Mister President, Excellencies, Director General, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be back here in UNESCO. Let me first take this opportunity to commend the Director General and her staff for navigating the organisation through these difficult last years without resorting to borrowing or large deficits.

This is an important General Conference because UNESCO stands at a crossroad where the economic reality and budgetary constraints make it more important than ever to focus UNESCO’s work.

Important, because UNESCO has a central mandate within the UN family. The UN is the steward of international legal order and standards for global public goods, including the environment and human rights.

Norway approves of the Director General’s message of continued reform and improved integration with the UN system. Norway believes
reform process is of utmost importance, and we will continue to pay careful attention to this.

We, the member states, need to do better in defining UNESCO’s priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Norway would like to draw special attention to three areas:

1) Education; 2) Freedom of expression, and 3) Sciences

Education is a fundamental human right. The newly elected Norwegian Government has set education as a top priority, with a particular emphasis on teachers and quality.

UNESCO must continue to provide strong leadership in the field of education, and to provide support to the United Nations Secretary General’s Education First initiative.

Furthermore, the Norwegian government has decided to give UNESCO its full political support in their efforts for a global convention for recognition of qualifications in higher education. Internationalisation of higher education spurs higher quality, better access, and better life opportunities for everybody. Furthermore, participants of the Youth Forum support such a global convention.

UNESCO is showing real leadership in its stewarding of the Education for All initiative. The efforts have given results: Never before have so
many children attended school. But the job is not yet done! Millions of children and adolescents remain out of school.

UNESCO and the donor community need to give more attention and more funding to higher education and vocational education.

About 150 million children leave school without having gained basic skills. Quality is key to successful completion. I am proud to say that my government will focus on teachers, because teachers are decisive for students’ learning.

Some 6.8 million teachers are needed to achieve universal primary education. Investing in teachers is crucial to make a dent into the global learning crisis. Also, there has to be more emphasis on quality in learning and teaching and we expect UNESCO to play its part.

Mister President, another of Norway’s priorities is the freedom of expression and media, where UNESCO has a particular mandate.

Free media is a cornerstone of democracy and governance. Media professionals are still being targeted and far too few of the perpetrators are brought to justice. UN Security Council held on the 17th of July a debate on the protection of journalists. I would like to join all those who commend UNESCO for its contribution, including the adoption of the UN Plan for Action on the Safety of Journalists and the fight against impunity.
Press freedom, access to information, and transparency are vital for good governance. The importance of governance was underlined in the High Level Panel’s report to the United Nations Secretary General on the next millennium goals.

Mister President,

UNESCO has a unique mandate for sciences. Research and knowledge are necessary to make better policy decisions. IOC, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, is doing valuable work for ocean science, observatories, data and information exchange. This gives us valuable information about the state of three quarters of the earth. This is important for climate research and policy. But in order to make the best contribution in facing common global challenges such as climate change, the various science sectors need to work closely together. UNESCO needs to do more to make these synergies happen in all relevant areas.

Thank you