

**Dr. Karan Singh, India's Representative to the
Executive Board of UNESCO**

**Speech at the 202nd Session of the Executive Board
9 – 11 October, 2017**

Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board, Madam Director-General, distinguished delegates, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

While I applaud UNESCO's significant effort in shaping the world discourse in the essential fields of Education, Culture, Science and Communications, all of us present here today are cognizant of the deep crisis affecting this great organization. Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of peace and crusader for non-violence, wrote a letter on 25th May 1947 to Dr. Julian Huxley, Director-General of UNESCO, which has great relevance for us today. Gandhiji had said: "... I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world'.

The world order has changed completely since the formation of this organization but the desire to see a just world, a 'good world' burns unabated in us all. The understanding of it changes with each generation, and there always remain great swathes of overlapping concerns which require nations to work towards common goals, vital to human existence and progress. UNESCO provides the world community a space to allow such co-operation and synergies to develop, and has rightly been described as the 'conscience of the world' and 'a laboratory of ideas'.

These common goals of mankind have been enshrined in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. India is fully committed to the attainment of these goals by 2030, and shares UNESCO's priorities with a focus on the education of the girl child. The recently established UNESCO Chair on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at the Amrita University, is a first in India and among the very few globally. India is adopting innovative strategies in education, actively promoting Open Educational Resources and has launched the National Digital

Literacy Mission. We believe that obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. Open Educational Resources have opened doors of opportunity to those constrained by time, resources or facilities to rediscover the joy of learning. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), a Category-I Institute in Delhi jointly set up by UNESCO and the Government of India has made commendable progress since its inception four years ago and is steadily developing into an institute of global importance.

In the cultural domain, India applauds UNESCO's efforts in the adoption of Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the Convention for Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity in a Digital Environment in June this year. We were gratified that 'the walled city of Ahmedabad', founded in the 15th century continues to flourish as the capital of the State of Gujarat for the last 6 centuries and is now the Heritage of all humanity. Auroville, a unique multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-national township in south India, will celebrate the 50th

Anniversary of its foundation early next year. UNESCO has earlier passed four resolutions supporting Auroville, and we hope that another will be passed by the General Assembly on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee.

Climate Change Action is our most crucial responsibility, failing which we will be held guilty for grave dereliction by future generations. At UNESCO, India has participated in formulating the 'Declaration of Ethical Principles of Climate Change' so that an intellectual discussion can be facilitated regarding responsibilities, loss and damage with respect to Climate Change.

I commend UNESCO's leading role in promoting Science. I am happy that Dr. Ashutosh Sharma of India won the UNESCO Medal for contributions to the development of nano science and nano technologies. The Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services, Hyderabad, was approved by the UNESCO's IOC in June this year to be established as Category 2 Center for Oceanography. India has also increased the

quantum of prize money of the Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science from the current cycle.

There is an urgent need for UNESCO to focus on a prioritization of its programmes and activities, phasing out those which over time have lost their relevance and eliminating duplication. The adoption of a fresh Programme and Budget for 2018-21 at the 39th General Conference, under a new leadership, allows us a rare opportunity to make a transition to a stronger organization. India will support any constructive effort in this direction. With our unwavering commitment to multilateralism and democratic decision making, India's voice is increasingly important among the comity of nations. It has been an ardent supporter of UNESCO's efforts in its mandated areas and we remain committed to the organization's goals.

Today is also an occasion for farewells. The election of a new Director-General is an occasion both to look to the past and the future. We all appreciate the manner in which our outgoing Director-General, Irina Bokova has guided UNESCO through one of its most difficult

financial crises. We commend her for the leadership she has provided to UNESCO over the last eight years and wish her well for the future. Having had the privilege of being India's representative on the Executive Board for the same eight years, I now take leave of this august assembly as my term expires this year. I take this opportunity to thank the Director-General and other officials of UNESCO for the courtesy shown to me during these years, and also to warmly greet my fellow members and wish UNESCO well for the years and decades ahead as the world hurtles into an indeterminate and challenging future.

TOTAL (911 WORDS)