

National Statement of Poland at the General Policy Debate
of the 40th session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Ms. Magdalena Gawin, Undersecretary of State
at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
of the Republic of Poland
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*Mister President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I would like to start by congratulating you, Mister President, on being appointed to this important position. I am convinced that under your leadership we will work efficiently and effectively.

It is a great honour for me to speak before such an august audience on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Poland, at such an important moment — during the 40th anniversary session. Every anniversary is a good time to reflect upon what has been achieved and what is ahead of us. We all know that UNESCO is at a difficult and pivotal moment for its future. I am certain that thanks to our cooperation we will be able to meet the challenges facing our Organisation. I would like to stress that Poland strongly supports UNESCO and its mission. We believe that cooperation in the fields of culture, science and education contributes significantly to achieving lasting peace and security. We will continue to support efforts to reform the Organisation and enhance its prestige. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Madam Director-General on a very ambitious and inspiring vision of making the Organisation a place of reflection and intellectual exchange which focuses on the development and future of humanity.

Poland wants to take part in the reform process initiated by Madam Director-General and that is why we have decided to stand for the Executive Board for the 2019-20 term. As a founding member of UNESCO, we remain committed to its ideals and aspirations. As a candidate to the Executive Board, Poland renews that promise.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the age of civilizational change, UNESCO has to address a number of challenges, including those brought about by advances in science and technology, in particular digital technologies. In addition

to new opportunities for preventing exclusion in education, for cultural dialogue, and for the growth of international research and scientific cooperation, new threats are emerging that involve the dominance of technology and the fragmentary way of how we understand the world. It is even more important to identify threats and seek answers from the perspective of humanistic values and human rights. The current session of the General Conference demonstrates the willingness to look for solutions based on a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach, one of UNESCO's most important assets. In our view, ethical aspects of artificial intelligence, Open Educational Resources, and Open Science are a good choice of priorities that are vital for individual development and for the development of societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Activities in the field of culture remain a cornerstone of UNESCO's strength. UNESCO programmes in this area are conducive to mutual knowledge and an attitude of acceptance and understanding — which are indispensable for dialogue between cultures and societies and the fight against violence and extremism. The UNESCO Conventions have constantly expanded our knowledge of the world's cultural heritage. We are increasingly aware of the fact that heritage is a vehicle of identity and memory for societies, and that identity and memory are essential for building the future. Poland considers measures to enhance the international protection of cultural heritage in all its dimensions, in terms of both traditionally perceived tangible and intangible heritage as well as documentary heritage, to be one of the core priorities within the Organisation's work. We also see a number of threats to heritage in today's world, resulting from armed conflicts, natural disasters or for example from urban pressure as it is in the case of the Gdańsk Shipyard, being a symbol of the fall of the Iron Curtain. The only way to protect global heritage is to apply an integrated approach including measures to preserve heritage; an approach based on the principles of dialogue and respect for cultural diversity. The Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage is an example of this comprehensive approach, put forward in May 2018 and subsequently endorsed by the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session. The Recommendation treats as a single process measures for the protection and reconstruction of local societies, their customs and practices, and their material heritage which has suffered damage as a result of crisis situations.

For years, Poland has been involved in rescuing cultural heritage across the world. We are ready to share our expertise with the international community through the recent establishment of the International Centre for Training and Research on Cultural Heritage under Threat in Wrocław,

a facility for the training of civilians and military staff on the protection of cultural goods under threat.

Poland attaches great importance to interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a means of preventing conflict and building mutual trust and respect among nations. We highly value the UNESCO initiative “Revive the spirit of Mosul” and we intend to continue supporting it.

Talking about heritage, I would like to express my hope that the Memory of the World programme for the sustainable preservation and dissemination of documentary heritage to save the collective memory of societies, cultures, and civilisations will soon become operational again.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Disseminating the Organisation’s ideas among the wider public and turning them into practical measures is vital for strengthening its role. In this context, I would like to emphasise the role of the National Committees, which have a significant impact on the promotion of the Organisation’s programmes and which make the work of the UNESCO network more dynamic. We welcome the fact that the Organisation intends to make full use of the potential of cooperation within the framework of the UNESCO networks — Category 2 centres, biospheres, geoparks, and the network of associated schools. We also welcome the growing importance of sustainable city initiatives. Tourism based on the sustainable use of heritage resources was the subject of the 15th World Congress of the Organization of World Heritage Cities held in Krakow this year, while guidelines on implementing the 2030 Agenda through culture are being developed within the framework of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network at its annual meetings, including in Poland in 2018.

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me end by stressing that we share the view that dialogue and the search for consensus are UNESCO’s fundamental values. I am confident that collaboration based on these values will allow us to achieve all of the Organisation’s priorities and successfully strengthen its effectiveness.