

Madam President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Director-General,
Distinguished colleagues,

On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, I am pleased to address this 207th session of UNESCO's Executive Board.

Serbia is a strong supporter of multilateralism and believes in the indispensable role of UNESCO in building peace in minds of men and women through education, science and culture. UNESCO, with its authority and abundant expertise, can significantly contribute to overcoming existing global challenges. At the same time, in order to preserve its relevance, it has to respond also to emerging global issues such as artificial intelligence.

We welcome the continued focus on the strategic transformation of UNESCO that is now in its crucial operational stage. We thank the Secretariat for all their efforts and invite them to ensure further active engagement of Member States. The imperatives should be to continue to improve UNESCO's operational efficiency, as well as to enhance the implementation and interdisciplinary character of its programmes that need to be adapted to the needs of our time.

These transformational endeavors should be innovative, while at the same time building upon the results already achieved in UNESCO's work and fully respecting its intergovernmental character. Alignment of its strategic transformation with the ongoing reforms of the UN, especially of the UN Development System, is of great importance to ensure the best possible strategic positioning of UNESCO within the UN system. Results-based programmatic orientation and strong focus on the contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda can be a driving force for revitalization of UNESCO.

Enabling UNESCO to play its genuine role of a global leader in knowledge and practice in the areas of its competences, as well as to increase its impact on the ground, makes it incumbent upon us to invest more in financing its activities. This applies especially to its engagement in the implementation of the SDGs and global priorities such as Africa, which deserves our utmost attention. In our

opinion, the highest budget scenario in the draft 40 C /5 would ensure this kind of much-needed support. Further improvement of the Organization's Programme delivery and strengthening its comparative advantages, in order to keep it relevant and impactful, should be a shared ambition and a shared responsibility. At the same time, additional efforts are needed to ensure further improvement of cost-effectiveness and management and accountability culture.

Of great importance are also the activities aimed to maximize the contribution of the field network to the implementation of UNESCO's mandate. In this context, Member States' needs and their development and other priorities should always be a starting point. Special attention should be given to the needs of developing countries, with focus on Africa and small island developing states. We commend the efforts to further mainstream the Global Priorities Africa and Gender Equality across all major programmes. In addition, we attach great importance to the meaningful inclusion of young people into planning and execution of UNESCO programmes.

Serbia is strongly committed to the mandate and values of UNESCO and dedicated to being a staunch partner in the implementation of its strategic goals. Our readiness to further intensify and diversify cooperation with UNESCO has been reaffirmed during the recent visit of the Director-General Ms. Azoulay to Serbia, on the occasion of the International Consultative Meeting on UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers, co-organized by the relevant Serbian authorities and UNESCO.

Serbia continues to support UNESCO's vision of education as an instrument to transform the quality of life for people and societies, in service of sustainable peace and promotion of mutual understanding. Education is one of key priorities and basis for the development of Serbia as well. In addition, Serbia attaches great importance to UNESCO's activities in the field of protection of cultural heritage, and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions, including the development of creative industries.

Avoiding polarizing issues, thus keeping the Organization away from the damaging politicization, incompatible with its original mandate, is a precondition for renewed credibility of UNESCO. The spirit of constructive, open and continued dialogue between the Member States on all issues and consensus-based approach are something that should be preserved as the key source of strength of this Organization. This is of paramount importance especially now having in mind the sensitive moment in which UNESCO is. The overall interest of

the Organization for stability in order to enable it to carry out its activities in the most effective way should always be our guiding principle. This should apply to all our endeavors, including actual ones, with no exceptions. We should be building upon those issues and initiatives that unite us, rather than on those that divide us.

UNESCO is a unique brand that should be used to pursue the objectives of international peace and common welfare of humanity through development of educational, scientific and cultural cooperation. It is our common responsibility and interest to raise awareness and visibility of UNESCO's work worldwide. The contribution of Member States is of great importance and my country is ready to make its contribution in this regard. Thus Serbia presented its candidature for re-election to the Executive Board of UNESCO hoping that it will be in position to continue its work on promoting UNESCO's noble mission through its membership in this body.