

**39<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO  
PARIS, 30 OCTOBER – 14 NOVEMBER 2017  
ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS,  
MR COSTAS KADIS, MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Two years ago, the United Nations family set forth the 2030 Development Agenda. The principles of inclusivity, integration, equality and universality that govern the Development Agenda have been incorporated in UNESCO's programme in the fields of education, science and culture. We acknowledge that the Organisation has an important role to play in providing guidance and essential tools for policy planning in these fields.

Cyprus was actively involved in the development of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. An important milestone for Cyprus was the drafting of the Voluntary National Review for the UN High Level Political Forum in 2017, under the coordination of the Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The drafting process offered Cyprus' relatively small administration an opportunity to commence the mapping of all activities and strategies that can be linked with the SDGs, reinforcing this way our chances to succeed in their achievement.

The Ministry of Education and Culture as the competent authority for SDG4, namely, "Quality Education", has made significant progress in implementing the goal and its targets. Specifically, Cyprus provides free and accessible education to everyone at all education levels in urban and rural areas without discrimination.

The ongoing humanitarian and refugee crises in the wider Mediterranean region, forcing people to seek a better future in neighbouring countries, inevitably increased the number of migrant children in the Cypriot school system.

To this end, an Action Plan is being rolled out for mapping the migrant student population, teaching of Greek as a second language, adopting measures for reception, transition and inclusion of migrants and implementing teacher training and anti-discrimination actions.

Education is the key for achieving the majority of the SDGs. Education for sustainable development requires knowledge and skills that are promoted effectively in the Cyprus education system on a systematic basis in formal and non-formal teaching environments (Environmental Education Centres), based on the National Action Plan that we have developed on ESD.

I take this opportunity to make a special reference to the new Mediterranean Action Plan for ESD adopted by Ministries of Education in fourteen countries and five international organizations including UNESCO. The Action Plan was presented at a ministerial conference held last December in Nicosia and lays the ground for using education to address the challenges to sustainable development in the Mediterranean region.

The Republic of Cyprus, acknowledging that “Transforming Our World” can only be achieved with the engagement of youth, has recently adopted the: “*National Youth Strategy*”, designed with the direct involvement of young people. The overall aim of the Strategy is to enable young people to realise their full potential as active citizens.

In relation to UNESCO's efforts to protect people and heritage against all possible threats, humanity is still witnessing worldwide violations of human rights and irreparable destruction of cultural heritage. During its recent Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Cyprus attached priority to the conclusion of a Convention on Offences related to Cultural Property. The Nicosia Convention is a unique instrument in enhancing the legal framework against the illicit trafficking in cultural goods. To be most effective, this instrument requires universal participation. I would therefore encourage you to consider acceding to it.

I wish to pay special tribute to the recent experience we have had in Cyprus through the "Pafos 2017, European Capital of Culture". The city of Pafos, a renowned World Heritage Site itself, throughout this year has offered unique and high quality cultural experiences. The concept of the Open Air Cultural Factory, which characterizes Pafos as European Capital of Culture, has been essentially an open invitation to artists, citizens of all backgrounds and visitors to come together and co-create different projects under the motto "Linking Continents-Bridging Cultures".

Excellencies,

In closing, I would like to assure you, of Cyprus' commitment to the realisation of UNESCO's goals, especially at this time when the Organisation is facing historic challenges. We will continue to fully collaborate with our partners within the framework of this Organisation to promote peace and solidarity among people, through education, sciences and culture. Education is the most efficient tool for diffusing the ideas and principles of the Agenda 2030. Strong political will is a key factor for achieving a sustainable future for generations to come and for the benefit of all of us.