

210th Session of the Executive Board – Speech by H.E.Mr Oike (Japan)

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Madam Director-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start my statement by emphasising the importance of this session held amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We are happy to be engaged in this Board even if it is in the virtual format. Japan, as a responsible Member State, is determined to contribute actively to discussions on the future of UNESCO in the post COVID-19 world.

Before I begin, considering the time constraints, please allow me to cut short some of the contents of my speech. We would like to submit the full text at a later stage.

During this session, Japan, as a responsible Member State and one of the major donors, is determined to contribute actively to constructive discussions on what and how UNESCO should undertake within its inherent mandate in the field of Education, Science, Culture, Communication and Information for the post COVID-19 world.

Mr Chairperson,

First of all, I would like to refer to the statement made by the Director General earlier. The Director-General quite rightly pointed out the need for the continuation of the reform and transformation of UNESCO as well as for the removal of political tensions in this House of Peace. It is indeed time to present our strategy to make sure that UNESCO further contributes to the international community by performing its core mandate. From such perspective, Japan highly appreciates the directions of the reform and transformation, especially those in the medium-term strategy proposals and those for de-politicisation of UNESCO, which the Director General has been driving forward. Japan is convinced that it will be beneficial to UNESCO as a whole that the Director General continues with her leadership and initiatives for reform and transformation in the next year and beyond. In this context, Japan supports the re-election of the Director General for her second term.

Mr Chairperson,

I would also like to draw attention to your opening Statement regarding the need for de-politicisation. I completely agree with what you said; UNESCO has a lot of things to do, but politicisation hampers and paralyses UNESCO activities. In this context, as in the Memory of the World, it should be emphasised that there is a need to strictly refrain from bringing in specific disputes between Member States with political intentions. For restraining such abuse, it is crucial to ensure that any process should not go further in contested items when there is no consent of concerned parties, thereby to build a mechanism that allows UNESCO and its experts to fulfil their mandate without the impediment coming from politicisation. Japan will contribute to such discussions even further.

Mr Chairperson,

Since UNESCO is the only international organisation under UN system, which has the comprehensive mandate in the field of Education, Science, Culture, Communication and Information, five functions for UNESCO such as laboratory of ideas, clearing house, standard-setter and catalyst

for international cooperation are extremely important vehicles in properly carrying out the missions in each of its fields and programmes. In order to support those functions to be played, Japan is deeply engaged in and contributes to the following programmes and initiatives;

In the field of Education, SDGs serves as principle guide line and Education for Sustainable Development, or ESD, is a key concept for the achievement of SDGs. Japan, as a long-time advocate for ESD, will continuously encourage the formulation of country initiatives through the Japanese Funds-in-Trust, JFIT in order to progress all together towards ESD under the global framework of the ESD for 2030. Furthermore, through its efforts regarding the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD, Japan is determined to keep its contribution to the public awareness on ESD at the grass-roots level.

Concerning the new education scheme that we have to figure out for the post pandemic, we should explore effective ways to utilise distance learning in combination with in-person classes. As to develop the distance learning, it is effective to make full use of relevant networks such as the Global Education Coalition, which seeks to ensure learning opportunities in cooperation with other intergovernmental organisations and businesses as well as ASPnet. Furthermore, we would like to touch the importance of the Futures of Education initiative. Japan will actively support this initiative by making use of JFIT for education.

In the areas of sciences, the elaboration of global standard-setting instruments regarding the Open Science and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence is extremely important towards the General Conference next year. Japan will continue making its contribution both in intellectual and financial terms.

Japan also reaffirms its commitment in the field of Culture. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1970 Convention. Japan will make further contribution to protect and promote the Culture through its efforts on the relevant conventions, including the framework of the yet-to-be-ratified one, and ResiliArt, which supports artists facing severe situation due to the pandemic. Japan will also strengthen its efforts to promote international cooperation for the protection of cultural heritage all over the world.

Mr Chairperson,

In the world after the pandemic, the efforts regarding the international cooperation will be further required. In order to support UNESCO's functions such as catalyst for international cooperation and capacity-builder, Japan will continue to support various UNESCO science programmes, particularly in the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, which starts next year, and the strategy for the ninth phase of the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) starting from 2022.

Japan, as one of the most natural disaster-prone countries, considers that the Disaster Risk Reduction or DRR is crucial for the sustainable development, and has been supporting the activities of UNESCO for DRR in vulnerable areas such as Africa and SIDS. On the other hand, natural hazards caused by the urbanisation and the climate change continue to affect our lives and properties, making our societies more vulnerable. In the next medium-term strategy, Japan expects UNESCO to fundamentally strengthen DRR initiatives by further enhancing the multi-sectoral approach and its organisational structure for DRR as well as by making full use of UNESCO's expertise and networks.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light the need to ensure the access to accurate information and to ICT as well as the improved media and information literacy or MIL. As part of its contribution under such recognition, Japan will support, through the Fund in Trust, efforts towards the improvement of MIL and the initiative to ensure the freedom of expression and safety of journalists in Africa.

Furthermore, Japan will reinforce its engagement in the Priority Africa as one of the main pillars.

Mr Chairperson,

Since the Executive Board is a crucial governing body for UNESCO's activities, Japan has decided to run for the election of its member to be held next year, in order to continue its strong commitment thereto. Regarding the term-limitation issue, Japan is determined to contribute actively to the debates. Having that said, it is against the introduction of any rules, regardless of the duration of a latency period, which would forcefully deprive Member States of their right of candidacy, which is a statutory entitlement in the UNESCO Constitution.

Thank you very much.