

**Address by Dr. Karan Singh**  
**Member UNESCO Executive Board (India)**  
**198<sup>th</sup> session, April 2016**

President of the General Conference; Chair of the Executive Board; Director General; Distinguished Delegates,

1. I am happy to be amidst you in this first meeting of the Executive Board after the 38th General Conference and the landmark 70th anniversary celebrations of UNESCO. My felicitations and best wishes to the new Team, in the able hands of the Namibian Presidency and German Chairmanship of the Executive Board. Equally, there are new ambitions as we embark on our journey towards Agenda 2030 and a new energy must infuse our work. It is indeed timely that we seek to reform the governance, procedures and working methods of the principal organs of UNESCO. We are for a reform that is comprehensive and holistic, through a process that is inclusive and transparent and for a discourse that should not divide or politicise, but rather move towards a convergence that will greatly strengthen our organisation.

2. I particularly commend UNESCO, led by its able Director General, for the global leadership that has been demonstrated in the core area of Education, particularly in the last year. Through Incheon and the Framework for Action, UNESCO has retained the leadership advantage on education, spearheading the adoption of an umbrella document that will guide us over the next fifteen years as we seek to overcome

barriers, so that Education is "for all" and "no one is left behind". Importantly, we will continue to need this leadership as we collectively endeavour to reach the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and its related targets. UNESCO will have to retain its niche advantage in those areas where it can deliver to the advantage of its Member States if it is to be meaningful and relevant.

3. Speaking from an Indian perspective, may I comment on the excellent work being undertaken by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) in New Delhi, of which I am the Chair, and which in the course of the last General Conference was brought closer to you through an effective outreach event organised by our Permanent Mission. As the education lexicon is inundated with new keywords, I am happy to announce that the MGIEP has contributed its fair share to the output through some good work on GCED or Global Citizenship Education, so critical for youth in this shrinking and compacting world of ours. I have no doubt that in the coming years this excellent resource, fully funded by the Government of India, will take on the newer challenges that face UNESCO, an example being CVE or Education to prevent Violent Extremism and radicalisation.

4. This is particularly required in view of the alarming rise of fanatic and destructive forces in various parts of the world. The recent horrendous terrorist attacks on peaceful citizens in Brussels, mirroring what happened in Lahore last week, in Paris last year, in Mumbai and

New York earlier are a dire warning to the entire world as to the grave threat that we all face. Terrorism also begins in the minds of men, and it is only a value-based education that can address this menace. We need to apply our minds seriously as to how member states can be encouraged to include a value-based element in their school curricula.

5. Over the decades since its inception, the saga of UNESCO has been replete with firm voices from India advocating peace and universal brotherhood. The past year has been particularly memorable with the historic visit and address of the Prime Minister of India. Continuing this trend, and in the great tradition of Indian knowledge and wisdom, we have just concluded a highly successful mathematics outreach, "The International Conference on the Zero." As our tribute, the bust of the ancient Indian mathematician-astronomer Aryabhata now belongs to UNESCO. Looking ahead to the coming months, we are hopeful that another Indian treasure, Yoga, will be Humanity's Heritage with the indelible UNESCO stamp.

6. Finally, I wish to congratulate UNESCO for the global leadership that it has provided on culture in response to the acceleration of the criminal destruction of precious cultural heritage and the increase in illicit trafficking of cultural property. The social media driven "Unite for Heritage" was one major step last year, and I am pleased that UNESCO and its member states have taken this to the next level through the proposed establishment of a Rapid Response Mechanism that will deploy in times of need. It is indeed horrifying that great ancient

monuments and museums in West Asia and elsewhere are being systematically targeted and destroyed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. I have always maintained that of the UN's specialised agencies, the role of UNESCO is perhaps the most important as it seeks to build the defences of peace in the minds of men and women through the advancement of the soft skills of education, the sciences and culture, which are fundamental to a sustainable development agenda. And never has this mission been more pivotal than today, in the midst of the turmoil and acute political tensions that surround us. The discussions at UNESCO therefore, whether inter-sessional or through the regular sessions, are critical in forging a consensus on key issues that affect us in the domain areas of our competence. Also, this consensus must increasingly translate into much needed action.

8. I wish the Executive Board well as it endeavours, in the days and weeks ahead, to advance what I believe must be our common goal, which is to move humankind forward towards a harmonious and stable global society.

**(TOTAL 921 WORDS)**