Statement On Behalf of H.E. Dr. Getahun Mekuria,
Minister of Education and the President of the National Commission of Ethiopia

At
209th UNESCO Executive Board Session

Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Chairperson of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Let me begin by thanking you Mr. Chairperson for your tireless efforts to ensure the conduct of our current session in the face of the daunting challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Ethiopia applauds the Director-General and the Secretariat for proactive manner with which they have responded to help member States mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the organization’s domains of competence. Thank you!

3. Since the last two years and the advent to power of H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, 2019 Nobel and UNESCO Peace Prizes Laureate, Ethiopia has embarked on a comprehensive all-round reform agenda.

4. At the heart of Ethiopia’s deep political, economic and social reforms is the objective of the ensuring the wellbeing, both material and spiritual, of our compatriots. At home this has meant fully liberalizing the political space, promoting the culture of peace and democracy, opening the economy and creating the conducive
conditions for the private sector to thrive and take the lead in the development of our country.

5. Abroad, as an extension of the domestic policy this has meant the promotion of peace and regional integration with noteworthy successes such as the peace agreement with Eritrea and the facilitation of the peaceful transition to democracy in Sudan.

6. In Education, in line with its development agenda, the Government of Ethiopia is fully committed to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4, and all the other 16 Goals, by 2030.

7. In its planning process, our Ministry of Education has fully integrated Goal 4 into the Education Sector plans at both the national and regional state levels. We wish to thank the Secretariat for the invaluable support given to us in the process of revising our entire school system curriculum. For us, it represents the best of what UNESCO and Governments can do together in advancing the cause of education for all in the 21st century.

8. However, the promising efforts and gains we have made are being suddenly scuttled by the global COVID-19 pandemic. It represents generational global shock, negatively affecting the great majority of our compatriots, and, in particular the vulnerable segments of our society.

9. To put it plainly, it is threatening our human capital accumulation in an unprecedented manner.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

10. Today, in Ethiopia schools are closed. 28 million students at all levels are out of school. Since March 2020, more than 40,000 formal schools, 1500 TVET institutions, and 200 public and private higher education institutions are officially closed. 750,000 teachers
are unable to exercise the profession they love, passing on knowledge and shaping the minds of the next generation due to the State of sanitary emergency.

11. More worrisome, the ANFE program expected to bring about in human development index is temporarily terminated with the real risk of relapsing of literacy.

12. Faced with such daunting challenges, using existing radio and television broadcasting facilities, schools have tried their level best to reach students virtually. However, connectivity, access to the hardware and digital literacy of both teachers and students have been critical bottlenecks for the full-fledged dissemination of learning in all education programs.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

13. In concrete terms in the post-COVID-19 environment one of the critical challenges which the Executive Board needs to reflect and properly address is how to bring back students to schools in the new academic school year in the fall ought to be a priority issue.

14. We were extremely happy to hear in the Director-General’s statement about UNESCO’s strong commitment to a global “Back to School Campaign. We need to leverage our efforts to ensure that the remarkable gains achieved during the MDG decades are reversed, and especially girls, students with disabilities and those in remote and pastoralist areas return to school when the time come.

15. In Science, our Ministry has been organizing virtual problem-solving research panels locally and internationally in connection with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and welcome the Secretariat’s open science initiative as a complement to our national efforts.
16. As part of our commitment to biodiversity and the great global task of combatting climate change, our country has launched under the auspices of H.E Prime Minister Dr. Abiy a national greening campaign with the aim of planting 4 billion trees during the current rainy season from June to September in the country while strictly respecting the sanitary conditions imposed by the pandemic.

**Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,**

17. UNESCO embodies the hopes and the future our children and youths. In this regard, the work being undertaken by the independent International Commission on the Futures of Education, chaired by our own Head of State, H.E. President Sahle-work Zewde deserves particular emphasis as the Commission seeks to lay down the blueprint for education for the coming decades, with more resilience to shocks and by reaffirming it as a public good.

18. More than ever, the pandemic has shown us the need for global cooperation and a real multilateralism. African leaders including H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy together with their peers from Europe have made global plea to cancel the debt of African countries as the concrete manifestation of this international solidarity. African governments should not have to choose between saving lives and honoring their debts.

19. We either succeed together or we all fail. A world when one or group of countries succeed while others fail is no longer possible.

20. More than ever, the post-COVID-19 world is in need of multilateralism, in its noblest sense that is the spirit of humanity and solidarity embodied in the ideals of our UNESCO.

Thank you!