

United States National Statement
As delivered by Chris Hegadorn, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i.
202nd Executive Board
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board, Madam Director-General Bokova, President of the General Conference, fellow Member States representatives.

Let me begin by thanking those who shared condolences following the recent horrific shootings in Las Vegas, a grim reminder of why we must continue working to construct peace in the minds of men and women. Likewise, we appreciate the support shown in the wake of the nearly unimaginable hurricane damage to Puerto Rico, parts of the continental United States, and across the Caribbean.

Before the week is over, we anticipate knowing who will be our Director General (DG) nominee, to be confirmed, of course, by the General Conference. The next DG will have a huge challenge, with difficult choices to make -- on program priorities, senior staff selections, how to ensure this agency remains fit for purpose in education, science, culture, and freedom of expression.

The UN Secretary-General is embarked upon a mission to reform the United Nations, a goal we strongly support, and one that should deeply impact UNESCO. In light of that effort, the next DG will be judged on his or her ability to meet 21st century challenges effectively, creatively, with a high standard of transparency and accountability. Working with Member States to find common ground and positive contributions to real-world problems will be the measuring stick of their success, including avoiding political crises UNESCO was not meant to resolve, and which damage its credibility and image.

Whoever is chosen to lead this organization, it is self-evident that UNESCO must continue to lead on preventing violent extremism via education, on literacy and educating women and girls, on protecting and preserving the world’s heritage, on science for development, and on free speech and journalist safety.

UNESCO is diligently working to support the UN Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism, and its inter-sectoral approach should set the standard for similar cross-cutting issues. It now must focus on impacts and results of this crucial work. We urge UNESCO to support country implementation of its voluntary PVE policy guidance, as well as trainings based on its PVE teacher resource guide, and digital literacy teaching tools to build resilience to online radicalization efforts.

UNESCO has to do more to support the UN Plan of Action on Journalist safety; we are seeing the numbers of journalists harassed, killed, and falsely imprisoned continue to grow. And, UNESCO should continue working to reverse the disturbing trend we see of governments closing websites and denying access to the Internet on purely political grounds. We implore the next Director General: do not turn your back on journalist safety, or on the issue of censorship and violations and abuses of freedom of expression, including the media.

We are proud of what the TeachHer public-private partnership has accomplished in Africa and Latin America to train the educators of young girls to bring them into the world of STEM/STEAM education and careers. Our pilot program has now benefited educators, policy makers, and young women of 18 countries, and is ready to achieve more with your help and that of UNESCO staff and institutes. We warmly thank Kenya and Panama for hosting and organizing regional trainings this year, and to Senegal and Japan who have volunteered to take this work forward in partnership with UNESCO in Africa next year.

In science, the United States will continue to play a leading role with the institutions and committees associated with UNESCO, on issues ranging from Tsunami early warning systems to international hydrological programs. Now, more than ever, the next DG should look for ways to reward those institutes that succeed, and guarantee the functional autonomy needed for them to effectively fulfill their mandates.

And of course, in the area of culture -- arguably UNESCO's greatest 'brand' -- the next DG will need to celebrate culture in all of its diversity and at the same time be the voice of concern about pillage and destruction of our universal heritage. Seeing the destruction in Iraq, Syria, Mali, and elsewhere of the world's ancient and historic sites reminds us all of the critical role UNESCO can and must continue to play in mitigating threats to, and illegal trafficking of our shared heritage.

At the same time, UNESCO should continue to invest in outreach, particularly through social media, so that more will hear and know about its University Chairs, Creative Cities, ASP Net Schools, Man and the Biosphere programs – and much more. The world should learn of the full range of valuable activities under way at UNESCO.

In closing, we would like to express our appreciation for the dedication with which Director-General Bokova has led this organization during the past eight years. She has faced many political and management challenges that neither she nor we member states would have imagined when she assumed office. As she prepares to depart, we are grateful for her hard work, her commitment to the goals of this organization, and her consistent support to member states.

To the next Director General, we emphasize our support for the goals and objectives of this organization and wish you success as you face the many challenges ahead. We continue to have faith in the purpose and capacity of this organization, in its ability to live up to its promise as a premier institution, and in the commitment of its Secretariat and staff. Looking to the future, reform, a renewed focus on transparency and accountability, and a re-commitment to the original goals of the Organization are essential. All of us owe the founders of this organization and the citizens of the world our best efforts to ensure that UNESCO will carry out its core mission and mandate in the most effective way possible.

Thank you for your attention.