

**NATIONAL STATEMENT BY MR EDWIN TONG  
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH  
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE  
41<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED  
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President of the General Conference Ambassador Santiago Irazabal Mourao,  
Director-General Madam Audrey Azoulay,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am honoured to be addressing my fellow Member States at the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference.
  
2. First, let me congratulate Director-General Azoulay for her re-election to a second term. The resounding support is a testament to DG Azoulay's steady leadership over the last four years, particularly in the face of the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
  
3. Singapore would also like to congratulate UNESCO on 75 years of building peace through education, culture, information, and science.
  - a. UNESCO has contributed greatly to building a culture of peace, ensuring universal access to quality education, preserving cultural and natural heritage, and safeguarding the basic right to access to reliable information.

b. Singapore appreciates UNESCO's efforts in supporting member states in distance learning, open science, knowledge and intercultural dialogue, as fundamental means to stay united and tighten the bonds of our shared community.

4. We are meeting during a time of profound change and uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted lives, communities, and businesses globally.

a. We are reminded that UNESCO's work in promoting education, science, information, and culture for sustainable development is more relevant than ever.

b. Singapore has participated substantively in UNESCO platforms to share best practices in these areas, and will continue to do so.

5. On the **cultural** front, Singapore fully recognises the role of culture as an important driver of sustainable development and fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. We are honoured that we inscribed our first element – Singapore's Hawker Culture – on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity last year.

a. Our hawker culture is an important ICH that reflects our distinct history, cultural identity, as well as community's values of resilience, adaptability, and solidarity, which have become even more salient in the fight against COVID-19.

- b. With the election of Singaporean expert Mr Yeo Kirk Siang to UNESCO's ICH Evaluation Body, Singapore is committed to contributing back to the international community.

6. Apart from ICH, we also firmly believe in the safeguarding of tangible cultural heritage.

- a. Singapore will continue to preserve the outstanding universal value of our first World Heritage Site – the Singapore Botanic Gardens.
- b. We will ensure that it will carry on to serve as an important site of national, historical, and cultural importance, as well as education and research in Singapore and the region.

7. On the **scientific** front, Singapore has been a keen contributor to the UNESCO Bioethics Programme. We consider the responsible management of bioethical issues critical for society, and the growth of emerging scientific developments and technologies.

- a. Singaporean expert, Professor Lee Hin Eng Hin, is proud to serve as a member of the International Bioethics Committee.
- b. As a member state of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC) since 2014, Singapore has also been actively involved in shaping the global discourse on emerging bioethical issues, as well as the development of international standard setting frameworks in this field.

- c. We are confident that we can continue to add value to UNESCO's important work in this field, and look forward to Member States' support of our candidature for re-election to the IGBC at this General Conference.

8. We would also like to congratulate UNESCO on the successful conclusion of the intergovernmental discussions on the Draft Recommendations on the Ethics of AI and on Open Science.

- a. Singapore's participation in these discussions reaffirms our support of UNESCO's efforts to advance international discourse and forge a consensus on broad standards in these salient and rapidly evolving fields.
- b. In the area of AI governance, Singapore has adopted a balanced and pragmatic approach to facilitate innovation and industry development, while ensuring user protection.
- c. As Singapore develops its own tools to facilitate effective AI Governance, we look forward to collaborations with UNESCO in our collective efforts to promote responsible AI research and use.

9. On the **education** front, Singapore supports UNESCO's education programmes and activities.

- a. School closures and distance learning brought about by COVID-19 has had an undeniable impact on students and our global progress towards achieving the Sustainable

Development Goal Four (SDG4) for inclusive and equitable access to education.

- b. Singapore shares these concerns and strives to ensure the continuity of quality education for our students, without neglecting their emotional needs and well-being.
- c. Through our participation in UNESCO programmes, we hope to exchange information with and learn from the UNESCO community to realise the targets under SDG4.
- d. As a UNESCO Creative City of Design, Singapore has also participated in the network's convening of the Cities of Design to share Singapore's efforts in responding to the pandemic to support the creative industry and design practitioners.

10. Dear colleagues and friends, this has been a difficult time for many of us. The pandemic has exacerbated many of our existing inequalities, economic uncertainties and challenges posed by climate-related and technological changes.

11. UNESCO's work is more critical than ever.

12. As a committed and responsible member of this organisation, Singapore hopes to work with you to strengthen UNESCO, so that we can overcome these challenges and build a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Thank you.