

## Items 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43 and 44 of the provisional agenda

### COMMENTS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON ITEMS PRESENTED BY MEMBER STATES WHICH MAY HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Following 170 EX/Decision 5.1, according to which “the Executive Board shall not take a decision involving expenditure unless it has before it a report from the Director-General on the administrative and financial implications of the proposal”, the Director-General presents her comments on nine items presented by Member States at the present session of the Executive Board.

**Item 35 – International Day of Education: 24 January – Item proposed by Armenia, Bahrain, Benin, China, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Iraq, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Serbia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay and Zimbabwe**

2. The Director-General welcomes the proposed item, which is in line with United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/75, which proclaimed 24 January as International Day of Education and invited UNESCO to facilitate its observance every year. While the Secretariat is pleased to commemorate the day and draw attention to it at the 40th session of the General Conference, we also welcome the invitation to Member States to mark it nationally every year. Close to 60 Member States having already endorsed this resolution (subscribed to this item) is a testament of the importance of education and national commitments to furthering SDG 4 – Education 2030.

3. This day is the occasion to reaffirm fundamental principles that must be practised year round. Firstly, education is a human right, a public good and a public responsibility. Secondly, education is the most powerful force in our hands to ensure significant improvements in health, to stimulate economic growth, to unlock the potential and innovation we need to build more resilient and sustainable societies. Lastly, we urgently need to call for collective action for education at global level.

4. Given the short lead time between the proclamation of the day at the end of 2018 and its actual date on 24 January 2019, the Secretariat focused on co-organizing an event at United Nations Headquarters, initiated by the Permanent Mission of Nigeria, together with Ireland, Norway, Singapore and Qatar. This provided a global stage for strengthening support to education in the United Nations. UNESCO will henceforth organize events at Headquarters, across the field and category 1 institutes on an annual basis, and in cooperation with other United Nations, academic and civil society partners, raise broad societal awareness about the urgency of providing inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities worldwide, and counts on Member States’ support in this regard.



**Item 36 – World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development – Item proposed by China, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Egypt, Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Palestine, United Republic of Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay, Senegal and Zimbabwe**

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5. This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 206th session of the Executive Board and proposes that 4 March be proclaimed as “World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development”.

6. The Director-General recalls that advances in engineering have been central to human progress ever since the invention of the wheel. In the past 150 years in particular, engineering and technology have transformed the world we live in, contributing to significantly longer life expectancy and enhanced quality of life for large numbers of the world’s population. Engineering has always had an essential role in achieving the mandates and global priorities of UNESCO. In fact, UNESCO was established in 1945 at the Institute of Civil Engineers in London, United Kingdom, the oldest engineering institution in the world.

7. The proposed celebration is prompted by the key role that engineering plays in providing solutions to many of today’s global challenges, helping to further address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Understanding engineering is essential for global development.

8. The Director-General takes note of the invitation, in the proposed decision, for Member States to provide extrabudgetary funds for the organization of the World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development. UNESCO’s involvement in the celebrations would rely only on additional support in terms of financial and human resources.

**Item 37 – Foreign language teaching and linguistic diversity – Item proposed by Andorra, Armenia, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gambia, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Monaco, Montenegro, Nigeria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, and Uruguay**

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9. The Director-General welcomes this item, which underscores the fundamental role of languages and linguistic diversity in building peace and supporting sustainable development. Every mother tongue deserves to be known, recognized and given greater prominence in all spheres of public life. In complementarity, the teaching and learning of languages other than the mother tongue represents a sense of personal wealth and facilitates understanding of different cultures.

10. UNESCO therefore welcomes the initiative for Member States to (i) ensure that at least two languages, in addition to the mother tongue, are taught in school from the primary to the higher education level; (ii) invest more in the training of teachers in charge of learning; (iii) develop online translation of resources for language learning and training. UNESCO, including the UNESCO Chairs concerned, are pleased to continue promoting research into the development of innovative plurilingual educational approaches, adapted to digital technology.

**Item 38 – Strengthening partnerships for physical education and sport proposed by Madagascar**

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11. The Director-General appreciates this item as it stresses the Organization’s lead roles in education and sport. She recognizes that early positive experiences garnered by children through inclusive quality physical education are the single most important factor for lifelong participation in physical activity and sport. Sport within and around the school setting is a unique means to promote healthy lifestyles, transmit skills and attitudes for tomorrow’s citizens, foster social inclusion, as well as empower girls and women.

12. The Director-General remains committed to UNESCO's leading role in coordinating the implementation of the Kazan Action Plan. The elaboration of guidance and toolkits for using the Kazan Action Plan as a framework for engagement on sport for development and peace across various contexts is a key element of the updated United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace that was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly last December.

13. The Director-General recognizes the critical role of partnerships for leveraging the power of sport as an enabler for the Sustainable Development Goals. She is personally committed to strengthening cooperation with leading sports organization such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA. The International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport, MINEPS, as well as the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, CIGEPS, are increasingly dynamic platforms for mobilizing a broad range of partners and fostering North-South collaboration. Regional fora, such as the Conferences for the follow-up of the Kazan Action Plan in Africa organized by the government of Madagascar, are important opportunities for engaging the business community in education and sport initiatives on the ground.

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#### **Item 39 – World Art Day: 15 April – Item proposed by Mexico and Turkey**

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14. The Director-General welcomes the initiative to proclaim 15 April as World Art Day with the objective of celebrating the role of culture and art in human development.

15. The Director-General concurs with the importance of art to promote the appreciation of cultural diversity, sustain creativity and stimulate innovation in the spirit of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity proclaimed by UNESCO in 2001. The proposal resonates with the Organization's mandate enshrined in a number of landmark regulatory frameworks, of which the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the 1980 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist, which "recognize the essential role of art in the life and development of the individual and of society" and underline "the duty of States to protect and defend artistic freedom" and "to facilitate the mobility of artists".

16. The Director-General welcomes the references to the World Conferences on Arts Education held respectively in Portugal in 2006 and Seoul in 2010 and to the multidimensional contribution of culture and creativity to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. She takes note of the proposal to engage National Commissions and UNESCO's networks of Chairs, Associated Schools and Creative Cities in bringing their respective value, expertise, knowledge and resources in joining the proposed initiative to celebrate World Art Day, including making the best use of UNESCO premises as a privileged venue for cultural expression and exchange as well as UNESCO's art collection to that purpose.

17. Notwithstanding the above, the Director-General recalls that no financial or human resources are provided in the Draft Programme and Budget for 2020-2021 (40 C/5) for this initiative. She notes, in that respect, that the celebration of this international day would not imply the use of funds by the Secretariat, as indicated in paragraph 8 of the proposed draft decision, and that related activities should, therefore, be financed and implemented by Member States.

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#### **Item 40 – Culture and Food: innovative strategies for sustainable development – Item proposed by Italy**

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18. The Director-General welcomes this proposal to strengthen intersectoral cooperation in the fields of culture, education and the sciences with a view to exploring further the linkages between culture, education and food. In this context, she acknowledges that food-related challenges are multidimensional and that they are critical in achieving sustainable development from the social, educational and environmental perspectives and need to be addressed holistically.

19. Although food is not a subject of direct competence of UNESCO, however, the Organization, together with other United Nations concerned entities such as FAO, UNEP, the Convention on Biological Diversity, contributes to better informing international policy debates and actions in response to these challenges and in the context of its global commitment to supporting the achievement of the SDGs.

20. In the area of Culture, UNESCO does so through three complementary perspectives: through its action for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites, including marine sites; through the perspective of the safeguarding of cultural expressions; and through the UNESCO Creative Cities Programme and Network, which addresses gastronomy as one lever to promote culture and the creative economy for sustainable development. The preservation of ecosystems and biological diversity is equally a strong focus of UNESCO's work and can have significant impact on food production patterns and climate change. UNESCO also pursues efforts to advocate for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) fostering climate change awareness in primary education and within curricula development.

21. Notwithstanding the above, the Director-General wishes to underline that no financial or human resources are provided in the draft Programme and Budget for 2020-2021 (40 C/5) for this initiative. As such, she emphasizes that the active support of the Member States, both financial and in terms of human resources and expertise, will be required in order for UNESCO to enhance its efforts and positioning worldwide and across the United Nations system.

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**Item 41 – World Olive Tree Day – Item proposed by Lebanon and Tunisia**

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22. The Director-General welcomes the initiative to proclaim 26 November as the “World Olive Tree Day” with the objective of encouraging the protection of this highly symbolic tree and promoting the preservation of the values it represents, such as peace, wisdom and harmony.

23. The Director-General recalls that protecting cultural and natural heritage, including cultural landscapes, which reveal the diversity of interactions between peoples and their environment and often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land use, are at the heart of UNESCO's mandate. It was in this spirit that the Organization inscribed “Portovenere, Cinque Terre, and the Islands (Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto)”, “Cultural Landscape of the Serra de Tramuntana” and “Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir”, which are examples of outstanding landscapes shaped by the cultivation of olive trees over the centuries, on the World Heritage List.

24. As the explanatory note observes, the cultivation of olive trees has enormous social, cultural and economic significance and holds potential in the fight against desertification and climate change. As such, the Director-General recommends that the activities that may be undertaken by Member States to mark the “World Olive Tree Day” be developed to promote heritage protection and encourage environmental sustainability.

25. The Director-General recalls that no financial and human resources are foreseen in the Draft Programme and Budget for 2020-2021 (40 C/5) for this initiative, and notes that activities related to this celebration, as indicated in the proposed decision, would need to be funded by extrabudgetary funds. In that respect, the Director-General is of the view that activities celebrating the “World Olive Tree Day” should be financed and implemented by Member States, with support from the Secretariat to promote it.

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**Item 43 – The Silk Roads of Dialogue – item proposed by Oman, co-sponsored by China, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Senegal and Tunisia**

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26. The Director-General welcomes this initiative and recognizes the importance of the Silk Roads Project for promoting mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue.

27. As highlighted in the explanatory note, the launch of the second phase of the UNESCO Silk Roads Project has created a dynamic among the Member States to promote the heritage along this Route of Dialogue. This project has been a pioneer in showcasing the concepts of mutual influences, common heritage and plural identities which facilitate intercultural dialogue.

28. The Director-General remains committed to fostering UNESCO's leading role in promoting the Silk Roads heritage through various initiatives including the Online Platform; the Interactive Atlas of Cultural Interactions along the Silk Roads; and activities focusing on youth engagement.

29. As such, the Director-General recalls the potentials of this project in responding to the challenges of intercultural dialogue and sustainable development. She recommends that Member States consider that this project be carried out during the period covered by the next Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029) as well.

30. The Director-General takes note of the call, in the proposed decision, for Member States to provide extrabudgetary funds and thanks the Member States that have extended their support to this project by providing financial and material resources. In that respect, the Director-General considers that activities implemented within the framework of the Silk Roads Project should be financed and implemented by Member States on a voluntary contribution base, with support from the Secretariat to achieve its objectives to the extent possible within its existing capacities.

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**Item 44 – Exploring the potential of artificial intelligence to accelerate progress towards SDG 4 – Education 2030 – Item proposed by China**

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31. The Director-General welcomes this proposal as it aims to explore the potential of AI to accelerate progress towards SDG 4 and strengthen UNESCO's work in this area. As the lead agency on education, UNESCO must lead the reflection on the benefits and risks of AI for education.

32. AI will profoundly transform education – from teaching tools to ways of learning and access to knowledge. The question of what skills to develop in order to evolve in an increasingly automated world will become more and more central. It will also be necessary to rethink educational programmes to prepare future generations for the new landscape of life and work. Girls and women – who are at a chronic disadvantage in education – must be given special attention. AI also has implications on ethics, including protection of learners data, security and privacy, which cannot be ignored.

33. Just recently, UNESCO organized Mobile Learning Week, which brought together close to 1,500 international education and technology specialists to discuss the role of digital technologies and the use of artificial intelligence for inclusive education. From 16 to 18 May, UNESCO and the People's Republic of China will co-organize an International Conference on AI and Education in Beijing to continue this discussion. We thank China for this and count on all Member States for support to accelerate the achievement of SDG4 by mobilizing the potential of AI. We are working to engage all Member States in the Conference and the preparation of its outcome document, which should culminate in an international consensus on the contribution of AI to SDG 4 and more broadly the 2030 Agenda.