Sir/Madam,

At the start of 2018, I would like to extend my best wishes for success, peace and happiness to you and your families.

The first issue I would like to address is the publication of the fifth edition of the Annual Report of National Commissions. Since there are only 41 contributions received to date, we kindly ask National Commissions, which have not done so yet, to send their inputs and photos, in accordance with the form we sent you, to natcom@unesco.org as soon as possible.

We hope that, subject to your active participation, the Annual Report for 2017 can be launched by the next meeting of National Commissions, which will take place in the margins of the 204th session of the Executive Board on the mornings of 11 and 12 April 2018. We will provide you with more details on the meeting in due course.

I would also like to inform you that, due to unavoidable circumstance, the 5th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions will be held in Diani, Kenya from 19 to 21 June 2018. The Kenya National Commission informed us of the change of date, so please note that these dates are different from those previously announced. Make sure also to save them in your calendars. Following the recommendations of the 4th Interregional Meeting, we anticipate working closer with you with a view to setting a consistent agenda and we will highly appreciate receiving your suggestions to this end at natcom@unesco.org by 23 February 2018.

UNESCO Education Sector Monthly Digest – January 2018

As usual, I am pleased to share with you this month’s Education Monthly Digest where you can find stories on the transformative power of education and information on learning assessment systems in African countries under this link. The Digest is also available in French and Spanish.

Contact: edknowledge@unesco.org
15 February 2018 – Deadline for submission of candidates for the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize 2018

The UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize was established by UNESCO’s Executive Board in 1997. Its purpose is to reward each year a person, organization or institution that has made a notable contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, especially if risks have been involved. It is awarded annually to a person, organization or institution that has made a notable contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, especially if risks have been involved.

The governments of Member States are invited to nominate candidates for the Prize 2018, in consultation with their National Commissions, as well as international and regional professional non-governmental organizations, active in the field of press freedom.

I would like to remind you that the deadline for submission of candidates for the Prize is **15 February 2018**. Nominations for the Prize should be submitted by filling out this form in English or French and sending it by post or by email.

Contact: Ms Sylvie Coudray (s.coudray@unesco.org)

21 February 2018 – Celebration of International Mother Language Day (IMLD)

The Organization has been celebrating this Day for nearly 20 years now with the aim of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Today, linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened because languages are disappearing. A language disappears on average every two weeks, carrying with it a whole cultural and intellectual heritage. Protecting linguistic diversity is a real challenge today. With regard to multilingual education based on mother languages, there is some progress. Overall, there is a better perception of mother languages, more commitment to the development of mother languages in the public sphere, and more measures for mother language education in the early years of schooling.

Activities will be held at UNESCO Headquarters to celebrate the Day, around the theme “Preserving linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism to support the SDGs”. More information will be available soon on UNESCO’s website.

Given the importance of mother and local languages as channels for safeguarding and sharing indigenous cultures and knowledge, which are vast reservoirs of wisdom, I encourage National Commissions to organize events in your respective countries to celebrate this important Day.

Contact: Ms Noro Andriamiseza Ingarao (n.andriamiseza@unesco.org)

5 - 6 March 2018 – International symposium: Early childhood care and education, cradle for social cohesion, Paris, France

The Symposium will put a spotlight on the transformative power of Early childhood care and education (ECCE) and address, in particular, how ECCE can effectively help combat inequalities, discriminations and violence and promote social cohesion by drawing on research evidence, good practices and experiences from around the world.
The Symposium aims to promote better understanding and practices related to the topic, and to contribute to ongoing and future efforts, including the Early Childhood Peace Consortium, the Year of Early Childhood in 2018 of the CONFEMEN (Conference des ministres de l'Education des Etats et gouvernements de la Francophonie), and UNESCO Forum on Education for Peace and Sustainable Development in 2019.

The event will address four themes:
- health, wellbeing and education;
- curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
- role of and synergy among parents, communities and teachers; and
- challenges of inclusion and gender equality.

I invite you to disseminate this information among relevant stakeholders and partners. You may find out more information about early childhood care and education via this link.

Contact: Ms Yoshie Kaga (ecce@unesco.org)

8 March 2018 – International Women’s Day

The official United Nations system’s priority theme for the International Women’s Day in 2018 is “Rural Women”.

Events organized at UNESCO Headquarters on this occasion include:

1. an « edit-a-thon » (8 March) organized with the Wikimedia Foundation to promote stronger representations of women committed to knowledge in the digital sphere. Those all around the world, including but not limited to UNESCO’s staff and partners, the Permanent Delegation’s members, representatives of civil society, as well as the youth and the general public, will be invited to join the initiative by creating new Wikipedia profiles, as well as translating and enriching already existing profiles on Wikipedia;

2. a half-day conference on the theme “Women and the Digital World” (8 March), with the objective to mobilize experts and policy makers and to identify key issues for further promotion of women’s empowerment through ICTs;

3. a half day conference focused on “Gender, Cultural Rights and Scientific Freedom” (8 March), co-organized with the UNESCO Chair on Cultural Rights at the University of Copenhagen and the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Denmark to UNESCO, with the objective to make an impact on the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment through effective enjoyment of cultural rights and scientific freedom;

4. the International Women’s Day Artistic Exhibition “Rural Women” in cooperation with Member States, to be complemented with a multimedia installation entitled “Rural Women in Africa and the Media” (7-18 March), with the opening ceremony to be held on 8 March 2018.

Contact: Ms Pauline Vallette (P.vallette@unesco.org) for activity 1 and Ms S. Gülsen Corat (director.ge@unesco.org) for activities 2 to 4.

I encourage you to organize your own events within the framework of this Day and share with us your respective experiences. Your events will be posted on the website of Member States: www.unesco.int.
UNESCO Publications

- Close to 10 years after its first edition, a fully updated International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach was published recently by UNESCO, in collaboration with UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, and the World Health Organization. This publication advocates quality comprehensive sexuality education to promote health and well-being, respect for human rights and gender equality, and empowers children and young people to lead healthy, safe and productive lives. The Technical Guidance is designed to assist education policy makers in all countries design accurate and age-appropriate curricula for children and young people aged 5 – 18+.

- UNESCO, in collaboration with United Nations University – Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), launched a publication Migration, Free Movement and Regional Integration following a research project focusing on regional organizations. This publication brings together a host of well-known scholars to analyse the different approaches to free movement used by some 30 regional organizations. It also presents a comparative review of the various measures taken and obstacles encountered by these organizations to highlight current and emerging trends. The book is available in English under this link.

- Published by UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), Quality management in higher education: Developments and drivers is the results from an international survey that aimed at providing advice to institutional and national Higher Education policy-makers and quality managers on ways to enhance the development and application of Quality Management in Higher Education institutions. As the first international study conducted on QM in HEIs, this survey fills a clear knowledge gap in mapping tools used, structures, and processes. The publication is available in English under this link.

Appointments of Presidents and Secretaries-General of National Commissions (December 2017 / January 2018)

I am pleased to welcome to the National Commissions network the following new members:

In Barbados, Ms Joycelyn Sealy has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Juliette Griffith.

In Cook Islands, Ms Danielle Cochrane has been appointed acting Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Gail Townsend.

In Malta, Mr Raymond Bondin has been appointed Chairperson (since November 2017), succeeding Mr Henry Frendo.

In Mexico, Mr Otto Granados Roldán has been appointed President, succeeding Mr Aurelio Nuño Mayer.

In Serbia, Mr Nemanja Grbic has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Jasmina Stanković Tatarac.

In Tajikistan, Ms Zulfiya Butaeva has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Mavjud Nurova.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Raft