

UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE (41ST SESSION)

UK HEAD OF DELEGATION'S REMARKS, 12th November 2021

Mr President, Madame Director General, Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, it is my honour to address you today.

As we celebrate 75 years of UNESCO, it is timely to recall those words, spoken in London at the Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO, and which now form the basis of the Constitution - that “wars begin in the minds of men”. Today we celebrate 75 years of bringing together minds from across the world to promote and safeguard universal values in the pursuit of peace. The UK is proud to have been a founding member of this organisation, and to continue to play an active role.

Madame Director General, may I begin by congratulating you on your achievements to date and on your election for a second term. The UK has welcomed your focus on reform, and applauds the progress made, particularly when set against the backdrop of the global pandemic.

But we believe the work is not yet done. The UK encourages you to maintain this momentum, and we look forward to supporting further reforms during your second term.

We note that UNESCO's regular budget is set to increase by approximately 2% for the next biennium, baselining the one-off budgetary increase approved at the last General Conference. We need

to ensure that the rationale for increasing budgets is transparent, results focussed, and follows efforts to find greater efficiencies. We expect that this additional funding will be used to support continued reform, efforts aligned with the vision for UN2.0, and progress towards SDG4. We would like to see even closer collaboration with other UN agencies, enabling UNESCO to deliver targeted, evidence-based interventions which play to its comparative advantage.

As a committed defender of every child's right to 12 years of quality education, the UK provides voluntary funding for the Global Education Monitoring Report and UNESCO's Institute of Statistics. The UK thanks UNESCO for providing valuable data and policy advice during the UK's G7 Presidency this year, under which we secured G7 endorsement of two brand new SDG4 milestone objectives and a political declaration on girls' education. And yesterday evening, in partnership with Norway and Tunisia, we celebrated the Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, which the UK intends to ratify.

However, we remain concerned that progress on SDG4 is critically off track. Over the next few years it is crucial that UNESCO, supported by Member States, provides the global leadership, practical coordination and support for prioritisation necessary to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. To this end we welcome the recent reforms of the High Level Steering Committee.

The UK commends UNESCO's continued leadership on media freedom and the safety of journalists. The UK and Canada co-chair the Media Freedom Coalition of 49 countries, and together helped establish the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund – launched at the London Global Conference on Media Freedom in 2019. The UK continues to support

the Fund and we commend the success of the first tranche of projects which have helped over 1700 journalists on the frontline around the world.

Domestically, we launched our first National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists in March this year, with the aim of protecting journalists from abuse and harassment.

In the field of science, the UK is pleased to continue to contribute to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and Hydrological Programme. We welcome the progress made on developing an international standard-setting instrument on Open Science since the last General Conference, and look forward to the adoption of the Recommendation.

Today marks the end of COP26 negotiations in Glasgow, and we have appreciated the engagement and collaboration of both the UNESCO Secretariat and Member States as we drive multilateral action on climate change. The COP26 programme brought together scientists, cultural experts, education leaders and others, underlining the multidisciplinary nature of this global challenge. We welcome the steps UNESCO has taken to embedding such an intersectoral approach in the new Programme.

Before I finish I would like to thank the UK National Commission for its support for both the UK Government and the wider UNESCO community. From the launch of their landmark report on the national value of UNESCO in 2020, to preparing for the inscription of two new World Heritage Sites this year, the National Commission plays an important role both nationally and internationally.

In closing, I recommend to you all, the new digital archive which brings together the instruments our forebears used to ratify the UNESCO Constitution. Launched by the UK and France, together with UNESCO to mark the 75th anniversary, this is an important historical record of our collective promise to work together to build peace in the minds of women and men.