kerry Biosphere, one of two designated UNESCO biospheres.

To conclude I wish to commend UNSCO for its work and look forward to future cooperation in building a sustainable world. Let us now focus on rebuilding and reenergizing UNESCO by directing all our energies at delivering UNESCO's core objectives. If we do, we can legitimately expect a General Conference in 2019 that can look back on two years of solid achievement and look forward to further years of effective service to the people of the world.

To end on a further quotation from President Higgins's speech to UNESCO in 2013, this time in our native language, "Gúidhim rath agus beannacht ar or obair UNESCO." Nous adressons à l'UNESCO tous nos vœux de succès et des belles réalisations dans le travail mené par tous.

Thank you.

Ends.