The Assistant Director-General  
For Priority Africa and External Relations

To Secretaries-General of National Commissions for UNESCO

9 December 2020

Ref.: PAX/DRX/NAC/2020/22

Dear Secretaries-General,

As the year comes to an end, I am pleased to send you this monthly letter, as the last one of the year, to congratulate and thank you for your continued and unfailing support to our common actions. This is even more valuable under current circumstances when the entire international community faces an unprecedented health crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It is under these exceptional circumstances that the 210th session of the Executive Board started its virtual meeting on 2nd December last, for the first time in the history of our Organization. Beyond its agenda, this session is also an opportunity to renew our deep commitment to multilateralism, which is today, more than ever, the sine qua non condition for success.

It is equally under these special circumstances that the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and of UNESCO takes place, for which the various events are planned throughout the coming year. As the Director-General recalled in her speech, delivered on the occasion of the opening of the 210th session of the Executive Board, “As we mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, […] we must reconnect with the humanist and ambitious commitment of our founders.”

On behalf of the Director-General and in my own name, I would like to renew our gratitude and appreciation to the entire family of National Commissions for your faithful commitment towards what unites us for many decades.

In this regard, I would like to thank you for your initiatives to organize, with your partners and your respective networks, numerous events to celebrate the anniversary of our Organization. We will have an opportunity to introduce, in coordination with the Division of Public Information, the main lines of events scheduled for 2021, to celebrate UNESCO’s 75th anniversary. I will provide you with more details of this meeting in due time and renew my most sincere thanks for the events you have already organized and wish you every success for those to come.

It is in this same spirit of continued interaction with National Commissions that we introduced, last November, a new series of monthly online meetings, to build capacity of National Commissions and to gather around priority activities of our Organization. These meetings are also an opportunity to share good practices among the entire family of National Commissions and interact on the challenges we face.
In this regard, we were delighted to see many of you on 30 November at the first online meeting with National Commissions dedicated to the Report, “National Value of UNESCO to the United Kingdom”, launched by the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO in June last. I would like to thank James Bridge, Secretary General of the UK National Commission for UNESCO, and Matthew Rabagliati, Head of Policy, Research and Communications General of the UK National Commission, for their precious support to this meeting and express my gratitude to those who joined us. I invite you to consult this link for more information.

Let me take this opportunity to invite you to join us on Thursday, 17 December for an online meeting dedicated to the launch of the Constituency Relationships Management (CRM) Portal. We will provide you shortly with details relating to this event.

I also seize this occasion to renew our request for your contribution to the Annual Report of National Commissions, for which the deadline is set for 18 December next. Due to the current health crisis, the 8th edition of the Annual report will place special emphasis on your ongoing and upcoming activities aiming to fight against COVID-19. It will be published in a similar format as the last year, available under this link (in a single bilingual, English/French, online version).

With seasonal greetings to you, your family and friends, I renew my sincere appreciation for your personal commitment to our Organization’s work and ask that you please accept, Dear Secretaries – General, the assurances of my highest consideration.
2 December 2020 - 21 January 2021: 210th session of the Executive Board

The 210th session of the Executive Board will take place from 2 December 2020 to 27 January 2021 as stated in the key recommendations of the online meetings of the Bureau of the Executive Board held on 6 and 10 November 2020.

Contact: Susana Sam-Vargas (s.sam-vargas@unesco.org)
Useful link: https://en.unesco.org/executiveboard

7 December – 8 December 2020: International Forum on Artificial Intelligence and Education

The online edition of the International Forum on AI and the Futures of Education (AIED) 2020 will be held from 7 to 8 December 2020 and devoted to the theme of Developing Competencies for the AI Era. It will convene education and technology experts from around the world to discuss AI skills for the futures of education and AI as a common good for education. Participants will share policies and practices in defining the competencies required in the AI era, and examine strategies to prepare all people to live and work with AI effectively.

The concept of futures in the plural is used to recognize that there is a rich diversity of ways of knowing and being around the world. The plural form also acknowledges that there are multiple dimensions to the future and that there will likely be various desirable and undesirable futures – all of which will vary greatly depending on who you are and where you stand. Rather than attempting to chart a single future, looking at futures in the plural validates multiple possible and desirable futures of humanity on our shared planet. The Futures of Education initiative aims to generate discussion and action on the role of education, knowledge and learning in view of the predicted, possible and preferred futures. Such re-visioning of knowledge, education and learning is more relevant than ever. Accelerated technology transformations over recent years, in particular in the field of Artificial Intelligence, and their rapid deployment in work, life and learning have profound implications for the futures of education. The Forum will provide an opportunity to discuss these implications and the transformative potential of AI on education.

The AIED Forum 2020 will follow up on the International Conference on AI and Education (Beijing, May 2019) which resulted in the first international consensus on AI and education, the Beijing Consensus.
➢ Concept note: English - French - Chinese
➢ Programme

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Register here: https://aiedforum.org/#/home

8 December – 9 December 2020: 5th UNESCO Global Geoparks Council meeting

The 5th Session of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council will be organized entirely online.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation missions of 20 aspiring Geoparks and the revalidation of 29 existing Geoparks have been postponed to next year. Accordingly, this session of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council will assess the 20 new applicants nor the 29 existing sites. However, the sites that were deferred by the 2018 and 2019 Council sessions and that have sent the required progress reports will be presented for the Council's consideration.

The 5th session of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council will start with the election of the Bureau members (Chair, Vice-Chair and Rapporteur). The Session will also look into items related to governance, such as the revised assessment methodology of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), the self-evaluation file (form A) and
the checklist and explanatory note.

National Commissions to UNESCO wishing to participate as observers are requested to make this known in writing by sending an email to the Secretariat at:
➢ Margarete Patzak (m.patzak@unesco.org)
➢ Charlotte Besombes (c.besombes@unesco.org)

8 December – 12 December 2020: High-Level Futures Literacy Summit

The High-Level Futures Literacy Summit will provide testimonials from around the world that being futures literate changes what people see and do. From high ranking leaders in the public and private sector to activists, artists, students and professors, the Summit will show how people become futures literate and the impact it has on all aspects of life, from dealing with COVID-19 to breaking the reproduction of oppression.

Now, as always, the future is uncertain. Climate change, pandemics, economic crisis, social exclusion, racism, oppression of women, inter-generational conflict, and more, shatter the conventional images of the future that humans use to feel secure, to be confident enough to invest in tomorrow.

*This is not a small problem*. Without images of the future that inspire hope and foster collaboration there is a high risk of despair and war. The malaise of poverty-of-the-imagination must be overcome.

Futures Literacy, a universally accessible skill that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine the future, offers a clear, field tested solution to poverty-of-the-imagination. UNESCO, in its role as a global laboratory of ideas at the cutting edge of human knowledge, has demonstrated that people and communities everywhere are capable of becoming more futures literate. This means they are able to use their imaginations for different reasons, using different methods, in different contexts.

Democratizing the origins of people’s images of the future opens up new horizons in much the same way that establishing universal reading and writing changes human societies. This is an example of what can be called a ‘change in the conditions of change’. A potent transformation in what people are able to know, imagine and do.

Futures Literacy is such a change. And it is happening now because the old ways of ‘using-the-future’ are no longer adequate given changes in both humanity’s aspirations and tool enhanced capabilities. We want and can do more than ever. But as always this depends on being able to do so. Futures Literacy addresses the urgent need to transform human governance by empowering everyone to use-the-future more effectively and efficiently. This is not just about understanding how to prepare for potential crises or plan how to realise the important goals of Agenda 2030. It is about moving beyond a dependency on the illusion of certainty and the fragilities this creates.

The Summit is composed of five strands: A high level plenary, Expo Agora, events and exhibitions, many of which will be interactive.
More than 25 high-level speakers are confirmed who will engage in ‘futures conversations’, including the Vice-President of Costa Rica, Ministers from Austria, Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Finland, Greece, Norway, Philippines and Sierra Leone, State Governor from Austria, and heads of International Organizations including the Director General of the IESCO; Secretary General of the OECD; Vice-President for Foresight of the European Commission; Economic Director of La Francophonie; President of World Futures Studies Federation and CEO’s of Climate-KIC (International), l’Atelier BNP Paribas (France), the President of the UNESCO General Conference, the Presidents and professors of universities in China, Egypt, France, Thailand, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Exhibitors include over 100 institutions participating in the Summit by hosting an “Exhibition Booth” or event, showcasing their past, current and forthcoming projects in
You can now register for the Summit here: unes.co/flsregister
Contact: futures@unesco.org


Organized in collaboration with the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the 2020 World Press Freedom Conference (WPFC) takes place in The Hague, a city known for its role in international peace and justice. The conference is being held on 9 and 10 December in the run-up to the annual World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) on 3 May which celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom and freedom of expression.

The theme of this year’s celebrations is “Journalism Without Fear or Favour” and it brings together those active in the field of press freedom and the public to stand up for a free and independent media. WPFD 2020 is the call for all to inspire positive change and to protect journalism against persisting and new forms of control. Journalism today faces many threats from actors trying to capture or intimidate media in order to influence the information flows. WPFD 2020 is about the successes of the growing movement to enhance professional journalism and its foundation in independent media institutions.

Through multiple sessions, the WPFC 2020 will shed light on different aspects of the overall theme, “Journalism Without Fear or Favour”. This includes opportunities to understand and debate topics related to media capture, diversity in the press, journalism in a digital age and how to move forward in protecting and promoting bold and independent journalistic work.

The UNESCO Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, as well as high-level government representatives will attend the WPFC on 9 to 10 December in the Hague. Together with representatives of civil society, media organizations, professional associations, academia and the judiciary, they will put media independence on the international agenda by inspiring, educating and by mobilizing people into action.

On 9 December, the UNESCO Director-General will award the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to an individual or organization that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence of press freedom.

On 10 December, the event will feature the first-ever World Press Freedom Festival that includes cultural events and performances such as workshops and film screenings. The Festival is dedicated to wider celebrations of WPFD and to a broader audience. It invites youths and students to participate in the celebrations of press freedom and explore how they contribute to the future of free and independent media.

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Link & Registration: As the number of online places is limited, we encourage you to reserve a place in advance. Registration for the WPFC 2020 conference is now open here.
10 – 14 December 2020: 60th anniversary of the Convention against Discrimination in Education

The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education will celebrate its 60th anniversary from the 10th to 14th of December 2020. The Convention is the first international instrument, having binding force in international law, which covers the right to education extensively. This Convention is also recognized as a cornerstone of Education 2030 Agenda and represents a powerful tool to advance SDG 4.

This anniversary is a major event as today, more than ever, the Convention is of particular relevance in overcoming barriers to fully realize the right to education. Indeed, while the world was already facing a learning crisis before Covid-19, the pandemic has exacerbated disparities, with vulnerable students, who are usually more at risk of being discriminated against, at higher risk of being left behind.

60 years after the adoption of the Convention against discrimination in education, it is time to effectively put an end to all kinds of discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity in education in law and in fact. The Covid-19 crisis has only worsened pre-existing inequalities. It is urgent and crucial to build back better, by ensuring that education systems are rights-based, inclusive, non-discriminatory and resilient to disruptive events.

As part of the celebration, other activities are undertaken in relation to this powerful instrument to advance the sustainable development goal on education, including the 10th Consultation of Member States on the implementation of the Convention, the release of the Guidelines on strengthening the right to education in national frameworks and a series of reports unfolding states obligations in various dimensions.

Say no to discrimination in education and join us to celebrate this 60th anniversary! We will update this page regularly with new content until the 10th of December.


The Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is composed of twelve States Parties elected for four years and meets once a year in ordinary session and in extra-ordinary sessions whenever it deems necessary.

The Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is established by the 1999 Second Protocol. It is composed of twelve States Parties elected for four years, which are eligible for immediate re-election only once. Half of its members are renewed every two years at the Meeting of the Parties to the Second Protocol. The Bureau of the Committee is renewed each year and its members are eligible for re-election only once in the same function. An equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world are taken into account during the election of the members of the Committee.

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To be chaired by H.E. Ms Olivia Grange, Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport of Jamaica, the 15th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage (15.COM) will take place online from 14 to 19 December 2020 between 13:30 and 16:30 (Paris time). Composed of representatives of 24 States Parties to the Convention, the Committee meets once a year to monitor the implementation of this legal instrument ratified by 180 States and to review recent developments.

Given the online modality decided this year’s for the meeting, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the fifteenth session will keep to a restricted agenda. In this context, the Committee will examine the report of the ICH-NGO Forum and periodic reports on the status of elements inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List. It will also establish the Evaluation Body for the 2021 cycle and decide the date and venue for the 16th session of the Committee.

During the 15th Session, the Committee will evaluate nominations submitted by States Parties and decide whether to inscribe those cultural practices and expressions of living heritage on the Lists of the Convention. In 2020 the Committee will examine:
- 41 elements for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- 4 elements for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.
- 4 proposals for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.
- 2 International Assistance requests over US$100,000 submitted by Malawi and the Central African Republic.

The sessions of the Committee will be broadcast live on the website of the 15.COM. See the working documents including the recommendations of the Evaluation Body for details of the 2020 inscriptions.

Useful Link: https://ich.unesco.org/en/15com


The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2020. The Commission was created within UNESCO to promote coordinated international research about the global ocean and its various basins, based on the pioneer experiences of the International Geophysical Year (1957-58) and the first International Indian Ocean Expedition.

To mark this special event, we are pleased to announce the launch of the Global Ocean Science Report 2020 (GOSR2020), IOC-UNESCO’s flagship report, which assesses the status and trends in ocean science capacity around the world and charts the possible pathways for the international community to deliver on the sustainable development goals. Over the past decades, IOC has advanced science and its applications to support sustainable economic and social progress, the basis of peace between nations, and sustainable development:

The 60th Anniversary of IOC is an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and look forward to a UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) filled with challenges and opportunities.

REGISTRATION: https://unesco-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_K4pguUzJT_G9dTXIWIJ0Ng
16 December – 18 December 2020: 2020 international Conference of NGOs “Envisioning a better and sustainable future: a new paradigm for civil society”

The 2020 International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) will be held from 16 to 18 December 2020 on the theme “Envisioning a better and sustainable future: a new paradigm for civil society”.

The 2020 conference is particularly important because NGOs will have the opportunity to collectively transmit their opinions and suggestions on the preliminary proposals concerning UNESCO’s draft Medium-Term Strategy (41 C/4) for 2022-2029 and the Programme and Budget (41 C/5) for 2022-2025.

Moreover, as is customary, participants will be called upon to elect a new Chairperson of the Conference, as well as a new NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, made up of ten NGO partners representing all regions of the world.

The Conference is a key forum in which UNESCO’s official NGO partners meet to review the state of cooperation with UNESCO. A statutory element of the collective cooperation expressly provided for by the Directives concerning UNESCO’s partnership with non-governmental organizations (36 C /Res. 108), it gathers every two years NGOs in official partnership with the Organization. Representatives of Member States, foundations in official relations with UNESCO, other NGOs and/or other interested organizations may also attend the Conference as observers.

Any additional information and working documents will become available soon on this site and the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee (www.ong-unesco.org).

Contact: Armin Ibrisimovic (a.ibrisimovic@unesco.org)

17 December 2020: Twenty-seventh (Ordinary) Session of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC)

In light of travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 27th (Ordinary) Session of the IBC will be held virtually following a condensed agenda. It is anticipated that an extraordinary session of the IBC will be organized early 2021, in conjunction with the 11th Extraordinary Session of COMEST and a Joint Session of the IBC and IGBC.

In this session, the Committee will present the progress update on its work on the Principle of Protecting Future Generations, on the Ethical Issues of Neurotechnology, as well as on the IBC-COMEST Statement on COVID-19: Ethical Consideration from a Global Perspective and its follow-up.

The working languages for the session will be English and French, with simultaneous interpretation provided in these two languages. All relevant documents will be prepared in these two languages and will be made available on the UNESCO webpage prior to the meeting.
UNESCO’s Strategy for Action on Climate Change (2018-2021):

The UNESCO Evaluation Office (IOS) is undertaking an evaluation of UNESCO’s Strategy for Action on Climate Change (2018-2021). The findings and recommendations will be presented at the Executive Board in the Fall 2021.

This exercise will assess the effectiveness of UNESCO’s approach to tackling one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century – climate change – and identify ways to improve its next updated Strategy.

A crucial aspect will be determining to what extent UNESCO has leveraged the different areas of its mandate to support Member States in achieving their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

In mid-December, IOS will send a survey to all National Commissions. We urge you to consult widely amongst your networks in completing it, including with the NDC focal points, and seize this opportunity to share your thoughts on UNESCO’s approach to reaching SDG 13. We look forward to your feedback!

Anniversaries 2022-2023:

In accordance with the statutory procedure approved by the Executive Board, the Director-General invited the Member States to inform her of the anniversaries of eminent persons or historic events with which they would like to associate UNESCO in 2022-2023, by the Circular letter CL/4323 of 25 August 2020. The deadline for submissions has been extended to 15 December 2020.

The online form for the submission by the Member States of the proposals concerning the celebration of anniversaries with which UNESCO could be associated in 2022-2023 is available on the dedicated website: https://teams.unesco.org/ORG/eri/anniversaries/. Please be reminded that, as stipulated by the statutory procedure, Member States having approved anniversaries for 2020-2021, should select the most important events prior to celebrating the anniversary and inform UNESCO Secretariat in a timely manner. Member States will report only on these events, using the results-based format. The online forms for the submission of information regarding the selected events are available under the link: https://teams.unesco.org/ORG/eri/anniversaries.

If the foreseen activities have had to be canceled or postponed due to the health situation related to COVID-19, please inform us accordingly.

UNESCO Publications:

« Culture in crisis: policy guide for a resilient creative sector».

Through this practical guide, UNESCO sets out to bear witness to the ingenuity of its Member States and to the efforts they have made to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions in their territories. Culture as a vector for meaning and identity has become even more vital in times of crisis for people who have lost their bearings. Faced with the urgency of the situation, exceptional measures have been taken by governments, civil society and the private sector to help artists, creators, cultural bodies, enterprises and institutions to weather the crisis. This practical guide provides an inventory of them, offering examples of good practice drawn from the various measures adopted by governments and civil society in all parts of the world. Many governments have also implemented measures designed to prepare for the recovery by redeploying existing cultural policies and systems to support the arts and culture. They, too, can be found in this guide.
Appointment of Presidents and Secretaries-General of National Commissions for UNESCO

In Danemark, Ms Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen, Minister of Children and Education has been appointed Chairman of the National Commission succeeding Mr Bo Manderup-Jensen.

In Lithuania, Ms Miglė Mašanauskienė has been appointed Secretary-General a.i. succeeding Ms Asta Junevičienė.

In Tadjikistan, H.E. Mr Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, has been appointed Chairman of the National Commission succeeding Mr Shamsiddin Orumbekzoda.

In Armenia, Mr Arman Khachatryan has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Lena Terzikyan.

In Slovenia, Mr Gašper HRASTELJ has been appointed Secretary-General, succeeding Ms Marjutka Hafner.

Firmin Edouard Matoko