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**Contribution to the plenary debate of the 202nd session of the Executive Board**  
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Mr Chair of the Executive Board, Madam Director-General,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Estonia aligns itself fully with the statement delivered by the European Union.

Our discussions at this session of the Board are taking place in an atmosphere of increased tension in the world. We have seen violent attacks on the freedom of expression and opinion, we have mourned the loss of many journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession. We strongly support UNESCO's work for the safety of journalists and advancing freedom of expression. This is one of the priorities for Estonia.

UNESCO's leadership in SDG 4 ties in closely with the European Commission's communication on school development and excellent teaching as well as Estonia's focus on new approaches to teaching and learning. In delivering SDG 4 UNESCO must make use of its advantages when cooperating with relevant international organizations. Supporting Member States in data collection and analysis has been one of UNESCO's flagships and Estonia is ready to contribute with our experiences and best practices in this field. Although methodology and coordination are important in order to assess the final results, we must not forget the processes of developing education systems since only this will actually ensure achieving the education goal.

Higher education is an integral part of SDG 4. There is a need for renewed higher education recognition principles that would be flexible and applicable for different higher education systems. UNESCO's new global convention on recognition of higher education qualifications has a great potential and we fully support the process of developing, adopting and implementing the convention. The global convention directly contributes to SDG target 4.3 that aims to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality education.

In the draft text attention is given to the recognition of the partial studies and qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation, contributing to SDG target 4.5 and helping to ensure equal access to higher education for persons in vulnerable situations.

Distinguished delegates,

Estonia strongly supports the activities undertaken by UNESCO to strengthen its action to safeguard cultural heritage under attack and in emergencies. UNESCO's global efforts to facilitate a coordinated international response have been strong and visible. Under Estonia's Presidency the EU is currently discussing its strategic approach to international cultural relations. One of the clear priorities is preservation and protection of cultural heritage, including in conflict zones and during peacekeeping missions and operations. We are glad that Dr Mechtild Rössler has accepted our invitation to join the meeting in Brussels on 18<sup>th</sup> October to introduce UNESCO's strategy for reinforcing action for the protection of culture and to discuss further co-operation with the EU. The question of financial support to the strategy's implementation also needs to be highlighted. UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund is an important mechanism to support UNESCO's strategy and action plan in this field. It is particularly well adapted to rapid emergency response and it finances activities in the domains of all six UNESCO Culture Conventions. Considering the strategic importance of the Fund, we hope that it will have many contributors and sufficient resources in order to meet its objectives. Estonia will make its second contribution to the Fund by the end of this year.

Estonia is a strong advocate of opportunities that information and communication technology can provide for sustainable development. The digital change has come to stay. Estonia is ready to cooperate with other states where our experience and knowledge is needed and would have an added value. UNESCO with its vast network of field offices also needs to further modernize its processes and to make a good use of the modern technology in order to become more transparent and accountable. The Working Group on Governance has put forward numerous recommendations in order for UNESCO to become more relevant, efficient and inclusive organization and to improve strategic decision making. We value the open and Member State-driven process that enables the Board to make its recommendations to the upcoming General Conference. The complexity of the task can be illustrated by the simple

fact that we now talk about “UNESCO universe” and not “UNESCO family” when we mean all the different networks, structures and bodies.

The Director-General has been forced to implement a Contingency Plan due to significant delays in payment of assessed contributions. We are concerned by the impact of the current budget freeze that means scaling down all activities across the house with associated programmatic and reputational risks.

UNESCO’s aim is to share knowledge for greater understanding and dialogue, in order to promote peace and respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and dignity. This is also an acknowledged goal of the Memory of the World Programme. We are grateful to the International Advisory Committee for their substantial work on the review of the Programme that is presented to the Board for its consideration. Estonia emphasizes the importance of keeping Memory of the World as an expert-led international programme that rests on professional judgement and encourages dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.

Since the term of Estonia in the Executive Board will expire in November, let me say how much we value the experience that has been enriching on more than one level. My delegation would also like to express our appreciation to all Members of the Board for their cooperation that will definitely continue also outside of our beloved Room number 10!