To Secretaries-General of National Commissions for UNESCO

24 July 2019

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Sir/Madam,

At the outset, I wish to thank all of you who participated in the online Survey of the National Commissions for UNESCO on the updated Comprehensive Partnership Strategy. As you know, at the request of the Bureau of Strategic Planning and in line with the ongoing Strategic Transformation process (specifically Working Group 3), a questionnaire was sent on 23 May 2019 to all National Commissions through the new online Platform of National Commissions. By 3 July 2019, the Secretariat had received responses from 28 National Commissions. The outcome of this Survey will be reflected in the updated Comprehensive Partnership Strategy to be submitted to the autumn session of the Executive Board (9-23 October 2019).

I am pleased to confirm to you that the 6th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions will take place from 15 to 16 November 2019 in room XII at UNESCO Headquarters on the margins of the 40th session of the General Conference (12-27 November 2019). Please note that the letters of invitation and the provisional programme will be sent to you shortly. In addition, as requested by many National Commissions, I am pleased to inform you that we will organize a training workshop for new Secretaries-General of National Commissions on 14 November 2019 at UNESCO Headquarters. You will receive more information on this shortly also.

As you all know, the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee closed in Baku, Azerbaijan on 10 July with the inscription of 29 new sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage List (one in Africa, two in the Arab States, ten in the Asia Pacific region, 15 in Europe and North America and one in Latin America and Caribbean). The World Heritage List now features 1,121 sites in 167 countries.

This successful session reaffirmed the potential of heritage in strengthening cooperation between States -- it showed also that significant efforts are still needed to enhance and preserve African heritage. UNESCO also renewed its call for unflagging rigour, integrity and responsibility in the examination of nominations, so as to bolster the credibility of the World Heritage Convention and its future standing. Next year the city of Fuzhou (China) will host the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee.

You can find more about the 29 new sites on the website of the World Heritage Committee 2019.

Thanking you all again for your leadership and support, allow me to end on a personal note, to wish you all Happy Holidays!
UNESCO Education Sector Monthly Digest – July 2019

I am pleased to share with you UNESCO’s Education Monthly Digest of July, under this link, in which you can find out the latest news such as UNESCO fast-tracking girl’s and women’s education, the UNESCO 2019 Forum on education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship and other interesting stories around the world. The Digest is also available in French and Spanish.

Contact: edknowledge@unesco.org

UNESCO’s Management Response to the MOPAN 2017-2018 Assessment of UNESCO

The first MOPAN Assessment Report of UNESCO was launched on 1 April 2019 for all UNESCO Delegations, at an event hosted by Norway in its capacity as institutional country lead at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The Assessment Report stresses that the Organization is fit for purpose and that it meets the requirements of an effective multilateral organization; it underlines UNESCO’s clear strategic vision, its central role to the SDGs, its unique expertise, its ability to work in a cross-cutting manner, and its convening power for experts, practitioners, citizens and governments to develop solutions to the global problems embedded in the SDGs. Similarly, it concludes that the Organisation combines its normative and programmatic roles in a mutually reinforcing manner and underscored the rare expertise and authority of the Organization in its fields of competence. The Assessment Report also identifies several areas for improvements, which are detailed in the Report (Assessment Report of UNESCO).

Following the presentation of the MOPAN report, the Organization has now released its detailed Management Response (Management Response of UNESCO).

This document follows MOPAN’s best practice presentation, and presents an overall assessment by the Director-General and a comprehensive Technical Annex, which provides a comprehensive list of key steps and measures taken or foreseen. As stressed in the document, these measures converge with many of the processes underway as part of the UNESCO’s Strategic Transformation process.

The Secretariat will continue to address the issues identified in full consultation with its Member States. UNESCO is one of the 14 organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-2018 period.

UNESCO projections show countries are off track in meeting their education commitments for 2030

Almost five years since the UN adopted Sustainable Development Goals for the target date of 2030, UNESCO projections show that the countries of the world will fail to meet the educational commitments of that agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 4, unless there is serious progress over the coming decade.

UNESCO projections ahead of the UN High-level Political Forum that is to examine progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, show that when all children should be in school, one in six 6 to 17-year-olds will still be excluded in 2030. Projections also show that 40% of children worldwide will fail to complete secondary education, a figure that is forecast to reach 50% in sub-Saharan Africa where the proportion of trained teachers has been declining since 2000.
The new projections (Meeting Commitments: Are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?) were produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report. The figures are all the more worrying considering that SDG 4 calls for effective learning, not just for school enrolment.

At current trends, learning rates are expected to stagnate in middle-income countries and drop by almost a third in Francophone African countries in 2030. Furthermore, without rapid acceleration, 20% of young people and 30% of adults in low-income countries will still be unable to read by the target date for the elimination of illiteracy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes leaving no-one behind, yet only 4% of the poorest 20% complete upper secondary school in the poorest countries, compared to 36% of the richest. The gap is even wider in lower-middle-income countries.

Contact: Ms Kate Redman (k.redman@unesco.org)

UNESCO and ECOWAS Court of Justice to reinforce freedom of expression in West Africa

UNESCO and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen the protection of freedom of expression, press freedom and safety of journalists in West Africa. The agreement, signed by the Director-General of UNESCO Audrey Azoulay and the President of ECOWAS Court of Justice Mr Edward Asante, will foster the commitment and cooperation between the two organizations to raise capacities and knowledge of judicial actors on the legal framework governing freedom of expression and press freedom. “Freedom of expression and its corollaries are at the core of UNESCO’s mandate,” said the Director-General Audrey Azoulay. “Our partnership with the ECOWAS Court signifies a vital cooperation that will allow journalists and individuals in Africa to exercise the right to freedom of expression with greater security.”

The agreement formalizes the cooperation existing since 2016 between the two organizations and facilitates the development of the joint activities targeting the judiciary and civil society in Africa, such as seminars, training workshops and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) on freedom of expression issues.

“The memorandum is a significant part of cooperation between both parties to protect and reinforce freedom of expression and press freedom in Africa,” declared Justice Asante. “I look forward to my further work with UNESCO and the judges and lawyers in Africa that will benefit from the cooperation between the two organizations.”

UNESCO at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2019, United Nations, New York

The High-level Political Forum 2019 (HLPF), including a three-day ministerial meeting, will review Sustainable Development Goal 4 for the first time since the 2030 agenda was adopted four years ago. Goals 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), 13 (climate action), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (global partnership) will also be reviewed this year.

As lead organisation for SDG 4, UNESCO has organised multiple events. The specific discussion on SDG 4 took place on 9 July. UNESCO and the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee highlighted that the world is not on track to achieve SDG 4 by 2030 and called governments and stakeholders to #CommitToEducation!
Multiple education focused events took place during the forum including a panel discussion on "Relevant, equitable and inclusive quality education for all: an imperative for the 21st century" at the Trusteeship Council Chamber, with UNESCO's Director-General, Audrey Azoulay.

Further information: High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2019

26 July 2019 - International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem

Mangroves are rare, spectacular and prolific ecosystems on the boundary between land and sea. These extra ordinary ecosystems contribute to the wellbeing, food security, and protection of coastal communities worldwide. They support a rich biodiversity and provide a valuable nursery habitat for fish and crustaceans. Mangroves also act as a form of natural coastal defense against storm surges, tsunamis, rising sea levels and erosion. Their soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon.

Yet mangroves are disappearing three to five times faster than overall global forest losses, with serious ecological and socio-economic impacts. Current estimates indicate that mangrove coverage has been divided by two in the past 40 years.

UNESCO is engaged deeply in supporting the conservation of mangroves, while advancing the sustainable development of their local communities. The inclusion of mangroves in Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks contributes to improving the knowledge, management and conservation of mangrove ecosystems throughout the world.

The International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2015 and celebrated each year on 26 July, aims to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems as "a unique, special and vulnerable ecosystem" and to promote solutions for their sustainable management, conservation and uses.

31 August 2019 - Registration Open, Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2019 Feature Conference and Youth Agenda Forum

The annual Global MIL Week will be celebrated from 24 to 31 October this year, under the theme "MIL Citizens: Informed, Engaged, Empowered".

The Global MIL Week 2019 Feature Conference, the Ninth MIL and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) Conference, will be held from 24 to 25 September 2019 in Gothenburg, Sweden, under the same theme as Global MIL Week 2019.

The Feature Conference will be followed by the Global MIL Week 2019 Youth Agenda Forum, an event designed by and for youth. It will be held on 26 October 2019 at the same venue as the Feature Conference.

These two Feature Events are co-hosted by the County Council Region Västra Götaland and the University of Gothenburg. The events will benefit from the synergies with the 2019 Gothenburg Book Fair taking place around the same period, which is the second largest of its kind in Europe.

9 September 2019 - UNESCO seeks nominations for the Avicenna Prize for Ethics in Science 2019

UNESCO invites Members States in consultation with their National Commissions, non-governmental organizations in official partnership with UNESCO, various professional, academic and non-governmental organizations active in the field of ethics of science and technology, members of relevant UNESCO’s expert bodies and UNESCO’s partners, to propose candidates for the UNESCO Avicenna Prize for Ethics in Science 2019.

This year it will reward activities in the field of advancing the "Ethics of Environment" with a special thematic focus on ethics of climate change and environmental sustainability.

The Prize may be conferred upon individuals, institutions, other entities or non-governmental organizations. Nominees (i.e. candidates) must be living persons or existing institutions.

Users with UNESCO accounts can submit candidatures online at: www.unesco.org/avicenna.

Other potential submitters are invited to request an account at: www.unesco.org/avicenna/account. The account will allow online submission of the nomination.

Deadline for the submission of candidates: 9 September 2019 (midnight, Paris time).

Contact: Ms Dafna Feinholz (avicenna.prize@unesco.org)

15 October 2019 - The International Geoscience Programme (IGCP) calls for projects to support research and capacities-building

The IGCP financially supports about 30 projects per year which are assessed by a peer-review process and have a lifetime of five years. Annual funding levels range between 5,000 and 10,000 USD to be used exclusively for meetings or workshops. Additional resources are usually needed to ensure realisation of the projects’ research goals, and scientists are strongly encouraged to raise such funds. Projects must focus, inter alia, on high-quality science, be of international importance and societal relevance, show interdisciplinary cooperation, and constitute international participation, including scientists from developing countries.

Project proposals may be submitted by individuals or groups to the IGCP Secretariat accompanied by a letter of endorsement (if possible) from one of the project leader’s National IGCP Committees. Project leaders are strongly advised to inform the UNESCO National Commission representatives and UNESCO Permanent Delegation of their home country.

The call will emphasize women and young and early career scientists who are especially encouraged to apply.
The project(s) will be sponsored for five years jointly by UNESCO, the International Union of Geological Sciences; the Jeju Province Development Corporation of the Republic of Korea and the UNESCO National Commission for the People’s Republic of China.

Deadline for project proposals: 15 October 2019

Contact: Mr Ozlem Adiyaman Lopes (o.adiyaman@unesco.org) or Ms Marie-Laure Faber (ml.faber@unesco.org)

National Commissions’ Community board - sharing initiatives

- For the last 10 years now, East African National Commissions have been engaged in a number of Capacity Building workshops with each country hosting at least an annual meeting. This year another meeting will take place in Nairobi, Kenya from 22 to 25 July with the support of the German National Commission for UNESCO, UNESCO Nairobi Office and the Priority Africa and External Relations Sector (PAX).

  This meeting will gather the following National Commissions: Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi. The overall objective is to prepare the East African National Commissions to fully and meaningfully participate in the 40th session of the General Conference.

- The Korean National Commission will organize a meeting of East and Southeast Asia National Commissions from 28 to 30 August 2019 as a follow-up to 2018 Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting that took place in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea. 15 National Commissions, representing five Northeast Asian countries (China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea) and 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) will participate in the meeting, along with UNESCO representatives. Several Category II Centres in the region will also be invited. The meeting aims to share information, exchange views, and discuss issues of common interest; to explore and implement joint activities, to reinforce cooperation between National Commissions and UNESCO; and to increase the visibility of UNESCO in the East and Southeast Asian region.

UNESCO publications

- The SDG 4 Data Book 2019 released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, presents the latest results for the official global monitoring indicators, including simplified explanations of their definitions, data sources and interpretation. Available in English, French and Spanish, it showcases data coverage for each indicator by region and a snapshot of global and regional trends, in addition to country-level data from 2010 to the school year ending in 2017. The new report presents the SDG 4 monitoring indicators included in the official dataset released by the UIS in February 2019 that will be used to evaluate progress at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which will specifically focus on SDG 4. To complement the Data Book, the UIS has also developed a series of related products to help stakeholders – from countries and donors to civil society groups and technical partners – use the findings in their efforts to get all children in school and learning by 2030.
UNESCO launches Interactive Atlas of girls’ and women’s right to education as part of the Her education our future Initiative. The Atlas is a monitoring and advocacy tool, aiming to enhance public knowledge of the status of national constitutions, legislation and regulations related to girls’ and women’s education rights, as well as to monitor progress. Based on the information collected and feedback received from States, the Atlas will be further developed and updated periodically until 2030 – the deadline set for Sustainable Development Goal 4. This first iteration includes information and data on 196 countries for the first three indicators and on 35 countries for the others, but the ambition is to expand to cover all States.

Appointments of Presidents and Secretaries-General of National Commissions (June/July 2019)

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

In Armenia, Ms Lena Terzikyan has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Mr Vahram Kazhoyan.

In Bolivie, Ms Rosemery Mamani Ortiz has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Susana Postigo.

In Comoros, Mr Moindjie Mohamed Moussa has been appointed President, succeeding Ms Marie Thérèse Volahaingo.

In Iraq, Mr Mahmood Alqiesy, has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Mr Karim Al-Waeli.

In Madagascar, Mr Manda Herilaza Ravelojaona has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Mr Achille Aimé Razafindramosa.

In Somalia, Mr Ahmed Hassan Yusuf has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Mr Issam Aljama.

Yours sincerely,

Firmin Edouard Matoko