

219th session of the Executive Board

Introductory remarks by

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Chairperson of the Executive Board

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Madam President of the General Conference,
Madam Director-General,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

Sixty-one years ago one of the greatest songwriters and Nobel Prize laureate for Literature, Bob Dylan, was asking

*how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
...and how many deaths will it take 'til he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer,....., is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind*

Sadly, these words still resonate today. The answer it still blowing in the wind.

The world is becoming increasingly complex and unstable, the spreading political tensions and conflicts generate a climate of insecurity that brings to mind the major events of the early 20th century.

The ongoing conflicts claim countless civilian lives, leaving behind shattered communities. Amidst this chaos, children endure unimaginable hardship, robbed of their innocence and opportunities to thrive. It's time to prioritize their protection and ensure they have the support they need to overcome the devastation of conflict and build a brighter future.

Social inequalities widen, education fails to meet the targets, cultural sites are threatened, and climate change is fanning the flames of injustice. Global warming is busting budgets, toppling energy markets, swelling food prices and strengthening a dramatic cost-of-living crisis.

At the same time, technology, especially Artificial Intelligence, is changing everything. It's bringing lots of new innovative software and other digital tools that anyone can use. It is true that it could be dangerous if we're not careful. But it can be great if we are. Let us not forget that.

Dear colleagues,

This is the world we live in and this is the context that will undoubtedly impact our debates and deliberations during this session as everything is looked at through the lenses of conflicts, which makes our work more complicated.

Every six months, we convene to echo the same sentiments. We acknowledge the tumultuous global landscape, as I just did, and we reaffirm UNESCO's enduring relevance. Yet mere relevance does not guarantee efficacy or success.

We understand our limitations; we cannot single-handedly resolve conflicts, eradicate poverty, or halt climate change. However, our duty remains clear: to transform rhetoric into action, rendering our impact palpable and meaningful.

As we establish the agendas of our future sessions, let us discern between the important and the indispensable in the context of today's world.

As a governing body of our Organization, the Executive Board should control its own agenda and discuss UNESCO's input to Global Meetings in a timely manner instead of being just invited to information meetings on these subjects.

Excellences, chers collègues,

Superviser l'exécution du programme et du budget est l'une des fonctions les plus importantes du Conseil exécutif, découlant de l'Acte constitutif de l'UNESCO.

Le point 4 de notre ordre du jour requiert donc la plus grande attention au cours de cette session et fait l'objet de notre débat général et j'attends donc avec impatience de connaître votre point de vue sur le document EX/4 aujourd'hui et demain.

Les documents d'information liés aux rapports sur l'exécution du programme et du budget contiennent des détails critiques et, à l'avenir, leur publication dans les délais statutaires est donc cruciale, pour permettre une préparation globale et en temps opportun de ce point.

Il convient de féliciter la Directrice du Bureau de la Planification Stratégique et son équipe d'avoir produit un document de qualité en si peu de temps, car cette session de printemps du Conseil s'est déroulée trop tôt et s'est en fait transformée en session d'hiver.

Le Bureau de la Planification Stratégique a considérablement amélioré les rapports sur le programme et budget. Nous devons toutefois être conscients qu'il y a des limites à la mesure dans laquelle vous pouvez améliorer les rapports sur le programme et le budget de l'UNESCO sans introduire des changements importants dans le C/5 lui-même.

Pour que les rapports soient axés sur l'impact, il est impératif que le 43C/5 soit axé sur les résultats.

Si cet objectif n'est pas atteint, nous continuerons malheureusement à voir de nombreux résultats qui nous sont rapportés se concentrer sur l'organisation d'événements, de réunions et de conférences.

Le 43 C/5 couvrira une période de quatre ans. Lors de notre prochaine session en octobre, la Directrice générale présentera ses propositions préliminaires sur le prochain programme et budget.

Ce sera le moment pour le Conseil de donner des instructions très claires au Secrétariat sur ce document.

Au cours des échanges sur cette question, la Directrice du Bureau de Planification Stratégique, en charge de la préparation de ce document, a montré qu'elle comprenait parfaitement nos attentes. Le dialogue et l'échange de vues avec le Secrétariat devraient donc se poursuivre après cette session et bien évidemment nous le faciliterons.

Dear colleagues,

Concerning the financial situation, a total of 5.57 million dollars of commitments initially recorded under the 2022-2023 41C/5 regular budget could not be covered by available regular budget resources.

As per the appropriation resolution of the 41C/5 adopted by the General Conference and the financial regulations of the Organization, this is a deficit. This is a fact and as someone once said "Truth is only harsh if you're unable to face it".

We shall face it all together.

Transparency and accountability are paramount as we navigate this critical phase.

We are expecting the External Auditors to determine what happened, why it happened and who is responsible. After receiving their report the Board will know what to expect in terms of accountability and will be in a position to decide what good governance measures need to be taken for work to be carried out on solid and transparent grounds, factoring in risk management and based on mutual trust.

It is the responsibility of the Executive Board to ensure that its decision is constructive, within the existing regulatory framework, and is adopted by consensus, as is the practice when adopting decisions on the budget.

Dear Colleagues,

To conclude I would like to stress that the Executive Board is a sovereign governing body and its members are free to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas, to draft and present amendments and take decisions without interference. As Chairperson it is my role to make sure that this is fully respected.

Dear members of the Executive Board, in this critical time in history you carry the responsibility of engaging in sensitive debates that are the mirror of today's world. However, please remember that with goodwill, it is always possible to find common grounds and to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.

I would like to wish you all, the Director General and the Staff, a fruitful session.