

STATEMENT BY

MS GRACE FU

MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH

REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

AT THE

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NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL

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Madam President of the General Conference,
Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. This year, we are meeting during a time of change, as we bid farewell to Director-General Madam Irina Bokova who has ably helmed UNESCO over the past eight years, and prepare to welcome a new Director-General. I would like to express Singapore's appreciation to Madam Bokova for her leadership, dedication and service over the past eight years. We look forward to working closely with the next Director-General on UNESCO's important work of building peace through education, science and culture.

2. Singapore remains committed to making constructive contributions to help advance UNESCO's agenda. On the scientific front, Singapore is a member of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), as well as other UNESCO bodies such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. On the IGBC, Singapore has been actively involved in the discussions on pertinent bioethical issues from a policy perspective, and in the definition of international standards in the field of bioethics. With the support of fellow Members in the Asia-Pacific Group, Singapore is running for a second term on the IGBC this year. We hope to have the opportunity to continue working closely with our partners on developments in bioethics.

3. On the cultural front, Singapore was designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2015. This supports our efforts to develop a

creative eco-system, and facilitates collaboration and knowledge-exchange with other members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

4. That same year saw another milestone, when the Singapore Botanic Gardens was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. This was our first inscription on the World Heritage List. It has been a source of enormous pride for Singapore and Singaporeans. Our National Parks Board – which manages the Gardens as well as Singapore’s parks and nature reserves – was also recently awarded the UNESCO Sultan Qaboos Prize for its significant contribution to environmental preservation. We will continue to preserve and enhance the universal value of the Gardens, both as a leading botanical institution for plant science, research and conservation in the region; as well as a vibrant community space with rich heritage.

5. Besides tangible heritage, we also recognise the importance of safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage. For a young country like Singapore, intangible cultural heritage is an important reflection of our history and multi-cultural roots. It is unique to us as Singaporeans.

6. For centuries, Singapore’s geographical location along the maritime trade route has welcomed different communities and cultures. As a migrant society, the practices of our diverse communities have evolved over the years, as they interact with other cultures and adapt to the local context, in tandem with our development. While Singapore is a modern city-state with just over 50 years of independence, our roots go back 700 years and we are a united people who have come together from diverse cultures and ancient civilisations. Our multi-cultural heritage expresses who we are and anchors our place in the world, by connecting us to our

past and giving us the confidence to share this unique heritage with the world.

7. Presently, we are partnering our local communities, academics and experts to draw up a comprehensive national blueprint for Singapore's heritage sector which includes the setting up of a repository for our intangible cultural heritage. During conversations with many Singaporeans, I am heartened by the strong collective desire for our intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded for future generations, especially during such times of rapid socio-economic changes and global uncertainty. Hence, we will step up our efforts in this area and hope that our friends at UNESCO can lend us support by exchanging experiences, knowledge and ideas. As part of this, Singapore is also looking into the ratification of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the coming years.

8. Singapore's efforts to safeguard our heritage are consistent with our broader agenda to pursue sustainable development. As a small country with no natural resources, Singapore has a clear appreciation of the challenges of sustainable development. Since independence in 1965, our policies have always been designed with long-term sustainability in mind, and in-line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

9. For instance, while Singapore has high literacy and numeracy rates, our education system seeks to further empower our students. We want them to discover their talents and develop their potential, regardless of their starting points. This is aligned with the SDG on "Quality Education".

10. It is also commendable that the SDGs represent the first occasion when an international development agenda has included culture within its framework. Singapore is supportive of this as we recognise that culture is key to our identity, and allows us to occupy a unique space in a globalised world with confidence. Reflecting this, the biennial World Cities Summit organised by Singapore in 2018 will include a session on how Culture and Preservation are important fundamentals for sustainable development. We welcome you to join us from 8-12 July 2018, as we discuss this topic with leaders and mayors from around the world.

11. Madam President, the above-mentioned examples are areas where Singapore and UNESCO can work even more closely together to achieve our shared objectives. I look forward to the further strengthening of our partnership in the years ahead.

12. Thank you.