



**Republic of South Africa's National Statement, Delivered by the Honourable Minister of Basic Education, and the President of the South African National Commission for UNESCO, Mrs Angelina Motshekga, MP at 41<sup>st</sup> Session of UNESCO's General Conference, held in Paris, France**

11 November 2021

President of the General Conference, Your Excellency Mr Santiago Irazabal Mourão,  
Director-General of UNESCO, Your Excellency Ms Audrey Azoulay,  
Honourable Ministers, and Distinguished Delegates,  
Citizens of the world,

On behalf of the Government and the People of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to join the Speakers from this esteemed House, who acknowledged and congratulated UNESCO for reaching such a noble milestone – ***its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!***

Let me also add our voice in congratulating the Director-General, on the renewal of her mandate for the second term, to steer UNESCO beyond its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which has been acutely hampered by the COVID-19 global pandemic, with its devastating effects to communities of the world. South Africa stands ready to work with you, and to provide you with our full support in your work.

We wish to state upfront that South Africa embraces UNESCO's principles of multilateralism, international law, the advancement of global human rights, the promotion of global peace and security, as

well as advocating for the transmission of education and culture, liberty, justice and dignity for all humankind.

Reflecting on the milestone of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UNESCO, it will be justifiable to revoke the spirit of our former statesman, a global icon of note, and the Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO, President Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela. President Mandela made a compassionate call of an education system in South Africa – characterised by the ***social justice principles of access, redress, equity, inclusivity, quality and efficiency***, a call which continues to reverberate with us now, and will continue into eternity.

Whilst we thought that we were progressing well in the advancement of ***UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***, and the achievement of the overall vision and mission of the ***African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025***, the COVID-19 global pandemic descended on the world in an unprecedented fashion; and exposed the deep levels of inequalities, inequities, injustice and indignation that still persist among most communities of the world.

If we had the capacity to go fully digital during the heightened COVID-19 global pandemic, South Africa, like all other countries with similar socio-economic development levels, could have denied access to quality education to many of its education communities.

Mr President and Esteemed Delegates, acknowledging these and many other debilitating challenges and disparities, as well as the urgent need for remedial actions, South Africa commends the new ***Medium-Term Strategic Framework for 2022-2029***, and its accompanying ***Programme and Budget***. We particularly note and appreciate the fact that the Strategic Framework includes among its priorities ***Africa and Gender Equality***.

Furthermore, South Africa welcomes the developments on ***Open Sciences, Global Priority Africa***; the benchmarking of the value of

the ***Sustainable Development Goals on Education***; the adoption of the ***Draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence***; and supports the call for increased resources to be availed for the ***Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)***. I am pleased to inform this Esteemed House, that South Africa hosts the ***Open Science Platform*** for the African Continent.

Mr President and Esteemed Delegates, the mainstreaming of ***Science*** across the programmes and intersectoral projects of UNESCO, is vital to successfully tackle inequality among communities, climate change, future pandemics, the digital gap, and for the advancement of sustainable development. This is one of the reasons that His Excellency, President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa established a Department of Science and Innovation in our country.

The role for UNESCO in global science programmes, is needed now more than ever before. We need access to the advances of science, technology and innovation for our people. The rich unique biodiversity of South Africa on land and our two intersecting oceans, is our heritage to humanity. We look forward to continue working with the ***Man and Biosphere Programme*** to conserve and restore our nature; and strengthen scientific monitoring of the biodiversity decline the world is faced with.

Similarly, water is essential to life. The devastation brought about by climate change, is impacting water security in our country and the entire world. We call upon the ***Inter-Governmental Hydrology Programme*** to make accessible tools and training programmes for the capacitation of water professionals in integrated water research and management programmes.

Mr President and the Esteemed Delegates, STEM education, is the gateway to the requisite 21<sup>st</sup> century skillsets. We thank the ***Natural Sciences Sector*** for its efforts in assisting in reinforcing science education in our schools, especially for young girls. We are excited

to announce that South Africa will host the **World Science Forum** in December 2022. The theme of this Forum, will be “**Science for Social Justice**”. This will be the first time that this Forum is held on the African Continent.

**Culture** and **Heritage** form part of the sectoral pillars of UNESCO. Africa, is still significantly lagging behind in the inscription of sites on the **World Heritage List**. Yet, a high number of properties on the List in Danger, are from the African Continent; and these properties are now faced with the challenge of either delisting; or the sites being put on the **Danger List**.

As we approach the **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1972 Heritage Convention** next year, we need to redouble our efforts in order address this imbalance. Through the **African World Heritage Fund**, we are working hard to capacitate our experts to better manage and conserve our heritage. We wish to thank those countries, which have provided financial support to the Fund; and wish to implore the other countries to partner with Africa in this regard.

Heritage is unique, and presents an exclusive narrative about each nation, region, and continent. It is for this reason that South Africa welcomes the establishment of the **Open-Ended Working Group on Sites of Memory**, in order to forge a consensus on how these sites could be inscribed. This will assist us to tell our unique stories in our own ways, and for our healing, reconciliation and unity.

Mr President and Esteemed Delegates, I am happy to announce that South Africa is at an advanced stage in ratifying the **Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education**, adopted by the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference.

We are also grateful to UNESCO for entrusting us with the responsibility of hosting such a successful **Global Media and Information Literacy Week**, just a month ago. This event was critical, as the world is faced with the exponential rise in

disempowering disinformation, political polarisation, and the increasing influence of digital platforms.

The Global Media and Information Literacy Week was critical, especially that the world is faced with seriously contradictory messages and meanings – particularly related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is therefore, important for the people of the world, to be equipped with media and literacy competencies to understand the stakes, and to contribute to and benefit from pointed information and communication opportunities.

The Government and the People of South Africa wish to thank UNESCO for awarding the PUKU Children’s Literature Foundation with the 2021 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its work on “*using digital technologies to promote children’s literature in South Africa’s indigenous languages*”. We also wish to congratulate PUKU for being named as the 2021 UNESCO Laureate.

In conclusion, Mr President and Esteemed Delegates, South Africa has presented its candidature to serve on the **UNESCO Executive Board for the term 2021 to 2025**, as well as to serve as a valuable member of the **Management of Social Transformations (MOST)** programme. We contend that through our nomination to the Executive Board, we will continue to support UNESCO in the implementation of its programmes, projects and activities, specifically aligned with its **Strategic Framework**; and particularly regarding the UNESCO priorities of **Global Priority Africa** and **Gender Equality**. We would be humbled and honoured to receive this Esteemed House’s support, to serve in these bodies.

Your Excellency, Madam Director-General, we can’t wait to receive and welcome you in South Africa next year. We are convinced that your presence in our country, will amplify the urgency of supporting UNESCO’s strategic programmes and interventions.

I thank you.