

210th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board

**Bangladesh National Statement
delivered by H.E. Kazi Imtiaz Hossain
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Bangladesh for UNESCO
Plenary Debate: Paris, 3 December 2020**

**Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madam Director General,
Excellencies, dear Colleagues**

Finally, we succeeded to meet *virtually*.

I must start by expressing our delegation's sincere appreciation to you Mr. Chairperson for your unrelenting perseverance and tireless efforts in organizing this unique *virtual* session of the Executive Board.

2. I would also like to record our deep commendation to you, Madam Director-General and your entire team at the Secretariat for responding swiftly, imaginatively and effectively to deliver upon the mandate of the Organisation during these unprecedented circumstances. Thank you very much.

3. When we last met in July, our major concern was Covid-19 pandemic. Six months later, it remains so. However, 63 million infections globally, and close one and a half million painful deaths later, we have some glimmer of hope. We almost have the vaccine against coronavirus. We can look forward to a life beyond Covid19 - and hopefully a more predictable and less painful one.

4. Bangladesh is strongly committed to the mandates of UNESCO. Having faced and lived through these unprecedented challenges, we are now, perhaps better placed to articulate as to how UNESCO should position itself in the coming decade to deliver effectively and meaningfully on its constitutional mandates.

5. Firstly, the Mid-term Strategy should be the roadmap for building back better and beyond on UNESCO's mandate. We support the Director General's Strategic Transformation initiative and would like to see it pursued with greater vigour and

urgency. The inputs of the High-Level Reflection Group would enrich our critical thinking as we finalize this Strategy.

6. Secondly, impact of the pandemic on attainment of SDGs has been significant. We must ensure that the Agenda 2030 remains firmly embedded in the Mid-term Strategy.

7. Thirdly, the pandemic has exposed many fault lines that still exist in our countries. The pandemic has not created them rather aggravated and amplified them. The technological and digital divide, the erosion and lack of social cohesion, the persistent exclusion of the vulnerable and marginalized segment of the societies - mostly the girls, the women and the people with special needs, the infrastructural deficiencies in our countries, have come out starkly during the pandemic reminding us the urgent need for corrective actions.

Mr. Chairperson,

8. Education is the foundation of socio-economic development of nations. The pandemic has severely disrupted education, most notably in the developing countries. We must ensure, this disruption does not turn into generational catastrophe. In this context we must,

- Remain focused on making education more inclusive, reducing and removing existing inequalities and making education resilient to such future shocks.
- Prioritise bridging the digital divide across regions and scale up coordinated efforts.
- Make access to remote learning and the digital inclusion of children and youth in education a high priority for the Organization.

9. Fourthly, life is precious, so is our planet which sustains life. The threat from climate change is an existential one. Multiple threats to biodiversity have intensified and ecosystems are being degraded. Surely, we do not want to leave behind for our future generations a planet that is irreversibly damaged. Work in these areas need to be further intensified.

10. Fifthly, culture is another area most profoundly impacted by the crisis. Culture, which defines our identity, our heritage and celebrates human creativity, should continue to be nurtured, promoted and supported through innovative initiatives.

Excellencies and dear colleagues,

11. Having unflinching faith in the power of culture to build and sustain peace and social cohesion, Bangladesh has tabled a proposal to institute a prize titled “**UNESCO-Bangladesh “Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman” International Prize for the Creative Economy**”. This prize will reward global initiatives of youth in the field of creative economy. On behalf of my country, I would like to convey our deep appreciation to members of the Board who have already conveyed their support to our proposal, and I seek the support of the entire Membership for the Board to approve the proposal at this session. I would also like to record our appreciation to the Culture Sector for their valuable support to our delegation us throughout this process.

12. The next mid-term strategy is critically important to the Member States. In addition to what I have stated before, I would like to flag a few other areas of priority for Bangladesh:

- We strongly support the emphasis on *Youth* as one of the priority groups along with the priorities on Gender Equality and Africa in the next Medium-term strategy.
- More focused and priority attention should be accorded to needs of LDC, LLDC, SIDS and call upon the Secretariat to design need-driven programs and projects for these countries.
- UNESCO’s engagement at the field level should be further strengthened and deepened. While reinforced engagement would provide UNESCO much needed visibility and greater relevance and allow the organization to effectively contribute to policy designs of member states in UNESCO's mandated areas.
- Building partnership across sectors, across region and across various stakeholders will be key to achieving optimum result.
- Capacity assessment and impactful capacity building programmes in areas of UNESCO competence should be undertaken especially in the LDC, LLDC, and the SIDS.

13. On closing, I wish to record our appreciation to the Secretariat for the excellent and commendable works on the *Futures of Education initiative*, draft recommendations on Ethics in Artificial Intelligence and draft recommendations on Open Science during these challenging times. We look forward to the fruitful conclusion of these processes.

Mr. Chairperson

Excellencies and dear colleagues,

14. The pandemic has once again reminded us the value of solidarity, compassion and fellow. Bangladesh is strongly committed to multilateralism. We believe, through building and harnessing partnership and working in concert, we can successfully overcome present and future challenges, no matter how daunting they may be.

15. Finally, Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the Statements by the distinguished ambassadors of Indonesia, on behalf of Group IV, Ghana, on behalf of Group 77 and China and Azerbaijan on behalf of NAM, Paris Chapter.

16. I thank you.