

**Exchange session with EXB members**

**with special guest**

**Ms Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General**

**Opening remarks by**

**Vera El Khoury Lacoueilhe  
Chairperson of the Executive Board**

***Tuesday 18 June 2024, 10am (room X)***

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Madam Deputy Secretary-General,  
Madam President of the General Conference,  
Mr Deputy Director-General representing the Director-General,  
Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,

Welcome all to our second exchange session of the year.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest Her Excellency Ms. Amina Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. We are very honoured by your presence Madam, and pleased to have the opportunity to have an open exchange between you and the UNESCO Executive Board members on the acceleration of the SDGs and the support that the upcoming UN summits can give in this regard.

As was the case for our first exchange session, there will be no recording or verbatim records, so everyone is encouraged to participate actively and freely.

Excellencies, Ms. Amina Mohammed, does not need an introduction, but I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration for her inspiring leadership, her vision, her resilience, her know-how, her courage and last but not least, her empathy - a very rare but much needed quality these days.

The role of the United Nations Development System in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is essential and is a subject that is very dear to me, as I was one of the 14 members of the Team of Independent Advisers, known as ITA, entrusted by ECOSOC in 2016 with the task of making bold proposals for the repositioning of the United Nations Development System.

Our recommendations were bold indeed ... and ended up in a drawer.

But after his election in January 2017, Mr António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the UN took them out of the drawer and put them back on the table for adoption.

Thanks to the vision of the Secretary-General and the able leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General the reform on the repositioning of the United Nations Development System, unprecedented in its scope at the UN, was adopted and implemented.

Madam Deputy Secretary-General, you get things done and you make a difference, especially when we remember where we started from.

The diagnosis of the Team of Independent Advisers on the state of the UNDS and its capacity to deliver on the SDGs was quite severe.

The first conclusion we drew at the time was that in reality, **there was no such thing as a United Nations Development System.**

It could not be defined as a system since it was not fully integrated, it was not a coherent whole and had no common identity.

It lacked much-needed horizontal leadership, transparency, oversight and accountability at the level of the system, especially when it comes to specialized agencies whose links with the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review were weak. The system also lacked predictable financing as core budgets kept decreasing while tied voluntary contribution skyrocketed.

The Reform attempted to answer all these gaps. There is still a lot that needs to be done especially in terms of the crucial problem of financing.

However, we have come a long way and Madam Deputy Secretary-General you have succeeded in bringing about considerable change and improvement. The reform produced a UN development system that is more integrated, and more focused on delivery on the ground, with an independent and empowered Resident Coordinator to deliver collective responses to national needs.

It is therefore better positioned to deliver on the SDGs, but our acceleration will require a new financing mechanism.

Dear Colleagues, when it comes to our role and responsibilities as an Executive Board I have two comments to make:

Firstly, it is imperative that the Board fully exercises its mandate and puts education back at the top of its agenda, and at the heart of its discussions and decision-making. The fact that there is a high-level steering committee for SDG4 does not mean that we have to relinquish our responsibilities regarding education. Education is still unquestionably the priority for an overwhelming number of Member States.

The ongoing changes caused by new technologies and their impact on societies require more attention and more engagement by UNESCO and its governing bodies. As is the case for climate change, education has become a question of survival in many countries.

Secondly, it is of crucial importance that the Executive Board carries out its responsibilities through an active participation in determining the Organization's input to all UN Summits that are linked to its mandate, in a timely manner, which means before the negotiations of the declarations start in New York. It is the best way to ensure a consolidated and consensual position that can be defended by our counterparts in New York.

This was not the case for the Transforming Education Summit or for the Summit of the Future, but we should all together ensure that it will be case for future UN summits.

With all this in mind, it is my pleasure to now give the floor to our distinguished guest Ms. Amina Mohammed.