

ALBANIA

Mr. President,
Mme Director General,

I am very pleased to participate in this 41st Session of the General Conference. And to be quite honest, I am very happy that I can be here physically and not through zoom or one of the other myriad platforms that have proliferated.

But first of all I am happy to be here so that I can confirm Albania's committed support to UNESCO, its role and its mandate. Indeed, Albania does not simply support the organization in its present shape, but we are determined supporters of a stronger, more efficient and more modernized UNESCO that pushes through with its strategic transformation that will produce an organization more in step with the challenges and realities of the time we live in.

There is no doubt in my mind, that Madame Director General, is the person best suited to meet this challenge. So it gives me great pleasure to confirm Albania's support for your second mandate, in which we are confident that you will build upon the achievements of your first term and continue to work tirelessly for the transformation of UNESCO.

This 75th anniversary of the founding of UNESCO is a good occasion to celebrate how much the organization has achieved during its existence. And I believe that I do not exaggerate when I say that UNESCO has given a valuable contribution to managing and reducing global problems in its unique way.

But I believe that while it has played an important role in its first 75 years, UNESCO has an even more important role to play today. Indeed, I believe that UNESCO is uniquely suited to contributing to addressing many of the challenges we face today. Many of the challenges of this age that are borne through the unique energies, good and bad, produced by science and technology, by culture and education.

We live in a world where culture and identity politics that find their rationale and foundation on a bedrock of cultural traits, values and assumptions, have on many an occasion become the great faultiness that divide people.

We live in a world that has benefitted greatly from technology and science, but that is always experiencing the down side of the science and technology revolution especially in the area of communication and information sharing, which instead of serving as vehicles for positive information exchange have often become vectors through which conspiracy, hate and division are circulated in an endless feedback loop.

And we live in a world, where education, the greatest and most powerful weapon the world has against hate and division and conspiracy, has unfortunately not always been able to keep up with the pace of change. It has not always been successful to inoculate our societies against the negative effects of identity politics and mass communication.

These are all difficult issues. Beyond the ability of any single country or any single group of countries, however powerful, to solve. These are exactly the type of issues for which this organization was created 75 years ago in a world that was just emerging from a nightmare caused by forces that are very similar to those challenging us today. The difference is that today we can do something about it. And UNESCO has a special role to play in this effort.

We must work together to promote education which is by far, the most ambitious commitment of the organisation, including as the lead agency in the implementation of SGD 4 within the UN system.

The task is immense and results have been limited. The pandemic has made it even harder to progress. But there is no alternative because we need quality education for all, as the best investment to shape and build the future, reduce poverty, inequality and various disparities, as well as to counter distorted and extremist narratives.

We must work together to promote human rights which are the heart of UNESCO's mandate. We will not be successful in building a culture of peace, eradicating poverty, achieving sustainable development and develop intercultural dialogue without respecting the rights of everyone without distinction. In this respect, I want to underline that the safety of journalists remains an important challenge and area of our work. In our part of the World, in the Western Balkans, we do remember the very high price we have paid to establish democracy and achieve individual freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression.

Albania has a special role to play in these efforts. A few weeks from now, my country will sit in the Security Council for a two-year mandate. We go to the Council with an ambitious agenda focusing on human rights and the belief in dialogue and inclusion as the best guarantee to handle many of the crisis we face today – from radicalism to violations of human rights, from identity politics to the exclusion of women from playing a decisive role in society especially when it comes to conflict prevention and resolution.

It is also from this perspective and from this unique opportunity to contribute that I address this General Conference, as a sign of commitment to playing a constructive and active role in facing the challenges we all face today.

In conclusion, and very much in line with Albania's commitment to promoting peace, cooperation, and human rights I do have an appeal for the organization and the colleagues. UNESCO has been very active in our region, yet this activity has not been all inclusive as any activities and agendas pursued by UNESCO must be by definition. Effective regional broader cooperation in the fields of education, culture, science, and community cannot be achieved without a comprehensive participation and input by all the people of the region, including the one country in Europe that, surprisingly, is still excluded, Kosovo.

I say surprisingly, because the inclusion of Kosovo would not only be the right thing to do, but the inclusion of Kosovo would also be the sound thing to do if indeed the priority is to deal with the recurrent claims regarding the preservation of the Serb cultural heritage in Kosovo. Because the truth is that there is no better and more efficient way to deal with the preservation of cultural heritage than through joint national and international efforts. Therefore, I sincerely hope that reason will ultimately prevail and Kosovo will be welcomed here, so that its citizens, Albanians, Serbs and others, join this large community and work together with other nations in promoting the principles and values that bring all of us together here.

Thank you