NATIONAL STATEMENT OF INDIA

Honorable President,
Madam Director General,
Hon’ble Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Distinguished Representatives,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We thank the Chairperson and the Director General of UNESCO for organizing this session during the extremely challenging times confronting the global community on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. India reaffirms its commitment to observing the core values of UNESCO to preserve peace through international cooperation in education, science and culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The world is witnessing a major black swan event that is impacting most of our established practices, norms and regulations, and thus reshaping its landscape. In this scenario, it is important for UNESCO to explore newer ways of functioning. We need to re-orient and reinvent our ways of functioning to combat the spread of Covid-19 across the globe. Our institutions must reflect these changes and adapt to the transformed world order.

This pandemic has exposed the existing gaps in our systems. We must regroup, reform and reinvent. But in this transformation, it is imperative that UNESCO’s inter-governmental nature that forms an integral component of its Charter and is enshrined in its Constitution, is protected and preserved.

Friends,

During these trying times, the role of UNESCO has assumed greater significance. We have come to realize more than ever before the importance of culture in human survival during the excruciating days of the lockdown. We are particularly reminded of the following words enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO, “That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern”. It is with grave concern that we have noted UNESCO’s latest report which has highlighted the alarmingly high rate of children who are dropping out of school in recent times as also to the abuse faced by them while they are being
forced to stay at home. UNESCO would have to focus on its core mandate areas of education, culture and science and technology to help neutralise the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi has recently launched a mission called an ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ or a “Self-Reliant India” to combat the adverse effects, particularly the economic impact, of the COVID-19 pandemic. Government of India has also announced an unprecedented economic package worth around 10% of India’s GDP, thus making substantial financial allocations to reinvigorate the education and health sectors of our country. On the education front, India has launched the Prime Minister’s e-VIDYA Programme to facilitate multi-modal access to digital education throughout the country. For students who do not have adequate access to digital modes, education is being imparted through SWAYAM PRABHA- DTH television channels. The top hundred universities in India will soon commence online courses to counter disruptions and continue the momentum of university education. 7 universities have already started these courses.

India notes with grave concern that during these unprecedented trying times, important stakeholders, particularly those engaged in creative fields have suffered untold economic and financial distress. Artisans and craftsmen have been trying hard to make their ends meet. As part of our endeavour to provide relief to such stakeholders as also to continue the propagation of culture at a time when connoisseurs are unable to visit museums, Government of India has brought museums closer to the people by enabling and facilitating virtual tours. Various webinars on the issues related to culture were also organised by the Government of India on the occasion of the last International Museum Day.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with the founding principles of UNESCO in mind, that we look forward to participating in the deliberations of its Executive Board, particularly the Futures of Education Initiative, UNESCO’s Strategic Transformation; Resource mobilization Strategy, Structured financing dialogue, SDG 4 Education 2030 and Global Priority Africa Initiative.

To conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, during these extraordinarily difficult times of the Covid-19 pandemic, I, on behalf of the Government and the people of India, pray for the safety and the well-being of the world, “Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah”, meaning May all be happy; May all be free from illness.

Dhannyavad, Namaste!!!