

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ahmad Pakatchi
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the
Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO
on the Occasion of the 41st Session of the General Conference of UNESCO
Paris, 10 November 2021**

Mr. President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

First, congratulations to H.E. Mr. Irazabal upon his election as President of the 41st General Conference. I would like to extend my profound gratitude to H.E. Mr. Cengizer, the esteemed outgoing President of the General Conference, for his unsparing efforts during his tenure. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Azoulay on her re-election as Director-General of UNESCO, and I wish to reiterate my government's full readiness to continue our cooperation.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

It is delightful to be able to have this conference in person after the difficult period of COVID-19 we have experienced during these last two years. I would like on this occasion to express my respect for the efforts made by the UNESCO authorities to manage this situation and to protect the continuity of UNESCO's activities without any critical interruption during the pandemic.

It is worth mentioning that besides the regrets and troubles caused, COVID-19 has created opportunities to upgrade and elevate educational systems, and to develop infrastructure for activities ranging from scientific exchange to public culture in Iran. For my country, it was an opportunity to equip an enormous number of schools and universities, and millions of students have acquired devices for distance learning, providing them with applications to widen their access to knowledge, information, and culture. It is worthy of note that national platforms have been developed for the various stages of education, inter alia the platform 'SHAD', as well as platforms for online university lectures, workshops, conferences, research teamwork, and virtual museums.

Furthermore, we have experienced regional crises which have caused a new wave of refugees to come to Iran. Despite the severe unilateral restrictions and unjust sanctions imposed on our country, the number of 900,000 Afghan students in Iranian schools has recently been increased by 350,000 newcomer refugees, which merits greater attention from the international community.

According to Iranian laws, all the refugee children from Afghanistan, whether or not they are documented, enjoy the right to study equal to Iranian citizens.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is proud to be active in the various fields of UNESCO's mandates and respects the efforts made by the Organization regarding the right to free and equal access to science, technology, and research results as the property of human beings in all countries. Furthermore, Iran supports the efforts made concerning IT, AI, bioethics, and other fields of dialogue between human values and advanced technologies in an ethical framework and with the aim of preventing damage, such as having remedies for misinformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNESCO has always been an arena in which all nations may better know and understand each other and achieve peace and friendship. The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that UNESCO's platforms for cooperation at both regional and international levels, such as category 2 centres, are very influential in the rapprochement of the countries of our region, like the significant activities of the Regional Educational and Research Centre on Oceanography for West Asia in Tehran. Also, I hope that the newly established category 2 centres, such as the International Centre for Health Related Basic Sciences and Human Nutrition in Mashhad and the International Centre for the Integrated Management of Watershed and Bio-Resources in Arid and Semi-Arid Regions in Tehran, will provide opportunities for increased close regional cooperation. Moreover, multinational and joint nominations regarding world natural and cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, and anniversaries in practice have been very efficient in creating solidarity between neighbouring countries, and it is my hope that this will be continued.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that UNESCO is a unique and appropriate international organization to put into effect the flourishing of cultural and multidimensional human capacities in the collective mind of peoples. It is UNESCO which prepares the ground for friendly cooperation to attain synergy and constructive solidarity in order to address common human challenges. Given the situation caused by the pandemic and the need to pay greater attention to the increasingly deep gap between North and South in the field of education, especially in developing countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the countries of the South, this global challenge deserves to be addressed by UNESCO as one of its priorities.

Thank you for your attention.