

National Statement by
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Delivered at the 221st Executive Board, UNESCO
on
08 April 2025

Madame Chair, Madame President of the General Conference,
Madame Director-General, Excellencies, Distinguished
Delegates, and Esteemed Colleagues,

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland welcomes the work of the Director General and the Secretariat as they continue to deliver across UNESCO's mandate. UNESCO was established 80 years ago to build peace through collaboration on education, science and culture. Since then, its mandate has evolved and grown in response to a changing world with increasingly complex and interdependent challenges. Today we find ourselves at a pivotal moment for UNESCO and for the UN system overall. Both are in their eightieth year. The multilateral system is facing unprecedented challenges, and how the UN responds to these challenges will define its future. There's no question about the continued need for the United Nations. But the whole UN system including UNESCO needs major reform to operate in today's world. Now is the time to accelerate reform efforts to deliver a more consolidated, focused UNESCO with a clear country footprint. This will need ambition, pragmatism and creativity from Member States as well as the Secretariat. Let us all use this opportunity to re-focus UNESCO so that it can achieve its mission to contribute to all of our peace and security.

We echo the remarks delivered at the Preparatory Group in thanking UNESCO for its work drafting the programme and budget 43 C/5. We are pleased to see the reinforced

commitment to Global Priorities Africa and Gender Equality, as well as a maintained focus on Small Island Developing States and Youth Programmes. We encourage UNESCO to continue to strengthen the Integrated Budget Framework by bringing together some of the Regular Budget with voluntary contributions to maximise programmatic, governance, and financial impact between headquarters and the field.

We encourage UNESCO to enhance collaboration across the UN system, break down siloes and adopt joint approaches, plans and programmes, which build on comparative advantage so the system can become more than the sum of its parts. We call on UNESCO to establish transparent information-sharing between UNESCO country offices and Resident Coordinators to build greater coherence with the broader UN Development System. We also encourage UNESCO to continue implementing the recommendations from the MOPAN assessment.

The United Kingdom will continue to support UNESCO's critical work across its mandate, including in the areas of education, culture and heritage, media freedom and safety of journalists, misinformation and disinformation, ethics of AI, ocean science, biodiversity, geodiversity, Open Science and scientific collaboration, and multilingualism.

Turning to education, the United Kingdom is grateful for UNESCO's leadership of the critical SDG4 agenda, particularly through the Institute for Statistics, and the provision of girls' education in conflict settings. The UK is keen to help make the High-Level Steering Committee more action-oriented, and we encourage UNESCO to provide enhanced global leadership to address the challenges impeding progress on SDG4 to pull together the work of the wider multilateral system in this space. UNESCO's leadership in advancing the Global Convention on Higher Education is important in fostering international

collaboration in higher education. We encourage UNESCO to support more countries to become signatories.

On culture, the UK remains committed to and supportive of the Cultural Conventions, particularly the 1972 Convention where we are actively supporting the efforts of the Open-Ended Working Group looking at the future credibility of the Convention. We also thank those who have warmly welcomed the UK to the 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. We are progressing work to create the inventory of living heritage in the UK, which will open for submissions later this year, and we look forward to supporting the Convention, particularly around the efforts to promote best practice.

We commend UNESCO's continuing and tireless efforts to deliver emergency assistance in conflict and conflict-affected countries. We encourage UNESCO to continue its pioneering work in Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, and Lebanon to denounce violence against journalists, promote the protection of cultural institutions, and support the continuity of inclusive and equitable quality education in conflict-affected countries. The UK has committed £250,000 to the Gaza Special Account for the protection of journalists and £100,000 to the Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict for Lebanon.

Despite UNESCO's progress, we must also recognize the ongoing challenges in promoting gender equality across the globe. The UK urges UNESCO to address these challenges through its convening power, policy expertise, and initiatives that protect and promote the rights of all women and girls.

Looking locally, the UK National Commission is developing a resilient, future-focused network of UK UNESCO designations through its 'Local to Global' project that promotes sustainable development and strengthens climate resilience, community

engagement, and global knowledge exchange. We look forward to launching these tools and approaches with UNESCO in the coming months to complement their global work in this space.

2025 is a pivotal year for UNESCO, particularly with the appointment of the next Director General. It is also a moment of celebration as UNESCO marks the 80th anniversary of its Constitution which was adopted in November 1945 in London. The United Kingdom looks forward to celebrating this occasion with UNESCO and others in the room, reflecting on the last eighty years and looking ahead to what is to come.

Thank you.