

Introductory remarks by

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Chairperson of the Executive Board

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Madame la Présidente de la Conférence Générale ,
Madame la Directrice Générale,
Excellences,
Chers Collègues,

Des vies brisées, des millions personnes déplacées,
Des corps affamés,
Des écoles réduites en ruines,

Des enfants tués et d'autres privés de leur avenir,
Des otages innocents sacrifiés,
Des femmes et des filles enfouies dans l'obscurité, privées de savoir,
Un patrimoine culturel inestimable irrémédiablement détruit.

Chers collègues et amis,

Nous avons appris, ici, au milieu de ces murs, que nous avons non seulement l'obligation morale mais aussi le pouvoir de donner de l'espoir.

Cela fait chaud au cœur de voir le bon travail et les progrès accomplis par l'UNESCO depuis le dernier Conseil, malgré des moyens limités, et des conditions extrêmement difficiles dans plusieurs régions du monde, notamment en Ukraine, en Afghanistan, et à Gaza.

Aujourd'hui c'est aussi le Liban qu'il faut aider.

Plusieurs organismes des Nations Unies se sont mobilisés dès la première heure, notamment l'UNICEF, qui s'active pour les centaines de milliers d'enfants déplacés de leurs foyers et de leurs villages.

L'UNESCO prépare sans doute un plan de réponse aux urgences qui concernent son mandat, telles que l'éducation et la protection de sites iconiques du patrimoine mondial qui se situent sur le territoire libanais comme Baalbek et Tyr.

Chers Collègues,

On a demandé un jour à l'ancien Directeur général de l'UNESCO, Mr Federico Mayor : comment décidez-vous ce qu'il faut dire dans les situations politiques difficiles ?

Sa réponse était simple : je relis le texte de la Constitution.

Relisons ce texte. Tout y est.

Nous nous sommes peut-être éparpillés au fil du temps, et il serait temps de nous recentrer plus sur l'essentiel du mandat de l'UNESCO : l'éducation.

L'éducation pour tous, sans laquelle il n'y aura ni paix ni sécurité sur cette planète.

« Le pacte pour l'avenir » affirme que nous n'acceptons pas un avenir dans lequel la moitié de la population mondiale serait privée de liberté et de dignité, qui deviendraient les apanages des privilégiés ».

Je félicite tous les Etats membres pour l'adoption du « Pacte pour l'Avenir » et remercie le Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies, Mr Antonio Guterrez pour cette initiative.

Je tiens également à féliciter la Directrice Générale, son équipe, et tous les pays membres qui ont œuvré pour la place donnée à la culture dans le « Pacte pour l'Avenir » reconnaissant son rôle pour le développement durable.

Dear Colleagues

I would like to congratulate the Secretariat for the clear and comprehensive preliminary proposals for UNESCO's programme and budget, 43 C/5.

These proposals emphasize the shift towards integrating the work of its various sectors—education, culture, sciences, communication, and information—into broader, transversal strategic objectives.

The aim is to promote cooperation across sectors ensuring that UNESCO's interventions are more cohesive and able to address complex global challenges in a more holistic manner.

This approach is a good way forward, while remaining vigilant in maintaining transparency and accountability in this new context of blending sector-specific programs into larger, generalized objectives.

I therefore commend the Secretariat for having already taken measures in this respect by retaining sector accountability through sector specific targets, and by striking a balance between fostering collaboration across sectors and preserving its ability to deliver specialized, high-impact programs that leverage its unique expertise.

Dear Colleagues,

At this session of the Executive Board, we will examine the audit of the integrated budget by the Internal Oversight Service (IOS), outlined in documents 220 EX/23 and 27.INF. These are some of the most important items on our agenda. The findings are a source of concern as they expose significant deficiencies in the management of UNESCO's budget.

These are not merely operational failures and budget overruns, but symptoms of a broader governance issue, one that calls into question accountability and trust.

What is perhaps even more alarming is the revelation contained in the audit, that critical information was deliberately withheld from the Executive Board.

Attempting to hide a deficit in the 2023 budget, by diverting funds allocated by the General Conference for programmatic activities for the 2024-2025 budget, is a breach of financial regulations.

It is a mismanagement of the funds entrusted to the Secretariat by Member States and entails reputational risk for the organization.

The decision taken by the Members of the Board during its 219th session under item EX/4 not only prevented the Organization from defaulting on its financial obligations, but it may have also averted a graver outcome: a potential qualification of UNESCO's accounts by the External Auditor for failing to comply with financial regulations—unprecedented within the United Nations system.

The External Auditor stated that there was no compliance with regulation 4.2 of the financial regulations, but that the situation was rectified by the decision of the Executive Board during the 219th session.

It is important to underscore that this decision, though necessary at the time, was taken under exceptional circumstances and must not be considered as setting a precedent. Furthermore, I would like to draw the attention of the Board to the fact that it still requires ratification by the General Conference.

To those who consider that “this is not a big deal .. that the issue is settled .. and that we should focus on the future and avoid making waves for fear of damaging the organization’s reputation” ...

I say to you: **It is a big deal.**

Speaking out never harms an organization.

It is **Silence** that harms an organization.

It is silence that fosters a sense of impunity and arrogance that are detrimental to any organization.

Let us not forget that UNESCO’s credibility is also built on the trust and confidence that Member States place in the Governing Bodies.

They need an Executive Board that fully exercises its oversight role, ensuring that the Secretariat is held accountable.

Excellencies,

The process for the election of a new Director General starts at this session of the Executive Board with the adoption of the vetting procedure.

At the April session all the candidates will be present here in order to be interviewed by you.

Now is the time to express our views about the kind of leadership that we want for UNESCO’s future.

As we all know, leadership, is more than titles and authority.

It’s about embodying a vision that inspires action, fosters progress, and champions peace and development.

True, effective leadership embodies humanism and also humility.

A true leader is willing to listen and learn from others, be open to diverse perspectives, harnessing the collective wisdom of staff and of the main stakeholders of a UN organization, the Member States.

A Director-General must lead by example, upholding the highest ethical standards and fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and trust, while bearing in mind that trust is earned, not given.

Integrity, ethical and moral values, are the bedrock upon which trust is built.

A DG must paint a compelling vision that triggers passion and creativity, and mobilizes, motivates and inspires the staff every day.

Dear Colleagues,

Candidates for the post of Director-General should have a deep understanding of multilateralism and most importantly of the responsibilities of being an international civil servant, acting in the interest of all Member States.

A Director General has the institutional obligation to fully respect all Members States and their representatives.

In other words, a Director-General is a custodian of UNESCO's mission, entrusted with upholding its values and advancing its goals, in accordance with the collective will of Member States.

His or her authority is derived from and subject to the oversight of the organization's governing bodies.

The role is clearly one of service to Member States.

Any deviation from this fundamental principle goes against the constitution, undermines the essence of UNESCO's democratic governance structure and jeopardizes its credibility and effectiveness.

To conclude, dear colleagues, I would like to thank you for the hard preparation work that has been going on since the beginning of September.

With the GBS team we helped in the organization of several information meetings.

You have yourselves met in informal groups and discussed some of the most important items on our agenda. Several amendments have been prepared and will be discussed in the commissions.

You can count on our support every time you need to meet and negotiate during the coming days. As I always do, I would like to emphasize that decision making is the prerogative of member states.

I am confident that we will have a fruitful session thanks to all of you.

I thank you for your attention.