

**National Speech by the Head of the Delegation of the Czech Republic
Mr Aleš CHMELÁŘ, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech
Republic,
in the General Policy Debate at the 41st session of the General Conference
of
UNESCO**

11 November 2021 in Paris

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the General Conference of UNESCO today on behalf of the Czech Republic.

We live in turbulent and challenging times of tectonic changes impacting every field of UNESCO competence. The ongoing pandemic has clearly shown the importance of equal access to education, the hunger for culture, knowledge, science and access to free media and a hate-free online environment. We have learnt that cohesion of our societies must be fostered, with special attention to intergenerational solidarity, as set out in the 2030 Agenda.

We commend the efforts of the Director-General in transforming our organisation. We fully adhere to UNESCO's two Global Priorities - Africa and Gender Equality - and four strategic objectives of the new Medium-Term Strategy.

While the climate change, the overarching global challenge of today's world, is being discussed at COP 26 in Glasgow, let me focus on four main pillars underpinning the temple of UNESCO.

A robust **educational system**, accessible to all, is vital for creation of sustainable societies, resilient enough to face the 21st century challenges, with inclusive growth, and peaceful coexistence.

The Czech Republic has spearheaded the **SDG Four implementation**. Last year, our government adopted a new Strategy for the Education Policy up to 2030+, which promotes competences in sustainable development, access to high quality education for all and digital literacy.

Inclusive education is also one of the key solutions to poverty eradication. We have recently adopted a programme focused on **enhancing capacities of public universities** in our partner developing countries.

Educating in innovative approaches, gaining diverse skills and learning from experience are also crucial for maintaining respect for **cultural and natural heritage and promoting cultural diversity**.

Focus on **education in crisis**, including on the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons, is of paramount importance. We help in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sahel, Syria and Ukraine. In Afghanistan in particular, we have currently mobilised or redirected funds worth 80 mil CZK in support of vulnerable population and refugees.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Inutile de le répéter, tout le secteur culturel mérite une attention accrue, suite à la pandémie mondiale. Nous ne devrions pas sous-estimer le rôle des musées et autres institutions culturelles. Leur avenir durable doit être assuré. Sans doute cette problématique sera entre autres amplement discutée durant la 26^e Conférence générale du Conseil international des musées à Prague en août prochain.

D'ailleurs, il est à saluer comment la culture a su s'adapter et s'est mise, ces derniers mois, « en ligne » afin d'atteindre un nouveau public et de nouveaux horizons. Or, chacun le sait, le monde virtuel n'est pas sans défis. Loin de là!

For this reason, we welcome the process resulting in the Recommendation on the **Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**. We appreciate that its starting point is the premise that ethics should lie in the very foundations of AI systems.

Speaking of the online environment, the Czech Republic supports creation of national strategies to **combat antisemitism** online. It is important to shorten the time between the hate speech appears online and its removal. To this end we must work globally.

Furthermore, we will continue our support to **independent media and media literacy** in target countries. This is an indispensable part of our foreign policy. We have decided to seek election to the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's IPDC Programme for the term 2021-25. Independent journalism as a direct and reliable source of information everywhere is of crucial importance.

Dans le domaine de **la préservation de l'information**, nous saluons l'approbation des Principes directeurs révisés du Programme *Mémoire du Monde* et le lancement du nouveau cycle de propositions d'inscription au Registre international.

Excellences,

Permettez-moi de conclure en mentionnant le bicentenaire de **Johann Gregor Mendel** que la République tchèque a proposé de célébrer l'année prochaine en y associant l'UNESCO. Que l'anniversaire de la naissance de père fondateur de la génétique puisse nous servir pour illustrer la place centrale qu'occupe la science dans nos vies.

Je souscris volontiers à la devise du Prix L'Oréal-UNESCO, auquel la Tchéquie participe depuis des années, « Le monde a besoin de **la science** ... La science a besoin des **femmes** ». J'en y ajoute que nous avons tous besoin d'un monde qui accorde et à la science et aux femmes la place qu'elles méritent.

L'éducation, la culture, la communication et la science. Les défis actuels dans tous ces secteurs sont de grande ampleur. Tout comme le rôle que peut (et doit) assumer l'UNESCO en les affrontant. Vous pouvez compter sur notre soutien.

Merci de votre attention.