

Ræða Íslands á aðalráðstefnu UNESCO 2017

39th General Conference of UNESCO

Plenary – Intervention by Ms. Ásta Magnúsdóttir, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

2 November 2017, am

Ms. President of the General Conference

Mr. Chair of the Executive Board

Madame Director-General

Distinguished Delegates,

Since the establishment of this organization, with human rights and dignity as starting points, the importance of UNESCO's mandate to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information is as vital today as ever - and is now supported by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda 2030 is indeed a remarkable achievement. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as human rights, peace and development are inseparable and essential to successful implementation of the Agenda. The violation of freedom of expression, of rights to free assembly, of the fundamental rights of women – all undermine Agenda 2030. Iceland knows first-hand the massive potential resting in gender equality and is a dedicated proponent of women's human rights. We actively work to engage men in the fight for gender equality with our Prime Minister as a HeForShe IMPACT Champion. We place high priority on reproductive health and rights, and continue to promote women's participation and the peace and security agenda. Empowering women is not only a human rights issue; it is an economic necessity.

Ms President,

There is no question in my mind that education is the key. The key to contributing to lasting peace, the key to contributing to sustainable development and the key to the eradication of poverty. It is my belief that education is a fundamental human right of which nobody should be deprived.

In today's international community, nations are engaged in never-ceasing competition where it takes a strong economy and a flourishing society to attract young and dynamic people. Quality education is a key ingredient in the development of any economy or society.

A solid education makes it easier for young people to find their way in a complex and ever-changing world, besides being the foundation of a strong economy and of the citizens' wellbeing.

Education and gender equality are two key elements in the Sustainable Development Agenda. The balance reached in this universal and integrated 2030 Agenda is an achievement which we should be proud of. We are particularly proud to have been among the proponents of gender equality and empowerment of women as overarching elements, necessary to achieving the other goals of our Agenda.

Our aims within UNESCO are also to spread knowledge and promote freedom of expression, global citizenship, enhance sustainable development, and to encourage acceptance of cultural diversity - just to mention some areas of great concern – these areas are all first and foremost addressed through better education.

One characteristic of a just and humane society is the treatment of its minorities. Iceland is deeply committed to continue its work with others against discrimination of any kind, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

UNESCO has a unique mandate for safeguarding the freedom of expression and the media, which Iceland strongly supports. Not only is this a fundamental human right, which is vital for open societies,

democracy and free market economies, but it is also as a key ingredient in realizing our ambitions in education, science and culture.

The potential established by the new media need to be continued to be harnessed in the same spirit of freedom, so that they may best contribute to our goals.

Ladies and gentlemen

To build a better future for all we need to accelerate momentum towards the Sustainable Development Goals – it is about delivering on the collective promise we all made. We need to support the data revolution called for by the 2030 Agenda to ensure that sustainable development plans and policies reach the most in need. UNESCO Institute for Statistics is contributing to the development of the SDG global indicator framework and it is important that a special focus has been placed on measures of equity and equality in order to support the development, implementation and monitoring of policies aimed at reducing inequalities and overcoming all forms of discrimination.

To conclude, UNESCO's role as a champion of peace, understanding and tolerance is as ever urgent and vital. Quality education, gender equality and sustainability must be crosscutting themes in all our work. Iceland is firmly committed to actively supporting UNESCO in this pursuit and thereby working towards the common good.

The Agenda 2030 and the SDG's are indeed a remarkable achievement. We have set ourselves ambitious goals that are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable. In practice, this means that we cannot reach one goal without working towards attaining others, and what we do in one part of the world matters in another – we must all do our part.

Thank you for your attention.