

**41st General Conference of UNESCO
Remarks by the President of GRULAC
Ambassador Elía del Carmen Guerra Jurado
Permanent Delegate of Panama to UNESCO
Paris, November 2021**

Mr. President
Heads of Delegation
Madam Director General
Ladies and Gentlemen

In my capacity as President of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), let me express how glad we are that a representative of our region has assumed the Presidency of the 41st General Conference of UNESCO.

Be assured, Mr. President, that there is a GRULAC and its professional capacities, with the desire and commitment to collaborate with you meeting these very high responsibilities, particularly when we commemorate the 75th anniversary of UNESCO, whose objectives and purposes continue to be an eminent challenge for all of us.

Mr. President

Allow me to congratulate Mrs. Azoulay on her re-election as Director-General, to whom I convey, on behalf of all the GRULAC Nations, our best wishes for your success in the exercise of such an honorable position.

Madam Director General

Its been already four years ago, when in this emblematic room, confident in your vision and experience, we encouraged you in facing the difficult challenges that were confronting our UNESCO.

We envisaged that it was not going to be an easy task and as such, many of them are still present.

In other cases, difficult circumstances of the past months, have deepened them at a period during which we have been able to learn and to teach to live with strict rules; notwithstanding how useful and convenient these measures have been for the health of the great majorities; giving up our particular rights and interests, in order to achieve the common well-being.

You assume Madame Director General a new mandate with proposals on the table; at a time when the Member States are anxiously waiting for proactive responses; from a joint effort between the Secretariat under your guidance and our governments so as to ensure the responses that the world needs.

The time has come to carry forward plans and programs as stated by Member States and in this sense we invite you to join us in this effort.

We are confident that the team that constitutes the UNESCO Secretariat will be able to respond to many challenges as the ones you recently underlined. The relevance of education, environment, sciences and the construction of a culture of peace in the world as a framework for the task you prioritize is certain; however, we know that in such an unequal world, many other agendas continue to be vital to promote growth and a safe path towards the sustainable development that we proposed several years ago.

Urgencies deserve immediate attention, but they should not distract us from what is essential to the integral dimension of human beings, their identity, their dignity and their development.

It is a matter of finding a balance between what is proposed by developed countries, the priorities of low-income countries and other countries that, like many in our GRULAC region, have been schematized as middle-income and for whom development and access to sources of opportunities are becoming increasingly distant.

GRULAC has been steadfast in accompanying not only with ideas but with deeds, the peace efforts in the region and globally. We contribute to the intergovernmental character of our organization which is fundamental for a constructive dialogue in unequal circumstances, many times really miserable for millions of people in the world.

UNESCO's voice has helped thousands of boys and girls in their return to classes. Many have been left out of school for health reasons but also because of the lack of access to those technologies that *sine que non* are the backpack for the intellectual growth.

We are still evaluating the impact of this special period because we know that the recovery will not be easy. We are seeking the support of experts from the global community for education trying to find a solution made at home, at the national level according to the socio-economic context of each state.

Undoubtedly, Madam Director General, education is and will continue to be in its broadest sense, the central objective of our common agenda without which we could not move towards the fulfillment of the SDGs in 2030.

If what is played in Paris does not sound in the field, our effort would not be worthwhile.

Our brothers and sisters from the Island States are living very particular situations due to the impact of climate change. This is a road which is constructed every day given its complexities and real commitments that need to be met. UNESCO's Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change is one of our most important tools if we want to join in these tasks for the Futures we Want.

We are part of the call of more than 41 Island Member States that demand short-term responses to their various educational, cultural and social circumstances; where a young population is calling and we must listen.

We want to see a UNESCO that "speaks young" and listens to this shift of paradigm in the reconstruction of our nations. These are commitments that we have assumed; for which we count on our colleagues in the field, who have a great responsibility in projecting this UNESCO-Partnership and for which we advocate for better and strengthened regional offices.

During these 75 years, we at UNESCO have contributed to and assumed a historic commitment to freedom of expression and the protection of journalists. We are confident that we are counting on you to strengthen this sector of communication and information, with the financial and human resources that will make a true strategy of access to information an effective tool to build more equal, pluralistic and inclusive knowledge societies.

Madam Director General

We have been insisting from GRULAC on the need to no longer tolerate this illicit trafficking of cultural property, and we hope that you will join us with your voice not only as a consequence of the mandate you have already received, but also because you more than anyone else can raise with impetus the banner of protection of the value of different cultures that lies in these goods.

It is vitally important that a call from UNESCO is made to the international community, to stop this crime against our national identity. Enough is enough.

We trust, Mrs. Azoulay, that this distinction that we, the Member States, place in your hands today, will encourage you to work to ensure that UNESCO continues to be the platform for building full and equal access to education; free exchange of ideas; development of relations among all peoples in a scenario of peace that reduces distrust and suspicion among nations and strengthens those democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, as stated in our charter.

Thank you Mr. President