Meeting of National Commissions
on the occasion of the 206th session of the Executive Board
(10-12 April 2019, Room IV, UNESCO HQs)

First Day, 10 April 2019

After welcoming the participants, Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko, ADG/PAX, proposed Mr Kwangho Kim, Secretary-General of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, as Chairperson of the meeting, in accordance with the practice of geographical rotation and on the basis of informal discussions. Mr Kwangho Kim was elected Chairperson by acclamation.

The Chairperson moved to the adoption of the agenda and then invited ADG/PAX to deliver an opening address.

ADG/PAX began his address by welcoming several regional and sub-regional consultations initiated by National Commissions during the current biennium (2018-2019) in which the Secretariat was invited to participate. He then presented the sixth edition of the Annual Report of National Commissions for UNESCO, and referred to its importance for the visibility of UNESCO and National Commissions. He also launched an Online Platform for National Commissions developed to strengthen coordination and cooperation between the Secretariat and National Commissions. ADG/PAX emphasized the importance of the National Commissions as an essential component of the Organization. He encouraged capacity building and welcomed deeper cooperation between National Commissions and the Secretariat. Regarding the agenda of the meeting, he mentioned that for the first time National Commissions would have a 3-day morning meeting, which would be mostly devoted to presentations by ADGs on the global priorities of their respective Sectors in the framework of the Pillar 3 of the Strategic Transformation, and on how to foster deeper consultations with National Commissions.

Mr Xing Qu, DDG, gave a speech on the progress of the Strategic Transformation from the planning to an action phase and how the Secretariat has implemented multiple initiatives. He mentioned that the first two pillars of the Strategic Transformation were internal, and the third one is focused on programmes. Pillar 3 mainly consists of global consultations involving staff, Member States, UNESCO networks and high-level reflection groups. He also mentioned that, in June 2019, high-level reflection group would support the DG on addressing the global challenges and priorities.

Then ADGs of ED, SC and IOC presented their global priorities.

ADG/ED Ms Stefania Giannini presented education as a global and UNESCO priority, mentioning the Organization's efforts to monitor, convene and coordinate SDG4 with an ambitious objective of leaving no one behind (Inclusive Education). She followed with a summary of a “what, how and where” strategy:

- What: at the Global Education Meeting held in Brussels, Belgium, from 3 to 5 December 2018, Ministers selected priorities to achieve, along with a roadmap, including the following: 1) Building gender gap and inclusive education for girls and women in ED programmes through data collection and developing better policies (20 million learners); 2) Refugees and Migrants: new tools to identify ED level in link with Higher education; 3) Research and Foresight: anticipate the future.

- How: asking colleagues to follow those priorities, respecting the set expectations.

- Where: leading education sphere in the UN system and well connected with financial and institutional partners, such as African and European Union.

ADG/SC, Ms Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, addressed the challenge of “how to reposition the ‘S’ (scientific value) in UNESCO, giving it its value again”. She highlighted the challenges the Science
sector was facing today, such as climate change, loss of ecosystem and pressure on natural resources. She described possible ways forward to overcome these issues, including the need of science diplomacy, inter-sectoral efforts in changing minds, and, finally, reassessing the international normative frameworks and science policy frameworks developed in Science, Technology and Innovation and suggested seeing whether they were moving at a speed rate that was matching the changes and challenges.

ADG/IOC, Mr Vladimir Ryabinin, highlighted how the future of the planet and climate depends on the ocean. Therefore, it is important to measure what is going on to shape the government systems and the steps they are taking to overcome the issue. In addition, efforts are needed to change the economy in ecological ways to save the environment and climate change. IOC will continue to do what it does in terms of preserving and managing the oceans and its resources, as well as engaging everyone, especially during the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030.

Presentations were followed by a brief Q&A session. Questions raised included:

- Role and contribution of National Commissions in preparing C4 and C5
- How SDG4 could be linked to other SDGs within the programmes of UNESCO
- UNESCO's relations with higher education and the private sector

The representative from the Egyptian National Commission announced that Egypt will soon organize a regional meeting of the Arab National Commissions. She also asked what would be the mechanism of consultation with the National Commissions in the framework of the third pillar of the Strategic Transformation.

The representative from the Kenya National Commission wished to know more about the science programme “Afrimpulse” and announced that Kenya would be pleased to host a meeting on ocean and sustainable development issues.

Replies:

The DDG reaffirmed that UNESCO, through its Sectors and ADGs, would continue its consultations with Member States and National Commissions as much as possible in the context of the Strategic Transformation. In this regard, he stated that the next Interregional Meeting of National Commissions in Switzerland in 2020 will constitute a final step for the preparation of C/4.

ADG/ED emphasized the interdisciplinarity of UNESCO as its added value, with several sectors pursuing SDG4. She added that UNESCO was strengthening partnerships and networks in the global architecture of education, using ILO as an example. Finally, she highlighted the work carried out in the field of higher education on inclusion issues.

ADG/SC stated that scientific diplomacy is essential and should involve UNESCO and all its networks. She also noted that the Science sector was strengthening its relationship with the private sector to mobilize more business partners. Regarding "Afrimpulse", ADG/SC indicated that this programme aimed to promote scientific research in Africa, strengthen scientific platforms and increase the participation of African women in science, considering that only 1% of scientific knowledge came from Africa.

ADG/OIC emphasized the need to develop strong capacities in Africa to face climate and natural disaster challenges.
Second Day, 11 April 2019

The Chairperson opened the meeting by recalling briefly what had been discussed the previous day. He then gave the floor to the ADGs of SHS, CLT, CI and Director of Gender Equality to share their programmatic priorities.

ADG/SHS explained how the sector was repositioning itself in the field and re-invigorating UNESCO’s role as a laboratory of ideas to achieve SDG’s national priorities and take into account a changing global context. SHS priorities are focused on growing inequalities, peace building, tackling social and political exclusions as well as addressing the social impact of disruptive technologies. Highlighting that the sector was heading towards a community of practice approach, through enhancing youth engagement, leadership, and intercultural dialogue, she noted the sector’s following future areas of focus:

- C4: from 2022 focus on the impact of destructive technologies and ethics of AI;
- Leading in UN system reform and strengthening the implementation of a human-rights based approach, in terms of leaving no one behind;
- Strategic Transformation: looking forward to unleash Pillar 3.

ADG/CLT emphasized the priorities in the wave of the transformation strategy, starting with cultural policies as a powerful way to achieve SDGs at national level. Exchange of best practices between countries, capacity building with the UNESCO network, enhancing positive impact of creative economies and finally the importance of intersectorality, particularly with Education, were also mentioned. The next meeting gathering all ministers of culture in the margins of the upcoming General Conference will be a cornerstone. Considering that one of today’s major tasks is defending cultural diversity, which is being challenged by conflict and migration, efforts should be made to come up with new projects to overcome this issue. The ADG finally, marked important cooperation efforts between CLT and ED sector, with a strategic entry point being human rights and gender equality.

ADG/CI addressed the importance of freedom of expression, protection of journalists, media literacy, universal access to information and digital transformation, which are being dealt with through awareness raising, monitoring and capacity building. In addition, he called for a greater involvement of African countries, Asia Pacific and Latin American regions, notably in regard to documentary heritage for sustainable development.

DIR/ODG/GE acknowledged that efforts are still needed, although gender equality issues tend to be mainstreamed into Sectors’ activities. Gender equality intends to remain a priority beyond 2021, which will require continued capacity building, reporting on UNESCO’s efforts and fostering partnerships and coordination with an emphasis on digital skills and masculinities, to address stereotypes affecting both genders.

The Chairperson then opened a brief Q&A session.

One participant highlighted the importance of teacher training and strengthening government capacities in recruiting teachers in Central Africa to achieve SDG4.

One participant pointed out that National Commissions’ brochures need to be updated, since it was last updated in 2007.

Another participant mentioned the importance of UNESCO preserving its singularity in its reform process.

There was also a question about possibility of UNESCO communicating to National Commissions what it is doing in an inspiring, consistent and clear manner, in order for them to inspire the youth back in their countries.
In all, the discussion highlighted need to improve exchange of good practices and further information on UNESCO’s capacity building strategy, demand for further engagement with National Commissions to strengthen UNESCO’s networks as well as a willingness for a genuine dialogue between the Secretariat and National Commissions.

Replies:

ADG/IOC stated that communication was essential, despite budgetary constraints.

DIR/ODG/GE stressed that efforts in terms of communication were underway, others to be done. She mentioned gender equality newsletters that would be shared with National Commissions to keep them informed.

ADG/CI noted that CI activities were cross-cutting involving education-related issues, such as media literacy. He recalled that raising awareness in the field was essential.

ADG/PAX summarized the discussion as follows:

- The need to exchange good practices among National Commissions, as exemplified by the Annual Report;
- Information tools for National Commissions need to be improved;
- In the margins of the next General Conference, a meeting would be held with all the National Commissions to take stock of their actions and discussions on Strategic Transformation.

ADG/SHS mentioned intersectoral work within the task forces, as well as ongoing efforts to expand the network in the field. She also encouraged improving communication and information resources.

**Third Day - 12 April 2019**

The Chairperson opened the meeting by recalling briefly what had been discussed the previous day. He then gave the floor to representatives of the National Commissions who had wished to speak the previous day.

The first speaker asked about the extent of UNESCO and European Union cooperation in Media and Information Literacy. He called for the proper use of the results of all the meetings organized between National Commissions, including the next interregional meeting in Lugano, in the view of the launch of the third pillar of the Strategic Transformation.

A representative welcomed the importance given to public policies by the SHS and CLTS Sectors, especially in Africa, to be able to adapt African youth to the urbanization and digital era and the fight against violent extremism. He encouraged UNESCO to work closely with the African governments to reframe their public policies.

The Korean National Commission announced the organization of a meeting to improve East Asian National Commissions’ cooperation and proactivity.

The Bangladesh National Commission presented the success of the Kiosk aimed to empower the public, which the Commission had been carrying out since last year. The speaker invited other National Commissions interested in replicating this innovative copyrighted project to contact the Bangladesh team for further help.

A participant asked for more explanation on the presentations made the previous day by the Assistant Directors-General, on how human rights were part of SHS mandate and about the link between artificial intelligence and gender.
In terms of communications, it was suggested that a single password be used on all existing platforms.

A representative welcomed the engagement of the Secretariat, and especially the Culture Sector, to collaborate more closely with the National Commissions, hoping that more joint project implementation would be announced in the field.

One speaker added that it would be interesting to rethink the model of “supervision” of National Commissions - often under the supervision of a Ministry of Education or Foreign Affairs, in order to make them fully independent and allow them to be transversal.

A National Commission representative acknowledged the importance of this meeting and undertook to give the conclusions to the ministers of his country.

Replies:

Regarding the link between AI and Gender, DIR/ODG/GE explained that:
- Gender inequalities could be induced or reinforced by AI-based technologies if their design was biased by inequalities or discrimination through the selection of data or algorithms.
- In Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, women are under-represented.
- AI has an impact on the world of work, and particularly for the less qualified workers who are majorly women.

ADG/CI emphasized that Media Information Literacy (MIL) was a flagship project of the Communication and Information Sector, encompassing a range of tools and components, and particularly impactful in Africa, Europe and Latin America. He called for collaboration of all entities working on this issue.

ADG/PAX, answering the question on the “supervision” of Ministries, said that it was up to each Member State, as a sovereign entity, to decide on the place of the National Commission within the national administration.

ADG/CLT stated that National Commissions should be UNESCO focal points in the field to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Chairperson thanked the ADGs for their attendance and contributions, and gave the floor to the representatives of six National Commissions who wished to present their good practice examples and initiatives that could be useful and adaptable for other National Commissions.

The UK National Commission presented the research project “Wider Value Plus”. This project consists of a smart dashboard assessing direct and indirect impacts on SDGs of UNESCO’s designations and registrations in the UK on the basis of financial and non-financial indicators. This project allows the National Commission to improve the achievement of SGDs and explore new ways of cooperation with other stakeholders. The speaker pointed out that this project could be replicated by other National Commissions. He announced the publication of a report in June 2019, the launch of the dashboard in August 2019, and the full presentation of the project at the next General Conference.

The French and German National Commissions made a joint presentation. The French National Commission presented its brochure aimed at listing all responsibilities and functions assumed by the National Commissions, in order to strengthen their role and cooperation. He recalled that a pre-draft had been distributed to the European National Commissions at the informal meeting held in Slovenia. Finally, he invited the Secretariat to revise the final version of the brochure before its dissemination to all National Commissions. The German National Commission presented the ongoing brochures series to highlight essential aspects of the work carried out by the National
Commissions Network. The aforementioned French brochure will be the first of the series, to be published in October 2019, before the publication of the German brochure. He explained that this series of short brochures would replace the outdated documents published a decade ago, as relevant pragmatic tools, valid for a period of three to four years. The speaker invited all the National Commissions to participate in the drafting or co-production of brochures in collaboration with UNESCO, while keeping a harmonized layout.

The Korean National Commission provided an overview of its 2018-2019 Research Projects carried out to identify the vision and goals the Republic of Korea should pursue in its cooperation with UNESCO. The speaker pointed out four major findings, namely that 1) UNESCO has a unique nature; 2) politicization and national interests should be avoided within UNESCO; 3) the role of National Commissions should be more taken into account; and 4) education for peace should be promoted in the Republic of Korea based on its experience with colonialism and war. This study was presented during the 2018 UNESCO Strategy Forum, organized by the Republic of Korea and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, on 13 November 2018 in Seoul (Republic of Korea). Another study is planned in 2019 on UNESCO’s role in strengthening peace, and other Commissions are invited to contribute. Lastly, the speaker referred to a joint research project in the Asia-Pacific region, inspired by the VINCI project, aimed at collectively revisiting the value of UNESCO for societies.

The representative of the Slovenian National Commission reported the results of the informal meeting of the European Network of National Commissions for UNESCO held on 24-26 February 2019. Bringing together 60 participants from 37 countries out of 41 Member States, as well as ADG/PAX, this meeting allowed participants to discuss in an open way the contemporary challenges, the VINCI project, and the role of National Commissions in the framework of UNESCO’s Strategic Transformation. Eight breakout sessions also took place on issues such as Artificial intelligence, Climate Change, World Heritage, UNESCO Clubs and others.

The Chairperson opened a brief Q&A session. Three participants asked questions.

One pointed out the difficulty to organize informal meetings in Africa and asked for the support of UNESCO and other National Commissions to strengthen networking.

The Namibian National Commission, replying that there was a strong network in Southern Africa and the capacity to organize such meetings, recalled that National Commissions were a mirror of UNESCO and needed capacity building.

The representative of the Turkish National Commission invited National Commissions to a meeting in Turkey in September 2019, and noted that the annual meeting of the National Commissions of the Turkic-speaking countries would be held in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, on 21 April 2019.

On behalf of all National Commissions, the Chairperson thanked UNESCO for these fruitful three days. He believed it necessary to cooperate and actively communicate with the National Commissions.

On behalf of the Secretariat, ADG/PAX thanked the Chairperson of the meeting and the National Commissions for their attendance and active participation. He recalled the importance of sharing and learning from good practices. He encouraged the National Commissions as UNESCO’s important stakeholders to convene a meeting on UN reform and confirmed that UNESCO was willing to assist National Commissions, including by organizing meetings in Africa.

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