

Statement by H.E. Foreign Minister Ararat MIRZOYAN  
General Policy Debate  
41<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference  
*11 November 2021*

Mr. President,  
Mr. Chair of the Executive Board,  
Madame Director-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,

I would like, first of all, to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Santiago Irazabal Mourao on his election as President of the 41st session of the General Conference and to extend my wishes of success in his mandate.

I would also like to congratulate Madame Audrey Azoulay for being reelected.

We also thank all the Member States for supporting Armenia's candidature as one of the Vice-Presidents of the General Conference.

The extraordinary challenges that the world faces today from armed conflicts to COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of climate change, emphasize the importance of expanding cooperation in the fields of education, sciences, culture, communication and information. Therefore today, as we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of UNESCO, we reiterate our commitment to the values of UNESCO and support its Strategic Transformation process.

In 2022 Armenia will mark the 30th anniversary of its UNESCO membership, during which Armenia has been and continues to be firmly committed to UNESCO's mandate to advance universal values and fulfill our common goals, including those defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That is why we have decided to stand for the Executive Board of UNESCO by submitting our candidacy for the 2021-2025 term.

Armenia is committed to promoting a future of education based on the principle of equal opportunities for all. We think that Global citizenship education is an important tool to respond to global challenges. We also believe that education and awareness-raising are vital for advancing the prevention of hate speech and identity-based discrimination. This is also one of the main ideas behind establishing the UNESCO Chair on Education and Prevention of Genocide and other Atrocity Crimes in 2020 in Yerevan State University.

Armenia strongly supports UNESCO actions for Global Priority Africa and Small Islands Developing States (SIDS). These actions should be further reinforced with special attention to the fields of education and culture.

Armenia supports UNESCO's efforts to safeguard cultural heritage in conflict zones and condemn the attacks on cultural symbols because of their diverse origin or identity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh and its people last fall, the armed forces of Azerbaijan have been deliberately targeting civilian infrastructures, including schools, kindergartens, as well as Armenian cultural and religious heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, more than 22.000 children of Nagorno-Karabakh have been deprived of their right to education.

Also, it has been almost a year since Armenia alerted the Director-General and the Member States of UNESCO on the severe threats to the Armenian cultural property located in the territories fallen under the control of Azerbaijan.

We are grateful to Madame Audrey Azoulay for her efforts to send an independent technical mission in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in line with the 1954 Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of armed conflict.

Unfortunately, Azerbaijan continues to block the implementation of this mission. This obstructive attitude makes us fear the worst for the state of the Armenian cultural heritage under Azerbaijani control. Both during the military hostilities and after the establishment of the ceasefire, there have been numerous documented cases of deliberate destruction and acts of vandalism by the Azerbaijani armed forces against the Armenian cultural and religious heritage, and the most notorious example is the double precise drone strikes on the Holy Saviour Ghazanchetsots Cathedral of Shushi on October 8th, 2020.

Along with the physical destruction of Nagorno-Karabakh's religious and cultural heritage, we witness unacceptable cases of distortion of the identity and changing of the architectural appearance of the Armenian cultural and religious heritage on the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh currently under the control of Azerbaijan with more than 1.500 cultural property and 19.000 museum exhibits.

It is crucial to spearhead international efforts and act appropriately to prevent the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh to share the tragic fate of 28.000 annihilated properties of the Armenian cultural heritage of Nakhijevan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by stressing the importance of promoting a culture of peace, tolerance, mutual respect, and dialogue between cultures as an essential tool for bringing people together and promoting peaceful co-existence. It will enable us to achieve all of the Organization's priorities.

Thank you.

