

Statement of H.E. Mr. Ahmad Jalali
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Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO
On the Occasion of the 202nd session of the Executive Board
Paris, 10 October 2017

Mr. Chair,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies,

I would like to thank our dear Chair for the very comprehensive work he has undertaken during his mandate. Also, I would like to thank the Director-General, who has led this House in very difficult circumstances from different aspects. Furthermore, I extend my sympathy and condolences to all those affected by the recent disasters.

Dear colleagues,

Why is UNESCO unique and innovative? Bringing together all States in a regular, structured and continuous manner - not for political or economic deals, but rather for departing from 'otherness' to mutual understanding. The novelty is that UNESCO was founded to employ States for peace. This was its conceptual *raison d'être*, while its historical one is its universality. Such an intergovernmental organization is a unique singularity! Compared to the *realpolitik* of today, to me, the very creation of such an organization appears a miracle. If it had not been safely born in 1945, there would have been many issuing fatwas for its abortion.

While UNESCO is intergovernmental in nature and engaged in important normative action in the elaboration of legal instruments, at heart it is in fact philosophical. That is not to say that it produces philosophy; it is rather the outcome of philosophical minds, and furthermore – essentially – strives to make these ideals and concepts concrete by putting them into practice throughout the world. Therefore, this does not mean that we abandon involvement in practical fieldwork; rather, we should fulfil to the maximum our essential professional orientation in the realm of ideas, principles and values.

It is interesting to remind ourselves that in 1922 UNESCO's predecessor, the International Committee – and later Institute - of Intellectual Cooperation, was founded as an advisory body for the League of Nations. It brought together such illustrious members as Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, and its Chair, the

philosopher Henri Bergson. In 1946, following the Second World War, it was incorporated into UNESCO, which inherited its archives. UNESCO's first activities in the field of philosophy were organized by Jacques Havel, with a focus on bringing about the greater familiarization of East and West in mutual understanding.

I know that politics is part and parcel of an intergovernmental organization, but politics is different from politicization, which means injecting politics into a subject matter which is not political by nature. This will culminate in a malaise. To cure it, we have to genuinely reaffirm our allegiance to UNESCO's founders. They wished to introduce a genuine politics of the mind in a clear universal form which is not supposed to represent the special interests or ideology of any particular group. Such self-reflection is essential in an organization like ours, which was founded on ethics, and whose objectives are ideals.

In 2005 we approved 33 C/Resolution 64 on the Future of UNESCO, whose Explanatory Note was written by myself, in which we emphasized re-reading the Constitution to analyse and discover its underutilized capacities and to elaborate on the visionary insights of its founders.

Let me refer to part of the Constitution that all of you know, but which needs to be underlined insistently and repeatedly: it says that the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind is the defence for peace, if it is not to fail. Why did they say this? Because they had arrived at the deep and bitter realization that the exclusively political and economic arrangements of Governments are unable to secure peace.

Let me make myself clearer through some examples. The concept of "common heritage" and its "universal value" elaborated in the 1972 World Heritage Convention was very innovative in the field of international law, and an intellectual achievement to enhance a sense of attachment to other nations. However, do we now educate our children to look at heritage from this perspective, or do we mainly want to exploit it for tourism? Not even cultural tourism, but rather looking at it from its economic aspects. This distortion of the main intellectual goal is unfortunately occurring in the case of some other very valuable intellectual fruits of UNESCO, such as intangible cultural heritage, Memory of the World, etc.

Reorienting our reforms in accordance with the Founders' ideas does not mean that we shall not make their application up to date and elaborated upon. While UNESCO's central vision remains unchanged, the meanings the terms embody are subject to alteration over the course of time. For example, at the time of UNESCO's establishment, "culture" was primarily used to refer to artistic

production in the arts and letters within the context of the State, while now it has a far wider meaning, in terms of creativity, identity and development. This is the case with Education, for which SDG 4 of the 2030 agenda developed by UNESCO is a very good example.

UNESCO reflects the ancient and venerable conception of the interlinkage of knowledge and ethics, contrary to the common notion that knowledge and science are in fact to be understood as standing separately from values and morality. Thus, when they are so interlinked, progress in the fields of knowledge should also be reflected in a similar ethical progress.