

DELEGATION OF FINLAND

41st Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Intervention by Ms Li ANDERSSON

Minister of Education

Head of Delegation

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Check against delivery

Mr. President

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board

Madam Director-General

Distinguished Delegates,

Finland aligns itself with the EU statement.

Mr. President, congratulations on your election. I also warmly congratulate you, Madam Azoulay, on your re-election. Finland looks forward to continued close cooperation.

Finland welcomes the aim to revive multilateralism as outlined in the UN Secretary-General's report "Our Common Agenda". We agree with the Secretary-General: We can either choose to breakdown or to breakthrough".

The report is highly relevant for UNESCO's work across all pillars of the UN -- peace, development and human rights.

The human rights -based approach is key for peace, stability and prosperity. We expect UNESCO to remain at the forefront in actively promoting the free flow of ideas – including academic, scientific and artistic freedom and the freedom of the media. UNESCO must continue to be a progressive and proactive voice for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We also wish to see greater emphasis on gender equality, including the rights of LGBTI persons.

My own country Finland serves as a strong example showing that a society flourishes when everyone has an active, equal and meaningful role in it.

Excellencies,

Sped up by the COVID pandemic, digital innovation and transformation are definitely here to stay. This has brought to the fore the access to reliable information and scientific knowledge as we address the current global challenges. Finland supports the recommendations on Open Science as well as on the Ethics of AI.

In the age of instant communication, disinformation and hate speech are increasing threats to societies all around the world. Disinformation has played an all too large role in slowing down our efforts to combat both climate change and the ongoing COVID pandemic. UNESCO has an important role in combatting misinformation, prejudice, discrimination and hate speech, which all reproduce and reinforce inequalities. As one remedy, we welcome the new intersectoral approach to critical media literacy.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of quality education for all. Access to education is also one of the key components for the wellbeing of children and youth. However, currently millions are at risk of

dropping out or falling behind in learning. Girls are at particular risk. The only acceptable goal in the current situation is that there must be no lost generation.

As technology becomes ever more intertwined with all aspects of our lives, we need to pay close attention to its racial, gender and social biases as well as biases towards disabled people. Finland is happy to be the co-leader of the UN Women's *Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation of the Generation Equality campaign*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the COP26 summit ongoing, I want to emphasise that education, science and culture are all needed fully onboard to combat the ongoing climate emergency. We are currently racing against the clock to ensure that our societies become carbon negative early enough to avert the impending climate catastrophe. This rapid transformation calls for a large amount of new skills and competencies. Our educational systems need to be fully up to speed to meet this challenge.

It is essential to promote youth engagement. We are grateful for the efforts to arrange for the virtual Youth Forum. Every General Conference should have a Youth Forum, planned for in a timely manner. I am happy to be accompanied by several young experts in my delegation.

Excellencies,

Finland supports the convening of MONDIACULT. It is important for UNESCO to re-engage more in cultural policies. Not only because of UNESCO's unique UN mandate for culture, but also because all global sustainability challenges relate to culture – from the values we foster to the ways people and communities operate.

Distinguished delegates,

During our term on the Executive Board, we have seen UNESCO strengthening its global positioning and relevance through the Strategic Transformation process and results-based management. We find UNESCO at 75 more resilient than before, as shown also by its agility during the pandemic.

The strategy and programme documents before us result from extensive negotiations involving all regions, and we wish to go along with the consensus adoption.

Finland is happy and proud to extend its support, together with the other Nordic countries for the candidature of Iceland to the Executive Board. The Nordics are, and will remain, strong and active partners of UNESCO.

As a testimony to Finland's firm commitment to UNESCO, we were pleased to introduce the self-governing province of the Åland Islands as a new Associate Member of UNESCO. I wish to extend our thanks to the General Conference for granting Associate Membership to the Åland Islands.

Thank you.

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