

**Statement on behalf of Sweden at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Conference  
of UNESCO**

Delivered by H.E. Ms. Anna Ekström, Minister for Education,  
Sweden

*Check against delivery*

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board,

Madame Director-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour to address the 41<sup>st</sup> General Conference of  
UNESCO.

Sweden fully aligns itself with the EU statement.

I am proud to be part of a feminist government. Gender equality is  
at the very top of Sweden's agenda. It is a prerequisite for human  
rights and sustainable development.

Gender equality must be at the core of UNESCO's work.

UNESCO's constitution is very clear: UNESCO should protect the  
universal principles of justice, the rule of law and human rights.

These principles are increasingly violated worldwide.

Sweden counts on UNESCO to defend these principles.

Mr President,

UNESCO's mandate to promote freedom of expression has never been more relevant. Freedom of expression is the foundation of democracy.

Journalists, artists, authors and scientists across the world are increasingly threatened. Academic freedom is endangered and women journalists face disproportionate harassment because of their gender.

Freedom of expression, artistic freedom, safety of journalists and media development are priorities for Sweden within UNESCO. As a member and chair of IPDC's council we have seen tangible results in this area. Therefore, Sweden is a candidate for a second term on IPDC's council.

We continue to stress that the imprisoned Swedish journalist Dawit Isaak and the Swedish book publisher Gui Minhai should be released.

Sweden is very concerned about the situation in Belarus. The respect for human rights, including freedom of expression, has rapidly deteriorated since the fraudulent elections in 2020.

Mr President,

Sweden's large voluntary funding to UNESCO is increasingly long-term and flexible. I urge other member states to follow our example.

Flexible financial support enabled UNESCO to respond rapidly and forcefully during the pandemic.

Sweden commends UNESCO's leadership in this crisis. However, much remains to be done.

Mr President,

The Swedish support must bring results for the people it serves. This especially includes youth, LGBTIQ persons and indigenous people.

We must leave no one behind.

UNESCO must continue its efforts to strengthen its result-based management and communication.

At the previous general conference, member states approved Sweden's proposal to change UNESCO's constitution. This was a small but important step towards a more efficient organisation.

The transformation of UNESCO must continue. Sweden supports UNESCO's draft medium-term strategy. We welcome the fewer and sharper strategic goals as well as the emphasis on intersectoral collaboration.

The support for a human rights-based approach was overwhelming during the negotiations of the strategy. We are pleased to see that most member states now accept the 2030 Agenda as a common responsibility.

Mr. President,

Education is a human right.

Education is central to our efforts to build back better after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many children have been excluded from education during the pandemic. Millions of them may never return to school.

UNESCO must support Member States in their efforts to ensure that these children resume their education. Providing quality education is the duty of every government.

Sweden kept schools open throughout the pandemic. This was a very difficult decision. Looking back, I am convinced it was the right decision.

Quality education includes comprehensive sexuality education. Sexuality education leads to better health and wellbeing for everyone. Comprehensive Sexuality Education is important for all genders. It is the best way to provide young people with the tools they need to stay healthy and make informed decisions. Sweden remains a major partner to UNESCO in this area through the *Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future-programme*.

Education has the power to change our societies. This is why education for sustainable development is so important. Sweden commends UNESCO's efforts in this area. This work must now continue, both at the global and national levels.

Mr President,

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in many countries. In October this year, Sweden hosted the high-level International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism. The pledges will strengthen international cooperation in this area.

UNESCO is for everyone, including grassroot organisations. Therefore, Sweden would like to see a greater role for civil society within UNESCO.

Finally, Madam Director-General, Sweden welcomes your candidature for a second term as Director-General.

The founding principles of UNESCO are as urgent as ever. Sweden remains a strong defender of multilateralism, the UN family and, of course, UNESCO. Thank you.