

Statement by 49 Countries at the 217th Executive Board under item 217 EX/4.I.H Regarding UNESCO's actions and emergency assistance programme for Ukraine

As we approach two years of Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine, UNESCO's emergency assistance for Ukraine is as vital as ever. The scale of the destruction, throughout all areas of UNESCO's mandate, including cultural heritage, educational facilities, scientific infrastructure, environmental ecosystems, and the media landscape, underlines why this support is needed and therefore must remain on the agenda of the Executive Board. It is also important to underline that the consequences of this war are not confined to Ukraine. The risks emerging with regard to third countries from environmental degradation is but one such example, as is the restriction of food supplies by Russia's endangering of international shipping traffic and blocking and attacking of Ukrainian ports and grain infrastructure.

UNESCO's support to Ukraine has included concrete aid that has helped the country in its efforts to sustain vital functions. The delivery of online learning platforms, for example, has helped ensure the continuation of learning for many of the estimated 3.6 million children directly affected by school closures, as estimated by UNICEF. Key heritage sites have also benefited from UNESCO expertise and funding, helping to restore and protect numerous sites, including those of universal outstanding value.

UNESCO's monitoring activities, together with partner UN agencies, have helped form the eyes and ears of the international community in Ukraine. In the face of Russia's disinformation and propaganda, establishing the facts on the ground is essential. And these are the facts: As of 31 August 2023, UNESCO has verified damage to 285 sites (120 religious sites, 105 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 27 museums, 19 monuments, 13 libraries, and 1 archive). These include numerous historic buildings in the WH protected areas of Odesa, which was attacked by Russia in July. In June, the Kakhovka dam, a crucial hydroelectric plant on the Dnipro River under the control of Russia's forces, was destroyed leading to a severe ecological crisis and evacuation of thousands of Ukrainians. We welcome the DG's response

to both these incidents, which included the deployment of technical assessment and fact-finding teams. In the case of the Kakhovka dam, Ukraine will be dealing with the environmental, economic and societal implications for many years to come as will the Black Sea and its littoral States.

On behalf of the co-signed Member States, I would like to wholeheartedly acknowledge and welcome the critical work that has been done by UNESCO in Ukraine, through Dezzi Bardeschi, UNESCO's Liaison Officer in Kyiv and her team, in very difficult circumstances. Your work is not only supporting Ukraine but (*through reporting and fact finding,*) is helping to foster international accountability- which benefits all Member States. The scale and severity of the situation requires this organization's continued engagement, as long as Russia continues its war of aggression. In this context, we again call on Russia to respect commitments made in the framework of its membership in UNESCO. The Russian Federation should immediately cease its attacks on Ukraine, and withdraw all its forces and military equipment from within Ukraine's internationally recognised borders, extending to its territorial waters.

This statement is delivered on behalf of the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America (49).