

Remarks by Her Excellency Mrs. Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili,
Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Serbia to UNESCO
at the General debate of the 209th session of the Executive Board

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Mr. President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Mr. Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Dear colleagues,

We meet at last at this long awaited 209th session of the Executive Board, and as always, it is a pleasure and honor to speak before you, and share my country's views on UNESCO and its role in the ever complex world. As we emerge from the pandemic that put the world to a halt, we can begin to see that returning back to normal is no longer possible. The pandemic revealed and exacerbated existing challenges and vulnerabilities of the system the world was functioning in, proving that if we wish to make this world a better place, we must do better. And by better, I mean together, in solidarity, overcoming narrow interests.

Serbia is a strong believer in multilateralism and cooperation. We believe that only together, in concert, the international community can be effective in tackling contemporary challenges, be it preserving the peace, fighting the climate change, achieving education for all, combat racism and discrimination, and many others.

My country also believes in UNESCO, in its indispensable role as a contributor to world peace through the means of education, culture, science, communication, and universal ethics that should be embedded in all the new achievements of humanity, like artificial intelligence, for example. UNESCO's relevance and significance were once more confirmed in the period that slowly remains behind us, the period of pandemic, when schools around the world closed for more than a billion of learners, when scientific research and cooperation became crucial in finding the cure for the invisible enemy we are all facing, and when accessing much needed reliable information turned out to be even more

challenging than before.

In the period ahead, when we all try to get back on track again, UNESCO's efforts in taking forward the agenda defined by the 40 C/5 should continue unabated. Africa, Small Island Developing States and Gender Equality are rightfully recognized as domains where the current crisis hit the hardest, and to which most attention needs to be given.

Serbia strongly supports the activities carried out by UNESCO in African countries. The Global Priority Africa should not be seen as something that is of interest only for the countries of that continent, but indeed for all of us. Effective implementation of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa and the Action Plan for its six flagship programs, as well as any new UNESCO's vision for Africa, requires maximum involvement of African countries, but also ensuring adequate human and financial resources. UNESCO's role in Africa should be also in line with the Agenda 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063.

Serbia welcomes the continuation of the next phase of the strategic transformation, a process that is vital for UNESCO's modernization, strengthening its means of action and ensuring that Organization's programmatic work corresponds to modern challenges. Improving the tools that are used to design and implement interdisciplinary programs and creating synergies, are preconditions for making UNESCO more impactful on the ground. As we had stated before, the transformational endeavors, such as strategic transformation, should indeed be innovative, but at the same building upon the results already achieved.

We believe that sustainable and efficient field network is essential for ensuring effective program delivery and visible impact of UNESCO on the ground. Any reform of the UNESCO presence can be meaningful only if it is based on principles and criteria agreed jointly by the Member States, and if it is planned and carried out in coordination with them. Serbia is, therefore, looking forward to the continuation of consultation between Secretariat and Member States in the framework of preparation of relevant strategy.

Education remains a corner stone of both social and economic recovery, as well as of achieving the Agenda 2030, which has been seriously jeopardized by the pandemic. We agree with the view of the International Commission for the Future of Education, expressed in their statement of last April, that "Governments and

international organizations must coordinate efforts to ensure continuity of learning and protect domestic and international financing of education.” Serbia welcomes the important role of UNESCO in leading international efforts to keep education on top of Member States’ priorities.

Dear colleagues,

Firmly believing in the mandate and values of UNESCO, Serbia is of the view that the Organization need to avoid polarizing issues that could lead to politicization and damaging of its hardly won credibility. We support the spirit of consensus and dialogue that prevails in UNESCO, believing it to be the best way not only to implement adopted decisions, but also the key element in renewing and reinventing multilateralism that is seriously being threatened.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, allow me to state once again, that if we want the humanity to recover, we can not go back to the old practice of unilateral steps. It needs to make way to multilateralism and solidarity, because only together we can overcome the challenges we are all facing and that lie ahead. Serbia, devoted to the mandate and the values of UNESCO, will do its utmost to support the Organization in achieving the goal of building more prosperous, resilient and solidary world.

Thank you.