

The 36th session of UNESCO's General Conference

**Ms. Kristin Halvorsen, Minister of Education,
Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research**

Madam President, Excellencies, Director-
General, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Norway is a strong supporter of Palestinian rights and aspirations for statehood within the framework of international law. We support initiatives that would ensure the protection of cultural and natural heritage located in the Palestinian territory.

In line with the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, Norway has given unwavering support to all efforts to reach a negotiated and comprehensive agreement that can turn the vision into a reality.

The recommendation of the Executive Board for admittance of Palestine as a member of UNESCO marks an historic step. It comes at the same time as there are ongoing discussions in the Security Council about Palestinian membership of the UN.

The membership issue, however, means that members of UNESCO also have to consider issues that are normally referred to the Security Council and the General Assembly, including upgrading of status and UN membership qualifications.

Norway would argue that these issues should be dealt with in New York first and before turning to specialised agencies or UN bodies. We should find a solution that is good for the Palestinians and good for UNESCO.

Dear colleagues, let me now turn to UNESCO's activities. UNESCO's mandate is undisputed. As we discussed during the Leaders' Forum this morning, UNESCO has a role to play in

building peace and promoting sustainable development.

At the same time, the recommendations from the Independent External Evaluation make it very clear that we, the member states, need to better define UNESCO's priorities.

UNESCO needs to do fewer things and do them better.

Ladies and gentlemen, Norway would like to draw special attention to three areas that should form the backbone of UNESCO's work in the future:

1. Education for All as the top priority
2. Freedom of expression
3. Women and gender equality throughout all of UNESCO's activities

UNESCO must continue to provide strong leadership for Education for All. Looking at the track record since 2000, Education for All is a success story. Never has such a high

percentage of children been enrolled in school. The success is driven by Member States, and supported by UNESCO and other partners.

But we cannot stop here. There are still children left behind – including children living in conflict areas and children with disabilities.

Also, enrolment is just starting point. We want UNESCO to take a leading role in defining the education goals after 2015. How to ensure that children complete basic education must be one important topic.

Quality is key to completion. And teachers are key to quality, and to ensure that education promotes peaceful co-existence.

We also know that premises for learning are developed at a very early age. **Early Childhood Care and Education** is a topic that lies close to my heart and has been a main priority for the present Norwegian

government. Early childhood care and education of high quality is beneficial for *all* children.

Madam President, let me now turn to Norway's second priority. This year, across the Middle East and North Africa, millions of people have called for democracy and human rights, and specifically freedom of expression. We are concerned that many places around the world such basic freedoms are still lacking. UNESCO needs to continue, and to strengthen, its role in working along side with all the people of the world who long for the possibility to participate in a democratic society. And to voice their opinion in public without fear of punishment.

Let me end by stressing that women's rights and gender equality must be integrated in all of UNESCO's activities.

Thank you.

