

Lithuania's statement at the plenary of the 202nd session of the Executive Board
October 9, 2017

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director General,
Mr Chairperson of the General Conference,
Dear Colleagues,

Lithuania fully aligns with the statement of the European Union.

Every time our Board meets, we have endured new challenges. Our thoughts are still with the innocent victims of the horrendous mass shooting in Las Vegas, and those of the recent terrorist attacks in Europe, Africa and South-West Asia. Our deepest sympathies also go out to the victims claimed by the recent earthquake in Mexico and the hurricanes in the Caribbean and the USA.

Different in their nature, these challenges have also something in common: they speak of our *present* experience as inherently shaping our *future*. Arising challenges forcibly remind us of the value of solidarity, which is also the founding principle of sustainable tomorrow. UNESCO has always been a trustworthy partner of all of us not only in the intellectual but also pragmatic endeavour to build *such* tomorrow.

It is not by chance that Lithuania, for a second consecutive year, contributed, together with the Netherlands and Finland, to UNESCO's IPDC Talks to celebrate the International Day for the Universal Access to Information. This event allowed to make a forceful statement on the liberating power of information and its contributions to attaining the sustainable development goals. Objective information, just like education, is an invaluable source of critical thinking, the sphere in which the international community continues to count on UNESCO's crucial efforts.

Lithuania commends UNESCO's efforts and its leadership in promoting the safety of journalists and appreciates the results achieved thanks to the Geneva multi-stakeholder consultations of last June. The safety of journalists is among Lithuania's priorities in the Executive Board of UNESCO and among those of our campaign for the election to the Human Rights Council for 2022-2024. My country is also a candidate for the IPDC Intergovernmental Council at the upcoming General Conference; we strongly believe that our national expertise will contribute to resolving challenges with regard to the freedom of expression, independent media, or other relevant issues.

Dear Colleagues,

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Memory of the World Programme, whose objectives have not lost their relevance. The preservation of documentary heritage and access to it are never only about the past. The Programme equally speaks to our present and future: it is only by better understanding our past and the one of others that we can strive for a more peaceful tomorrow. There are conflicting memories, but blocking those of others and silencing contradictory voices does not lead to reconciliation and peace. As much transparency as possible can be part of the solution to the current challenges the Programme is facing.

Together, we must continue to preserve and protect our cultural heritage, as well as promote its meaning as a symbol of belonging and collective identity. The protection of cultural heritage and promotion of cultural pluralism are yet another area, where UNESCO has helped the international community to build common understanding of collective challenges and to generate targeted action.

We know all too well the feeling of shock at witnessing the results of a course of action diverting from established international norms. In Crimea (Ukraine), ethnic minorities continue to be singled out for persecution, suppression of education in the languages of national minorities and restrictions on the freedom of religion and belief. Lithuania recognises the importance of UNESCO's active and direct involvement in solving the relevant challenges in its fields of competence.

Dear Colleagues,

Let us not wait for more tragic events to make us commit to our future. Within UNESCO, we have all the necessary determination and the most valuable means of ever strengthened collective action to do it on our own initiative.

Finally, Lithuania will remain indebted to the outgoing Director General, Mrs Irina Bokova, for her efforts to make our Organisation count. My country has always been a long-standing partner of UNESCO and is ready, together with all the Member States, to make a difference in the name of our shared future under the leadership of the upcoming Director General.

Thank you.