

Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
202 session of the Executive Board

Chairman of the Executive Board

Madam Director General

Distinguished Members of the Executive Board

Ladies and Gentleman

1. It gives me great pleasure and honour to be addressing the 202 session of the Executive Board of UNESCO on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka and Hon. Akila Viraj Kariyawasam, Minister of Education Representative to the Executive Board.
2. Today, when the world is faced with many challenges such as violent extremism, climate change and poverty, the role of UNESCO as a platform for intellectual debate to foster peace and sustainable development through Education, Science and Culture has become all the more important.
3. Sri Lanka believes that Education serves as a main bridge for alleviating poverty, encouraging intercultural dialogue, harmony and cohesion. In this respect, Sri Lanka is happy to note the excellent contributions made by UNESCO in the implementation of SDG4-Education 2030.
4. We also applaud initiatives launched by UNESCO to enhance learning opportunities for refugees and internally displaced persons and also for prevention of violent extremism through education.

Mr. Chairman,

5. My country has developed a multi-thronged roadmap to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all, particularly in relation to marginalized groups and to ensure that no child is left behind.
6. In this respect, Sri Lanka has taken steps to provide scholarships to disabled, displaced students and those with financial difficulties. We have also introduced an insurance coverage for all school going children. At the same time, legal and administrative environments are being created to implement 13 years of compulsory education.
7. Concurrently, vocational skills are being introduced to school curricula so students with no access to universities can accomplish appropriate level of skills.
8. Sri Lanka also hopes to develop an Education Management Information System to increase service delivery and efficient management with the assistance of UNESCO.

Ladies & Gentlemen

9. Building peace in the minds of men and women appears to be all the more challenging due to the scars of hatred, mistrust and violence. Therefore, the promotion of intercultural and interfaith harmony and social cohesion is of paramount importance.

10. In this context, Sri Lanka is also on a progressive path towards achieving meaningful reconciliation, consolidating accountability, transparency and democracy. A constitutional reform process is also underway to strengthen mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Mr. Chairman,

11. Sri Lanka acknowledges the leading role played by UNESCO on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. Our country has also taken various steps in this direction. Introduction of the Right to Information Act and provision of training for all related stakeholders marks a major milestone in this process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

~~12.~~— Achieving gender parity is still a challenge in most countries and in most societies. Discrimination against women still remains a problem that must be addressed. Gender equality is a global priority of UNESCO and Sri Lanka notes with satisfaction the work carried out by UNESCO in this respect. I am happy to state that in my country where 52% of the population is women, their rights have been guaranteed through our constitution.

~~13.~~12.

Mr. Chairman,

16. We cannot find lasting solutions to any of the global issues such as poverty, food and energy crises without bold action to combat climate change and achieve greener low-carbon growth.

~~18.~~17. Therefore, the launch of a Sustainable Development Act which serves as the National policy and Strategy in Sri Lanka is a major stride in the right direction. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has developed a National Research and Development Framework in view of the significant role to be played by scientific research and innovation in achieving sustained development.

~~19.~~18. In addition, Sri Lanka wishes to underline the importance of south-south, north-south and triangular cooperation in this respect. We are pursuing enhanced collaborations with many foreign science and technology institutes in order to share knowledge and experience through UNESCO Chairs.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

~~20.~~19. UNESCO's Man & the Biosphere Programme is one of the key priorities for my country. Sri Lanka therefore, commends the proposed strategy and action plan to protect and strengthen brand recognition of biosphere reserves. Sri Lanka also constantly strives to enhance management of Man and Biosphere Reserves through training and capacity building.

Mr. Chairman,

~~24.~~20. UNESCO's work in the protection of cultural heritage has always been significant. Sri Lanka is thankful for UNESCO for the assistance extended in capacity building to develop a National Policy for Intangible Cultural Heritage and the training of practitioners of various elements. Sri Lanka has also taken steps to improve conservation and management of Heritage Sites.

~~22.~~21. In conclusion, I wish to also congratulate & thank Madam Irina Bokova, the outgoing Director-General of UNESCO on behalf of Sri Lanka for the exemplary manner in which he has led.

~~23.~~22. Thank you.