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Basic Education Minister, Mrs Angelina Matsie Motshekga, addresses the 40th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, France on 14 November 2019

National Statement of the Republic of South Africa to be presented by the Honourable Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angelina Matsie Motshekga, MP at the 40th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, France, in room i: fontenoy building on 14 November 2019

President of the General Conference

Chairperson of the Executive Board

Director-General of UNESCO

Colleagues, and Distinguished Delegates

South Africa wishes to congratulate the President of this Conference, the Permanent Delegate of Turkey, on his election to preside over the work of the 40th Session of the General Conference. We pledge our support, in anticipation of a successful General Conference. Similarly, we express our appreciation to the Director-General for her introduction of the General Policy Debate and the General Conference Secretariat for the preparations for this Session.

Since we successfully deconstructed the vestiges of apartheid, and established a democratic State, based on a culture of human rights and the respect for law, South Africa remains committed to the principle of multilateralism, international law, the advancement of global human rights, as well as the promotion of global peace and security. We are convinced that these tenets, are a necessary pre-condition for achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, our unwavering support and commitment to international multilateral organisations, such as UNESCO.

Mr President, we wish to remind this 40th Session that during the 39th Session, South Africa fully endorsed the agenda focusing on the transformation and realignment of UNESCO. Once again, we wish to publicly reaffirm our support for the agenda and programmes of UNESCO. As our obligation, we wish to stress the importance of Member States making good of their assessment contributions, which must be paid in full and on time.

During the June 2019 State of the Nation Address, His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa declared “education and skills for a changing world” among South Africa’s topmost priorities. Mr President, we have achieved universal access in basic education, and redressed the inequalities of the fragmented and divisive apartheid education system of the past. We are

now focusing on improving the quality, inclusivity and efficiency of the system – paying much attention on, amongst others, learners with Special Education Needs, quality pedagog teacher development; reading with meaning, especially in the early grades; and continuing to support the system with the appropriate resources and processes. With regards to the efficiency of the system, we are paying a particular attention on improving the retention and progression rates of our learners, with the intention to improve our children’s readiness for the specialised and diversified curriculum offerings and programmes post the basic education phase.

Distinguished Delegates, South Africa continues to make progress in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. After the 2019 General Elections, South Africa broke new grounds – we have 46% women representation in Parliament and Provincial Legislatures; and 50% women representation in Cabinet. This puts our country in the eighth position in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s rankings for women representation in Lower Houses or National Assembly.

To accelerate progress in this area, South Africa has adopted the *Gender Responsive Planning*; as well as the *Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework* in March this year, to institutionalise our country’s gender equality agenda. South Africa is also in the process of finalising the *National Strategic Plan to address Gender-Based Violence and Femicide*. To meaningfully address gender-based violence and patriarchal behaviour, we implore UNESCO to lead and guide in programmes directed at the boy-child, intended to socialise them differently; so that they don’t perpetuate toxic gender practices that may lead to violence against women, children and the general public.

Mr President, consistent with UNESCO’s commitment to the advancement of human rights, South Africa strongly rejects the decision of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) to control the levels of testosterone among female athletes in certain athletic events. It is public knowledge that this decision, was targeted at our athletic star, the World Champion, Caster Semenya. This decision is discriminatory, and is a violation of the dignity of Caster Semenya and many other female athletes in a similar situation. We call on UNESCO, which we believe has a moral and legal obligation, to join the World Association for Medical Doctors in explicitly rejecting the unjust and unfair IAAF Regulations.

Mr President, we are pleased to announce that we have ratified the *Revised Addis Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualification in Higher Education in Africa*; and we support the adoption of the *Global Convention by the 40th Session of the General Conference*. This Convention will be a welcome relief to the more than 5 million students, who are studying abroad; and the 2.5 million who are studying outside their regions. Importantly, this Convention will facilitate the movement of both students and academics across the regions; improve the quality of education through the exchange of knowledge and expertise; and enhance international cooperation, especially in higher education and training as well as research innovations.

Distinguished Guests, the World we live in, is fast changing; and we are called upon to lead in addressing the renaissance of the 4th Industrial Revolution and its contemporaneous digital innovations. South Africa is hard at work to join the nations of the world in the strategic and systematic roll-out of ICTs as our direct response to the 4th Industrial Revolution. The best practices we continue to learn from the developed and developing worlds, including the African Continent and the Diaspora, on the strategic roll-out of the ICTs, have been invaluable indeed. We therefore encourage the elaboration of the *Ethical Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Open Science*, which we believe will serve to bridge the digital divide; while also ensuring the protection of intellectual property rights.

Mr President, despite Africa's rich cultural heritage and endowment, it is regrettable that the Continent remains underrepresented on the World Heritage List. South Africa's election to the World Heritage Committee will afford us the opportunity to work with other partners in addressing this imbalance. [South Africa hosts the African World Heritage Fund – a UNESCO Category 2 Centre](https://www.education.gov.za/Home.aspx). We therefore, call on Member States to support Africa in this endeavour, by contributing to the African World Heritage Fund.

In conclusion, the 2030 Agenda, sets new targets in the areas of education, science and culture, which must be achieved through the collective wisdom in UNESCO. We strongly contend that by simply addressing the underperformance of education systems in the developing world, we will be in a better position to fight the triple evil of unemployment, poverty and inequality. We applaud the inclusion, among many, of accessible, equitable and quality ECD programmes; basic, technical-vocational and technical-occupational education; as well as higher education, science and research innovations to the Education 2030 Agenda.

Finally, Mr President and Distinguished Delegates, we wish to thank the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in collaboration with the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO), for inviting us to the 10th World Congress of Neuroscience in Daegu, South Korea. We have already begun to integrate the good practices from the 10th Congress into our learning and teaching strategies. We also wish acknowledge with appreciation UNESCO's support on the topical Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) we will implement in our schools as in 2021.

I thank you

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