

**36th GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO
PARIS, 25 OCTOBER – 10 NOVEMBER 2011
ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
CYPRUS, MR GEORGE DEMOSTHENOUS
MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

UNESCO HQ

Thursday 27 October 2011, Afternoon session

Mrs President of the General Conference
Mrs Chairman of the Executive Board,
Mrs Director General
Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to begin my address by congratulating the new President of the General Conference, Ambassador Mrs Bogayay, and, also, by praising the outgoing President, Ambassador Mr Hepburn, for his successful mandate.

Mrs President, in today's rapidly changing world, considering the crises and contemporary challenges, UNESCO's vision and the need for international cooperation are more pertinent than ever.

Cyprus has been a deeply committed member-state of the Organization since 1961 and has worked hard to promote the Organization's scope and strategy throughout the years. Our dedication to UNESCO's vision is expressed in other Governing Bodies, in which Cyprus is also an active member. The forthcoming Cyprus presidency of the European Union (in 2012) is a challenge for us and an opportunity to further promote, inter alia, intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and diversity, which are key elements in "building peace in the minds of men and women".

In the field of education, Cyprus shares UNESCO's vision of education as a vehicle to social, economic and sustainable development.

According to UNESCO's "Education for All" Global Monitoring Report for 2011, as with the previous ones, Cyprus figures among the countries which have achieved most of the goals of the Dakar Framework of Action.

The ongoing Educational Reform is an effort for a comprehensive introduction of changes and innovations at all levels and all aspects of the educational system. The main objective of this effort is to create a democratic and student-focused educational system, which offers high quality education to all students, thus assisting them to maximize their potential and acquire skills and knowledge which will enable them to become active and democratic citizens.

Cyprus has also made important steps in higher education, as it currently supports three state and four private universities, thus increasing the opportunities for studies in the country and further development of research and innovation. These opportunities have also been enhanced following the establishment in 2010 of a UNESCO Chair on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, at the University of Cyprus.

In the field of culture, Cyprus has concentrated its efforts on the promotion of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which we consider to be an invaluable tool for the preservation of our cultural identity. As further indication of our commitment to the promotion of intangible cultural heritage, we are a member of the Intergovernmental Committee that promotes the objectives of the Convention. Cyprus has also inscribed since 2008 an element on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the 'Lefkara laces' and has submitted another nomination, the "tsiattista poetic duelling".

Special mention should also be made to the project "Training workshops on preparing nomination files to the Lists of the 2003 Convention", which was fully funded by the Cyprus Government and executed by UNESCO in seven African countries: Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe. The project has been a contribution of Cyprus to enhance cooperation with developing countries, respecting UNESCO's overarching priorities - Africa and Gender equality.

Furthermore, the government continues its efforts to protect and preserve our island's tangible heritage, and especially the archaeological sites and monuments that feature on the World Heritage List.

Cyprus has been a dedicated member of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and was among the first two States which managed to be granted enhanced protection for its World Heritage Monuments, according to the provisions of the Second Protocol to the above mentioned Convention. Cyprus is now a candidate for the Intergovernmental Committee of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, with the intention to contribute to its effective implementation. These two Conventions are of particular importance to Cyprus. I wish to underline that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is committed to the preservation and protection of archaeological sites and monuments on an island wide basis. The implementation of this commitment is challenged however for those sites and monuments that are located in the occupied area, many of which are in dire need of conservation.

Please allow me to conclude by reaffirming my country's profound commitment to UNESCO's mission of peace-building through education, culture and science.