

Tribute to the Director General, Mrs Irina Bokova

President of the General Conference;

Chairperson of the Executive Board;

Director General;

Honourable Ministers;

Excellencies and Dear Colleagues;

On behalf of the Africa Group, it is my honour to pay our tribute to Ms. Irina Bokova the outgoing Director General of UNESCO.

On the occasion of her appointment to the esteemed office on 15 November 2009, Africa's representative articulate Africa's expectations from that appointment. Among others, the consolidation of the time long links between UNESCO and Africa.

Madam Bokova, despite the many constraints, you have exceeded on those expectations. While Africa has been a priority for UNESCO, during your tenure you turned our aspirations into reality. Reforming UNESCO's Field network in all the electoral regions, to make it effective, efficient and accountable was always a top priority for UNESCO. However, and under your direction and given the financial implications, Director General, eye marked Africa as the first phase of the implementation of the new field network.

The results are evident, five Muti-Sectoral Regional Offices that have been established in consultation with Member States and nine national offices as well as a number of desks now make up UNESCO's network of Field Offices in sub-Saharan Africa. Notwithstanding the financial impediments, which are not of your making, the Field offices have served to strengthen UNESCO's support for national development priorities.

Madam Bokova, you translated Priority Africa into a reality through the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2014-2021 and its six flagship programmes. As you take leave of this office, we are heartening by the fact that subject to the approval of the recommendations of the Executive Board on the Programme and Budget of 2014-2021

(39C/6 and 39C/6 Add) by the General Conference, the recommendations therein are a landmark in turning vision into action.

Madam Bokova, you traversed the entire length and breadth of our continent. You shared with us happy moments as well as sad occasions. We recall your grief when in April 2012 the mausoleums of Timbuktu were destroyed Islamic Extremists. In that dark hour you galvanised international opinion and effort. As a result of your leadership we celebrated with the people of Timbuktu when in February 2016 when the mausoleums of this World Heritage City were restored to their former glory.

Lastly, may be on a lighter note, it will not escape our attention that you solidly supported the logistic arrangements for the Africa Group, among others provision of meeting rooms, translation services etc. For most of us, the hallmark of your commitment for Africa found expression in “Africa Week” which is now inculcated in UNESCO’s calendar of events. The bottom-line is that your actions spoke louder than words.

We indeed hope that the track record you have left will be emulated by your successor.

I Thank you.