

SRI LANKA

:President of the General Conference

:Chairman of the Executive Board

:Madam Director General

:Excellencies

:Distinguished Guests

:Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the UNESCO, I am pleased to represent Sri Lanka on behalf of Hon. Dinesh Gunewardena, Minister of Education of Sri Lanka at the forty first session of the UNESCO General Conference.

We welcome the new President of the General Conference, His Excellency Mr. Santiago Irazabal Mourao. We wish you every success, and assure you our maximum support throughout your tenure.

Sri Lanka also joins with the Member States in congratulating the Director General Audrey Azoulay on her re-election as the Director General of UNESCO.

Madam, Sri Lanka continues to pledge her fullest support to you and to your vision for the future of UNESCO.

I also wish to place on record our sincere appreciation of the outgoing President, His Excellency, Mr. Ahmet Altay Cengizar, who has led the General Conference in an exemplary manner. Allow me therefore to express the warmest felicitations to you too Sir.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world has experienced the greatest crisis in modern history during the last two years, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to further exacerbating the challenges to multilateralism. Sri Lanka has been successfully containing the spread of the virus with many proactive measures and a whole-of-government approach. As of now, about 84% of the total population has been fully vaccinated.

In collaboration with the WHO, Sri Lanka is establishing a Regional Knowledge Hub to facilitate exchange of lessons learnt from COVID19 and support countries to recover better.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I take this opportunity to thank all bilateral and multilateral donors who have generously provided financial and material support to manage the pandemic. The increased global cooperation has been visible during the ongoing crisis. The scientific advancements made through collaborative endeavours are greatly encouraging.

We are very thankful to the UNESCO for the support given to Sri Lanka, especially for Sri Lanka's South Asian Centre for Teacher Development (SACTD). As of date, SACTD is the only UNESCO Category II Centre in the South Asian Region and in the World dealing with Teacher Development. We are in the process of securing a steady line of funds for the sustainable expansion and development of the Centre. Potentially contributing to Quality Education in the region especially aligning with Sustainable

Development Goal 4.7.c (By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states). We look forward to working with other South Asian countries to support teacher development and become a renowned regional hub for teacher development.

Sri Lanka welcomes the initiatives taken by the UNESCO in giving a platform for young people to hone their skills in leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship. Many Sri Lankan youth have benefited from such programmes organized by the UN agencies.

Sri Lanka looks forward to chairing the 16th session of the ICH Committee in December in Paris. Unfortunately due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation the meeting could not be held in Colombo. However, we reiterate our fullest support to the UNESCO and remain committed to its fruition.

Sri Lanka welcomes the recommendations made on two key issues during this special session of the General Conference

marking its 75th anniversary, the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the Recommendation on Open Science. We believe these policies would facilitate greater international scientific cooperation leading for development in the science and technology thereby improving analytical skills.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Sri Lanka's philosophical heritage, deeply rooted in Lord Buddha's teachings, also emphasises the vitality of preserving environmental integrity.

As a climate-vulnerable country, Sri Lanka is deeply aware of the dangers of climate change and would like to stress that preserving the health of our planet is a shared responsibility of all the Member States.

Developing nations like us are grappled with the risk of deceleration of achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals due to the severe economic impact of the pandemic as well as the adverse effects of climate change.

The geographical distribution of the human resources of UNESCO secretariat remains a high priority concern for Sri Lanka, who is currently a non-represented Member State. Therefore, we urge the UNESCO to facilitate fair competition and balance in recruitments to ensure equal opportunities for applicants from around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Sri Lanka is grateful for UNESCO's support for education and science in Sri Lanka and for preservation of our cultural heritage. Sri Lanka values the work of UNESCO deeply; and, appreciates our partnership with UNESCO immensely.

On behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka, I congratulate UNESCO for the successful last 75 years of its service and wish the 41st Session of the UNESCO General Conference every success as nations collectively gather to deliberate, debate, discuss and plan the path we are to tread in the years to come.

Thank you

May the Noble Triple Gem bless you!