

National Speech by the Head of the Delegation of the Czech Republic
Mr Aleš CHMELA, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech
Republic,
in the General Policy Debate at the 41st session of the General Conference
of
UNESCO

11 November 2021 in Paris

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the General Conference of UNESCO today on behalf of the Czech Republic.

We live in turbulent and challenging times of tectonic changes impacting every field of UNESCO competence. The ongoing pandemic has clearly shown the importance of equal access to education, the hunger for culture, knowledge, science and access to free media and a hate-free online environment. We have learnt that cohesion of our societies must be fostered, with special attention to intergenerational solidarity, as set out in the 2030 Agenda.

We commend the efforts of the Director-General in transforming our organisation. We fully adhere to UNESCO's two Global Priorities - Africa and Gender Equality - and four strategic objectives of the new Medium-Term Strategy.

While the climate change, the overarching global challenge of today's world, is being discussed at COP 26 in Glasgow, let me focus on four main pillars underpinning the temple of UNESCO.

A robust educational system, accessible to all, is vital for creation of sustainable societies, resilient enough to face the 21st century challenges

Inclusive education is also one of the key solutions to poverty eradication. We have recently adopted a programme focused on enhancing capacities of public universities in our partner developing countries.

Educating in innovative approaches, gaining diverse skills and learning from experience are also crucial for maintaining respect for cultural and natural heritage and promoting cultural diversity.

Focus on education in crisis, including on the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons, is of paramount importance. We help in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sahel, Syria and Ukraine. In Afghanistan in particular, we have currently mobilised or redirected funds worth 80 mil CZK in support of vulnerable population and refugees.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Inutile de le répéter, tout le secteur culturel mérite une attention accrue, suite à la pandémie mondiale. Nous ne devrions pas sous-estimer le rôle des musées et autres institutions culturelles. Leur avenir durable doit être assuré. Sans doute cette problématique sera entre autres amplement discutée durant la 26^e Conférence générale du Conseil international des musées à Prague en août prochain.

D'ailleurs, il est à saluer comment la culture a su s'adapter et s'est mise, ces derniers mois, « en ligne » afin d'atteindre un nouveau public et de nouveaux horizons. Or, chacun le sait, le monde virtuel n'est pas sans défis. Loin de là!

For this reason, we welcome the process resulting in the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. We appreciate that its starting point is the premise that ethics should lie in the very foundations of AI systems.

Speaking of the online environment, the Czech Republic supports creation of national strategies to combat antisemitism online. It is important to shorten the time between the hate speech appears online and its removal. To this end we must work globally.

Furthermore, we will continue our support to independent media and media literacy in target countries. This is an indispensable part of our foreign policy. We have decided to seek election to the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's IPDC Programme for the term 2021-25. Independent journalism as a direct and reliable source of information everywhere is of crucial importance.

Dans le domaine de la préservation de l'information, nous saluons l'approbation des Principes directeurs révisés du Programme *Mémoire du Monde* et le lancement du nouveau cycle de propositions d'inscription au Registre international.

