

National Statement on behalf of Ireland at the 41st UNESCO General Conference

To be delivered by Ms. Josepha Madigan T.D., Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion

12 November 2021

Opening Remarks

Monsieur le Président, Madame la Directrice générale, Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres et Délégués.

Permettez-moi de commencer par vous féliciter, Madame la Directrice générale, pour votre réélection. L'Irlande se réjouit de poursuivre notre coopération pour faire avancer nos priorités et nos objectifs communs.

L'Irlande a toujours été un fervent partisan du multilatéralisme. En tant que petite nation, nous pensons que notre voix est amplifiée par notre active participation aux organisations multilatérales. En cette soixante-quinzième année de l'UNESCO, la pandémie de COVID-Dix-neuf et la crise climatique n'ont fait que souligner que nous avons plus que jamais besoin d'une coopération multilatérale pour aborder et surmonter ces défis communs. Nos générations futures en dépendent.

Mr President,

We have all witnessed how the COVID-19 pandemic has set back progress on reaching the SDG 4 targets, by generating the largest disruption to global education ever. From the very start of the crisis, UNESCO took action to monitor, document and highlight the impact of the pandemic and public health measures on education. Let us congratulate UNESCO for its unwavering resilience and determination to ensure continuity of learning for all children and youth.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is widely acknowledged as a key enabler for achievement of UNESCO's 2030 Agenda and Ireland is currently developing its 2nd National ESD Strategy in line with the UNESCO Framework.

Ireland believes that quality education is essential to individual well-being, social cohesion and sustainable development. Ireland has always been committed to the promotion of quality education as a fundamental human right for all, both at home and abroad.

The Irish Education system is underpinned by a policy of inclusion, where all children, including migrant, Traveller and Roma children, and children with disabilities, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have the same access to quality education, and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Internationally, our development cooperation programmes focus on strengthening national education systems to deliver equitable, inclusive and quality education for all, especially those in need of additional support. This means including children living in extreme poverty and rural areas, children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children and those in conflict and post-conflict situations, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations.

Gender equality is a priority for Ireland, in and through education. Ireland has championed adolescent girls' education, launching a Call to Action for Adolescent Girls' Education in 2020. We have worked with UNESCO and other stakeholders in promoting girls' education as the catalyst to achieving gender equality.

Equipping children and youth with 21st century skills and digital literacy is essential to enable them to avail of opportunities and contribute to solving the world's most pressing problems. Ireland and UNESCO both support Africa Code Week, Africa's biggest digital skills program which creates opportunities for young Africans to learn coding for free, and for teachers to be trained on digital learning curricula.

Dear Friends,

With a vibrant and unique cultural and natural heritage, Ireland recognises the central role of UNESCO in promoting, protecting and sustaining the world's cultural and natural heritage. Ireland is proud to be a party to many UNESCO Culture Conventions, and works with UNESCO and other State Parties in prioritising and contributing to enhanced international cooperation and sustainable development.

In particular, Ireland is a strong contributor to the work of UNESCO in respect of Intangible Cultural Heritage. To date, Ireland has succeeded in having three of our living heritage practices recognised on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Uilleann piping; Hurling; and, Irish Harping. In an ever-increasing globalised world, the recognition of these practices has served to shine a light in Ireland on the important work of UNESCO in advocating for the safeguarding of the world's living heritage.

With a strong tradition of placing culture and creativity at the centre of communities, Ireland is also an active participant in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Since 2010, Ireland has been awarded two Creative Cities' titles – Dublin UNESCO City of Literature and Galway UNESCO City of Film. The two Creative Cities work closely with their partner cities in

countries around the world to advance cooperation, shared learning and public participation in creativity and cultural life for all members of society to foster sustainable development.

Mr President,

Two years ago, UNESCO embarked on a process to elaborate the first global standard-setting instrument on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Ireland welcomes that an ethical and human rights-based approach to Artificial Intelligence is increasingly supported by multilateral standard-setting organisations, including at UNESCO. Ireland will continue to monitor and participate in discussion on Artificial Intelligence governance in these multinational fora.

The importance of the mission and mandate of UNESCO is recognised by all of us around the world; and Ireland will continue to work to advance those common goals and priorities. Ireland has two reasons to celebrate this year particularly: indeed, 2021 does not only mark UNESCO's 75th Anniversary, but it also mark our 60th Anniversary as a proud UNESCO Member State. We look forward to many more years of cooperation in building a more just and sustainable world.

Je vous remercie,

Go raibh maith agaibh,

ENDS