

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Madame Director General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates

I am delighted to be here at this afternoon's UNESCO Executive Board and I am very pleased to be able to deliver the opening comments from the Delegation of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

As a committed public servant and a career diplomat, I am particularly honoured to be able to support the important work that UNESCO is doing. During the last 20 plus years I have had the opportunity to witness at first hand – and in a wide variety of different contexts, the work that the United Nations does, and to see for myself the impact and importance of UNESCO's mission, in Europe, in the Middle East, in central Asia and in Africa. That experience gives me a particular interest in the work of this organisation – and in the role that we, as Member States, have in supporting that work.

I am therefore pleased to be able to reaffirm the UK Government's commitment to the issues which UNESCO deals with across the fields of science, education - including the promotion of education and learning in developing countries - and the protection of international culture and heritage.

It was particularly satisfying that my first official responsibility, which came on the day I presented my credentials to the Director General last month, was to

deposit the documents noting the UK's ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and our accession to both its protocols. This underlines the UK's absolute commitment to protecting cultural heritage across the globe,

As the Secretary of State for International Development stated during the UK-hosted panel on UN Reform at UNGA last month, we are encouraged to see that "the UN Secretary-General's first report on system reform creates a strong foundation for building a UN for the 21st Century. One that the UK believes must be transparent, efficient and able to justify to the taxpayers of the world what it does and what outcomes it achieves on their behalf."

The concept applies just as much to UNESCO as it does to the wider UN.

There is a clear link between the UK's commitment to UN reform and its desire to see a significant improvement in UNESCO's ways of working.

We recognise that change – positive change - within UNESCO is underway. Progress has been made and further steps are in hand to improve UNESCO's efficiency, effectiveness and integrity as an organisation that is fit for its unique – and important - purpose.

If we are to maintain this momentum and build on what has been achieved so far, it is important that we continue to strive for excellence, for increased

impact and greater focus – so that we can ensure together that UNESCO is able to achieve all that we want of it.

Greater organisational transparency, accountability and efficiency naturally lend themselves to ensuring UNESCO's longevity.

We consider it essential to maintain a realistic budget, which is administered transparently by staff that are fully accountable to the Member States, with programmes that best serve the needs of those that need the assistance that a focused, UNESCO creates.

We believe that such objectives are not only feasible, but necessary to maintain UNESCO's position as a global leader for peace.

As we once again find ourselves facing the difficult decision of who to elect to lead this organisation, the UK looks forward to working closely with the new management, pursuing a rigorous reform agenda.

We will look to work together with the Director General and Member States alike to achieve objectives such as a better fit-for-purpose field office network that can increase UNESCO's impact around the world, managing a fully transparent financial process and developing a motivated workforce.

I look forward with enthusiasm, commitment and determination to playing our part in writing UNESCO's next chapter.